

CARE AND THE CORPORATION: HOW ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS SHAPE THE
FORMS AND CONSEQUENCES OF FATHERS' CAREGIVING

by

Natasha Stecy-Hildebrandt

B.A. The University of Manitoba, 2009

M.A., The University of British Columbia, 2012

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

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submitted by Natasha Stecy-Hildebrandt in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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Examining Committee:

Sylvia Fuller, Sociology, UBC

Supervisor

Elizabeth Hirsh, Sociology, UBC

Supervisory Committee Member

Amy Hanser, Sociology, UBC

Supervisory Committee Member

Jennifer Berdahl, Sociology, UBC

University Examiner

Geraldine Pratt, Geography, UBC

University Examiner

Abstract

Fathers have increased their involvement in child care in recent years, in the context of dual-earner households and intensive parenting pressures. Yet, their involvement remains low relative to mothers. One reason for this continued gendered division of care is the context of paid work. Borrowing from Acker's (1990) theoretical framework, workplaces can be viewed as gendered, characterized by ideal worker logic and the presumption of uninterrupted worker availability and commitment. While we know much about how mothers experience the competing pressures of work and care, we know less about the experiences of fathers and how they manage their care in gendered organizations.

To that end, I examined fathers' experiences in two contrasting workplaces, Manuco and Comco, representing opposite ends of 'family-friendliness'. Manuco is a blue-collar, manufacturing environment, while Comco is a family-friendly, white-collar firm. I adopted a comparative case study approach, conducting over seventy worker interviews across these two organizations and examining relevant workplace documents to understand how fathers manage their care at work.

At both these organizations, and despite their stark differences, fathers' care was limited to the margins in and around work time. Yet the mechanisms for this differed in important ways. Manuco relied on a culture of normative work time, informed by gender and class, that framed understandings of and possibilities for fathers' care. Normative work time underpinned Manuco's rigid rules around time, managerial responses to workers' flexibility requests, men's own limited conception of their care needs, and the culture around caregiving on the factory floor. Comco, on the other hand, was characterized by a culture of care, providing workers with

family-friendly policies and practices that in theory made space for workers' non-work lives. Yet, Comco's high commitment context and managers' and coworkers' subtly gendered reactions to fathers' care, meant that care was still sidelined. Despite their contrasts, these organizations both exemplify the gendered dismissal of fathers' care, in particular, and the broader devaluing of care characteristic of gendered organizations.

Lay Summary

While fathers have increased their involvement in child care, they continue to perform less care than mothers. The goal of my research is to examine one of the main barriers to fathers' greater involvement in care, the context of work. I talked to workers across two organizations, a blue-collar firm and a white-collar firm, to better understand how men's caregiving is shaped and limited by the workplace. I found that in the blue-collar firm, rigid timing, a lack of work-family policies, and the culture of the factory floor limited fathers' care. Yet even in the family-friendly white-collar firm, dads' care was limited by high expectations of commitment and availability. Ultimately, both workplaces expected fathers to prioritize work above care.

Preface

The design, data collection and data analysis for this project were all conducted by the author, Natasha Stecy-Hildebrandt. Approval was granted by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (certificate #H15-02396). No part of this research has been previously published.

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Dedication

For my Dad

Chapter 1: Introduction

Fathers' involvement in child care has become a topic of interest inside academic circles and out. As a culture, we celebrate and promote a 'new' ideal of involved fatherhood. Distinct from earlier models of fatherhood centered on moral teaching and distant breadwinning, the contemporary ideal presents fathers as physically present, active participants in the daily, mundane, and gendered tasks of child care (Pleck 1998). Celebrities showcase a paternalized media presence (Hamad 2010: 1). They conspicuously document time spent with their kids on social media, and famously tout the merits of paternity leave in the *New York Times* (Ohanian 2020). We hear about more dads in the 'estrogen-filled worlds' of parks and play groups (Doucet 2006). Academics log men's increases in care and the phenomenon of growing 'gender convergence' in relation to the household division of labour (Guppy, Sakumoto and Wilkes 2019; Moyser and Burlock 2018; see Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel 2020 for a review). During the Covid-19 pandemic, scholars reported further increases in men's childcare and domestic labour (Carlson, Petts, Pepin 2020; Shafer, Scheibling, and Milkie 2020) In many ways, our cultural landscape gives the impression of a shift in priorities and undertakings for dads – away from paid work toward the unpaid work of care. The project of gender equality seems to be proceeding apace.

Yet, despite these trends, fathers' involvement remains low relative to mothers. Men continue to spend less daily time caring for children than women, they are less likely to be a stay-at-home parent, and they are less likely to use parental leave (Marshall 2006; Moyser and Burlock 2018; Statistics Canada 2017; 2021). On the other hand, they continue to spend more time in paid employment than women and are less likely to work part-time (OECD Data 2010;

Patterson 2018). Indeed, the historical link between masculinity and breadwinning remains strong. In essence, dads' care continues to be seen as 'discretionary' rather than a default, as back-up or secondary care, rather than essential, automatic, a given. The realization of the involved father ideal remains partial and ongoing research efforts aim to understand exactly what factors contribute to a more gender equitable division of care. This undertaking seems especially pressing as the pandemic has moved "the work of caring for children from the paid economy – nurseries, schools, babysitters – to the unpaid one", thereby exacerbating negative employment outcomes for women related to their disproportionate responsibility for child care (Lewis 2020).

One factor that has garnered much attention is paid work and the context of the workplace. The influence of paid work on family life is profound. Rosabeth Moss Kanter wrote, in 1977, "...[F]or the vast middle range of people who trade labor for wages or fees on the market, the structure of work and the constraints of occupations may be the most critical elements in shaping personal lives" (24). This remains true today. Scholars like Joan Williams have asserted the primary importance of the workplace (instead of, for example, the family) – and its all-or-nothing conditions – as the source of our contemporary 'work-family issues' and gender inequality. It is not women's failure to negotiate effectively within the family that is driving their disproportionate undertaking of care work. Rather, it is the workplace, which "sets the nonnegotiable terms within which men and women bargain in family life" (Williams 2010: 88). These terms rest on the gendered assumption of a fully available (male) worker with a dedicated (female) caregiver at home. As Kanter articulates, workplaces expect workers to "act-as-though they have no other loyalties, no other life" (1977: 15). More recently, Blair-Loy (2003) advanced the schema of work devotion, the assumption held by employers that workers will be "dedicated to their jobs and will not spend significant amounts of time on other

obligations” (2). This assumption is built into organizational policies, practices, and cultures. Ultimately, workplaces cannot deny the exigencies of family life completely, but they can push them to the margins of everyday existence and expect – explicitly or not – that a person’s job is their number one priority. They can expect workers to be ideal.

Much work-family research to date has considered the experiences of mothers – and indeed, work-family issues continue to be perceived as women’s issues. Yet, fathers and mothers report comparable levels of work-family conflict (Young and Schieman 2017). And in fact, fathers are significantly less likely than mothers to feel supported by their workplace in combining work and family (Hill et al. 2012). It is therefore necessary to zero in on fathers’ particular lived experiences managing their care obligations in the context of ‘act-as-though’ workplaces – those workplaces where the expectation is that “while you are here, you will act as though you have no other loyalties, no other life”, especially given the continued and strong link between breadwinning and masculinity (Kanter 1977: 15; Thebaud 2010).

Knowing that workplaces condition parental involvement in care in a general way does not fully capture the specific ways in which this occurs. To wholly understand how fathers’ involvement is shaped – constrained and facilitated – by workplace context requires an understanding of the specificities and idiosyncrasies of any given workplace and may especially depend upon the distinction between blue and white collar workplaces. Blue and white collar workplaces vary in significant ways that matter for shaping fathers’ care: in terms of how flexible they are, how likely they are to have policies facilitating care, to what extent they promote the integration/segmentation of work and family lives (Nippert-Eng 1996), how organizational control over workers’ time operates, and the link between masculinities and breadwinning.

My dissertation takes off from these points by comparing the experiences of fathers managing their paid work and care at a blue-collar manufacturing workplace (Manuco), and a white-collar firm with a reputation for being family-friendly (Comco). Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both workers and managers at these organizations, I investigated the following questions: What are certain workplace contexts like for dads (i.e. what care policies exist, how are they implemented, how are dads' care responsibilities viewed and managed by their workplaces)? What are fathers' experiences managing their work and care? How does gender (masculinity) operate as a structuring force to shape fathers' care in the context of work? By pursuing these questions at two distinct and contrasting sites, my aim is to offer a deeper understanding of each workplace, while also offering the perspective that is gained through comparison. I hope to contribute to the broader conversation around men's involvement in care and the important role played by workplaces in limiting and facilitating that care. A focus on fathers and care in the context of work recognizes that key to gender equality is men stepping into women's traditional roles rather than the reverse. As England (2010) notes "women's lives have changed much more than men's" (150). Exploring how workplaces shape fathers' involvement in care is the first step in facilitating it.

Institutions shaping fathers' involvement in care: A focus on work

Several explanations for men's relatively low involvement in care have been advanced. One type of explanation focuses on dynamics within the family related to women's patterns of labour force participation. Historically, women's lesser participation in paid work outside the home and their lack of financial resources relative to their husbands, meant that they had more time to perform the household labour, including child care, and also lacked the bargaining power to insist their

husbands do it (Poortman and Van Der Lippe 2009). However, even with women's increased labour market participation, the gendered child care gap remains. Another explanation is gender ideology – men and women specialize in household labour according to which tasks are 'typically' male or female. Yet, widespread beliefs in gender equality and contemporary egalitarian ideology make this explanation seem less compelling as time goes on (Pedulla and Thebaud 2015).

Others have noted the importance of individual attitudes and preferences around men's involvement in care. For instance, maternal gatekeeping and mothers' preferences may play a role in curbing father involvement in child care (though gatekeeping behaviors have been found to be limited to small sub-sets of samples) (Allen and Hawkins 1999; McKay and Doucet 2010). And while research has found that individual attitudes/preferences predict differences in housework, the relationship is much less strong for predicting time spent on child care (Poortman and Van Der Lippe 2009). Child care tends to be valued more than other household labour (such as cleaning) by both mothers and fathers – not only enjoyed more, but characterized by high standards and feelings of responsibility (ibid). Available evidence seems to show that fathers are just as interested in spending time with children as mothers, and they are at least as likely as mothers to report that work interferes with family (Padavic, Ely, and Reid 2019).

One factor that has potentially increased the pull of family is intensive parenting pressures. According to Hays (1996), the ideology of 'intensive mothering' creates parenting pressures that situate "appropriate child rearing... as child centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive" (8). Similar to concerted cultivation, a highly deliberate approach to parenting centered on cultivating advantageous institutional knowledge and dispositions in children which help to maintain their middle and upper-class

status, intensive parenting is about managing risk (Lareau 2003). Parents with means attempt to guard against poor child-related outcomes in a neoliberal context in which responsibility for children's outcomes is highly individualized and placed squarely on their shoulders (Fox 2009; Shirani et al. 2012). To some extent, this middle- and upper-class standard has become the normative standard for contemporary child-rearing (Ishizuka 2019). Good, moral parents are those who put their children first and are highly attentive to them, guarding against risks that are seen, not only as preventable, but as their singular responsibility.

These pressures may increase men's desire for involvement. Increasingly dads do spend more time with children and see time with kids as a marker of good, moral fatherhood (Houle, Turcotte, and Wendt 2017, Milkie, Nomaguchi, and Schieman 2019). Yet these pressures remain gendered. Intensive parenting pressures still tend to fall largely on the shoulders of mothers. And fathers (and others) still continue to define good fathering in relation to providing. As Shirani et al. (2012) note, "Good father and good worker identities are unavoidably entwined" (Shirani, Henwood, and Coltart 2012: 25; Townsend 2002). Providing actually becomes the means for facilitating a financially expensive intensive parenting approach (Lareau 2003; Shirani et al. 2012; Townsend 2002)

Ultimately, while family dynamics almost certainly play a role, fathers' decisions around care and paid work are always constrained by the workplace. As Kanter noted, "Family events and routines are built around work rhythms (at least more generally than the reverse),.... The sheer number of hours spent at work as well as which part of the day those hours encompass can influence a large number of family processes through, for example, the effects of fatigue or the availability of the worker to take responsibility for or participate in family events" (Kanter 1977:

31). This remains true today, over forty years later: work tends to structure family life and involvement in care.

There is empirical evidence showing how workplaces limit fathers' involvement in care, especially in relation to parental leave. For instance, in her study of men's use of parental leave in Canada, Marshall (2008) reported that the second most common reason fathers gave for not claiming parental leave benefits was that it was not possible to take time off work, which could reflect "a perception that the employer would not permit it" (12). Myriad studies have emerged out of the 'Nordic Nirvana', in light of the paradox that generous parental benefits exist but fathers still do not use them as much as mothers, leading researchers to investigate various workplace factors and how these condition fathers' parental involvement (e.g. Brandth and Kvande 2002; Bygren and Duvander 2006; Haas and Hwang 2007; Kaufman, Lyonette, and Crompton 2010; Mauno, Kinnunen, and Piitulainen 2005). Supporting this theme, Tremblay and Genin (2011) remark that "organizational culture is a significant element in fostering or dissuading work-life balance arrangements" (257).

My Study

Past research on organizations and how they shape fathers' care has shown important differences between blue and white-collar workplaces. Survey-based research suggests that blue-collar workplaces may be less fathering-friendly than white-collar workplaces. For instance, in their study comparing the work-family culture in four organizations in Finland, Mauno, Kinnunen, and Piitulainen (2005) found that their blue-collar paper mill (a 'traditional', blue-collar, male-dominated organization) was the least supportive of employees' efforts to balance their work and family responsibilities relative to the three other (white-collar) workplaces. Haas and Hwang

(2009) likewise found significant blue-white collar differences in support offered to fathers taking parental leave, with white-collar fathers receiving both more formal and informal support around leave use than blue-collar fathers. Blue-collar environments are often male-dominated and rely on bureaucratic organizational structures and styles of management, which could contribute to less supportive work-family cultures (Mauno et al. 2005). White-collar workplaces, on the other hand, while often having more of the characteristics that lend themselves to ‘family-friendliness’, tend also to perpetuate long-hours cultures and face time pressures that detract from their otherwise more flexibly organized work (Mauno et al. 2005).

Interview-based research has uncovered some of the more subtle ways that work arrangements matter for fathers’ caregiving. Shows and Gerstel (2009) focus primarily on the occupational distinction between emergency medical technicians and physicians, and relate this to the type of care fathers provide. They found that working-class EMTs had employment conditions that facilitated their care and participation in ‘private’ fatherhood, characterized by involvement in children’s daily, routine (and less visible) care. These conditions were clear boundaries between work and family (in terms of time, space, and mental schemas) and were facilitated by the ability to swap shifts with others. Physicians, on the other hand, participated mainly in ‘public’ fatherhood, attending children’s public events but not involving themselves as much in routine care. They were constrained by intense career commitment (a ‘work devotion schema’), paperwork after hours and at home, being on-call, a culture of long hours and related masculinity norms, felt obligations to their patients, and habituation to a certain standard of living (and requirements for income) (Blair-Loy 2003; Shows and Gerstel 2009). Similarly, Cooper (2000) interviewed dads in Silicon Valley to understand how they balance their work and

their care. She found that her white-collar knowledge workers were constrained in their care by masculinity pressures linked to technical prowess and working long hours.

Some studies have zeroed in on one particular workplace context. For instance, Perlow (1998) considers the mechanisms through which a white-collar firm constrains the care provided by fathers in an engineering group. She finds that managers employ multiple strategies for expanding fathers' work time and limiting their care time, such as scheduling meetings during non-work hours, surveilling workers, and modelling the behavior they expect. This American study is especially useful for understanding the minutiae of the work context in shaping how fathers' involvement gets decided and enacted. Other studies have also looked at how workers manage their family responsibilities in the context of single workplaces. They have used case study, ethnographic, and survey methodologies (e.g. Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Brannen 2005; Fried 1998; Hochschild 1997; Lewis 2010; Perlow 1998; Tremblay and Genin 2011; Tremblay, Genin, and Loreto 2011; Whitehouse, Diamond, and Baird 2007).

Other existing research has often conceptualized fathers' 'care' as uptake of parental/paternity leave (e.g. Bygren and Duvander 2006; Haas, Allard, and Hwang 2002; Haas and Hwang 2009). This line of research has been enormously helpful in drawing attention to this important policy and de-gendering its use.

My research expands on this body of work by first, using interviews to investigate fathers' experiences at work. Previous survey-based research has uncovered broad patterns in terms of fathers' work and care, but we know less about the micro-level, interactional mechanisms operating in specific workplaces to shape dads' care. My interview-based project focuses on the specifics around fathers' experiences and relates these to the complex interplay of structural, cultural, and interactional dynamics in particular work contexts (Mason 2002).

Interviews are well-suited to the study of fathers and care in specific workplace contexts because contexts – and their messy singularities – are especially important.

Second, I build on extant interview-based research focusing on the influence of occupations in shaping fathers' care. By foregrounding workplace context, I continue the investigation into how work-related factors matter for men's involvement at home, but focus on the contexts of specific workplaces where the decisions are made, on the ground, in terms of whether and how best to accommodate workers' family responsibilities. Workplaces have specific structural, cultural, and interactional features that shape caregiving not fully captured through examinations of occupational differences.

Third, I take off from studies examining specific workplaces by adopting a comparative lens. Case studies and ethnographies of single workplaces are especially useful for getting at the singular features of specific workplaces, and how these shape care. Taking a comparative approach allows for corroboration and extension of theoretical propositions across cases. Patterns can be perceived and explanations of phenomena developed that potentially elude the examination of a single case (Eisenhardt 1989; 1991). Furthermore, by comparing fathers in a blue-collar and white-collar organization, we can see how class-based work cultures operate differently or similarly and constrain or facilitate fathers' care in ways that are similar or different. Bringing in a blue-collar context also addresses a large gap in the literature. Much of the work-family research to date has been done in white-collar (and professional/managerial) contexts (Grandey et al 2007; Poppleton et al. 2008; Williams et al. 2013).

As a fourth contribution, I incorporate a focus on parental leave but further expand the definition of father involvement. I consider dads' routine daily care, appointments and emergencies, and use of other kinds of leaves, as well as sick/vacation time. I was especially

interested in any kind of missed work time for care reasons. This expansive view of care allows for a focus on work-care dynamics throughout fathers' and children's lives, not just at the time of birth.

Finally, much of the research on fathers' work and care takes place outside of Canada. I build on this work by considering the Canadian context, which differs in important ways from both the U.S. and the 'Nordic Nirvana' – the sites of much of the existing research. The Canadian context represents a unique 'fatherhood regime', consisting of "the broader policy discourse and the relationships it establishes between individuals/households, the state and market,... as well as working time" (Gregory and Milner 2008; 2011: 590). Canada can be seen as falling somewhere in between the more extreme regimes of the U.S. and Europe, especially Scandinavia (Evans 2002; O'Connor et al. 1999; Wysong and Wright 2003).

Like the U.S., Canada is considered a liberal market economy (LME) in some ways. The state plays a smaller role in the provision of services, relative to markets and employers and in particular, there is less welfare support for parents, relative to coordinated market economies (CMEs), including some Northern European and Scandinavian countries (e.g. lower payments and shorter time periods for leaves) (Karu and Tremblay 2017; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999: 3). The state's aim is to "preserve maximum scope for individual initiative and market forces" (9), resulting in the 'privatized responsibility' of care (Fox 2009).

Yet Canada also differs from LMEs and more closely resembles coordinated market economies. Canadian women have higher rates of employment compared with other LMEs, such as Australia and the United States (which obviously impacts men's care), and it has a more expansive welfare state than the U.S., like other CMEs, which is particularly evident in Canada's

universal health care and its maternity/parental leave structure ¹(O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999; OECD 2019a). In terms of working hours – an important point to consider when comparing fatherhood regimes – Canadians tend to work fewer hours than Americans (Gregory and Milner 2008; Heisz and La Rochelle-Cote 2003; OECD 2019b). Ultimately, Canada can be seen as a unique setting in which the state does more than merely regulate relations of care – it plays a part in reconstituting the gender order in ways specific to the institutional context (Connell 1987: 130; O'Connor et al. 1999). My workplaces reflect the specificities of this unique institutional context (Schein 2010).

Two organizations: Comco and Manuco

I conducted my research at two organizations which differed dramatically from one another. Manuco was a traditionally bureaucratic, blue-collar manufacturing environment that felt tied to the past. Comco was a family-friendly, white-collar office environment with an eye toward the future. Both organizations were in large Canadian cities.

Manuco and Comco represented opposite poles in terms of 'family-friendliness'. Manuco was male-dominated and had few policies, while Comco was more evenly gender-split (with higher than average female representation in senior positions) and had many family policies (Table 1).

Table 1 lays out the different policies available to workers at the two companies, as well as their respective provincial standard (as of the time of my interviews, prior to the pandemic).

¹ I describe Canada's leave policies below (p.15). However, within Canada, there are significant inter-provincial differences in parental leave policy. Quebec, for instance, would align more closely with Scandinavian countries as it offers more accessible, better paid, and more flexible leave options, as well as a use-it-or-lose-it paternity leave (Mathieu, Doucet, and McKay 2020).

The provincial standards differ because the companies were located in two different provinces. In the case of sick time, both companies exceeded the provincial minimums: Manuco offered three paid days, while Comco offered ten paid days. In the case of paid vacation time, both provincial minimums were two weeks after one year of employment. Both exceeded these minimums. Manuco offered between two and four weeks, depending on years of service. Comco offered three to six weeks, also conditional on length of service.

In relation to parental leaves, neither province mandated a dedicated paternity leave for dads. However, both companies offered this anyway. Manuco offered one paid day and Comco offered two paid days. Provisions for maternity and parental leaves (useable by one or both parents) are legislated provincially, with payments through federal employment insurance, but no jurisdictions in Canada mandate employer payments. As such, Manuco offered no top-ups. Comco on the other hand topped up a significant portion of workers' salaries (in addition to employment insurance payments they received).

Provisions around flexible working do not appear in provincial employment standards acts. Federal employees have 'the right to ask' for a flexible work arrangement, but this legislation doesn't exist at the provincial level. It is therefore not surprising that Manuco didn't have formalized flexible work policies on its books, other than part-time schedules (in practice, workers had some limited access to informal flextime). Comco on the other hand offered several provisions, including part-time schedules, telecommuting, flextime, compressed work week, biweekly compressed schedules, and job sharing.

Finally, both Manuco and Comco offered unpaid personal leaves that could be used for the purposes of travel or family time (or other reasons). These leaves were not legally guaranteed in either employment standards act.

Policies	Manuco	Comco	Provincial Employment Standards
Sick time	3 days paid	10 days paid	3-5 days unpaid
Paid vacation leave	2-4 weeks	3-6 weeks	2 weeks
Paternity leave	1 day paid	2 days paid	None
Maternity/Parental leave top-ups	No	Yes	None
Part-time schedule	Yes	Yes	None
Telecommuting	No	Yes	None
Flextime	No	Yes	None
Compressed work week	No	Yes	None
Biweekly compressed schedule	No	Yes	None
Job sharing	No	Yes	None
Unpaid personal leaves	Max 30 days	Max 24 months	None
Official work hours	37.5	35	40

Table 1: Policies at Manuco and Comco

Manuco was pragmatic, utilitarian, down-to-earth, plain, unsentimental, and grounded in the present. Comco was its opposite – lofty, idealistic, exciting, and future-facing. Where Manuco’s focus was on riding out a period of low demand, Comco had its eye on future growth and developing new initiatives and projects. These qualities were in some ways reflected in their

respective approaches to workers' care. Manuco adopted a pared-down approach that contrasted with Comco's more elaborate approach.

Each organization gave generously of its time and the time of its workers, enabling me to construct an account of fathers' caregiving in the context of work. In the following pages, I hope to present a fair portrayal of how these workplaces were flexible, some of the ways in which they were not, and what we can learn about fathers' care by comparing their experiences and perceptions in two radically different organizations.

Looking Ahead

In what follows, I present an account of fathers' experiences at Manuco and Comco. I consider how flexible the workplace is for dads, how 'balanced' they feel, and link these questions to the context. The picture that emerges is one of difference, but also similarity – ultimately, both organizations limited fathers' care to the margins in and around work time/space. While both organizations accommodated and facilitated some flexibility and balance, they also constrained these and reinforced the primacy of work. The mechanisms of actions differed somewhat between the two workplaces, but the limits on fathers' involvement in care were similar. And often, drawing on gender was the basis of constraint: Fathers do not really need flexibility because they are men, after all.

In Chapter 2, I review research that motivates my focus on the workplace as an important context for understanding men's fathering, highlighting particular arguments relating to gendered organizations. Specifically, I focus on how gendered organizational logic, workplace policies, gender composition, workplace culture, and interactions can be expected to shape fathers' care.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my methodology. I describe how I came to conduct the study at Manuco and Comco, how I recruited my 73 interviewees and did the interviews, and how I analyzed my data. My approach was a comparative case study informed by feminist reflexivity and with the aim of capturing the depth of fathers' experiences at work.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I present the case of Manuco. In Chapter 4, I discuss Manuco's facilitation of fathers' care. Fathers' generally reported Manuco to be sufficiently flexible when it came to managing their caregiving. This related both to the fact that the organization accommodated emergencies and occasional absences, as well as to the clear boundaries between work and non-work life. However, it also reflected a gendered (i.e. limited) conception of fathers' caregiving needs and a culture of normative work time which, I argue, circumscribed expectations around caregiving time for dads.

Chapter 5 explores the limits on Manuco's flexibility. While clear boundaries may have guarded against work incursions into non work time, they also lead to day-to-day rigidity, with a high level of monitoring of workers' comings and goings, and a strong emphasis on punctuality and attendance. Workers who failed to conform to normative work time were sanctioned. Certain kinds of absences (i.e. patterned, frequent) were seen as less legitimate and described in the language of abuse. Managerial discretion also operated in a way to circumscribe fathers' care, with flexibility linked to a worker's reputation and performance. Finally, certain workers had less flexibility than others. In general, the workplace as a whole was relatively rigid.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the role of coworkers in maintaining Manuco's culture of normative work time. Workers didn't define work-family issues as important (especially relative to health and safety). They also engaged in teasing and joking that helped pass the time in a challenging work environment, but that often centered on time away from work. Sometimes

joking occurred around caregiving-related absences. Through widespread teasing and joking, workers reinforced normative work time, a view of fathers' care as illegitimate, and ultimately, the gendered nature of Manuco itself.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I discuss the case of Comco. Comco was Manuco's opposite in many ways and in Chapter 7, I lay out the generous flexibility Comco offered fathers: It not only accommodated the emergencies and occasional absences of Manuco, but went well beyond, by facilitating fathers' extended leaves and offering flexible schedules to workers. Fathers were seen to be no different from mothers in this feminist, caring organization and their caregiving needs were facilitated.

In Chapter 8, I explore the limits on Comco's flexibility. The permeable boundaries characteristic of many white-collar contexts let work flow into non-work time. Workers worked long hours despite an official work week of 35 hours. In fact, I argue that Comco's caring culture had a flip side – long hours and high levels of commitment, which presented challenges to fathers' care. Formal work-family policies were available on the basis of managerial discretion, which relied on judgments around the legitimacy of absences. As at Manuco, a narrative of 'abuse' circulated to demarcate legitimate absences from those deemed illegitimate. Upon the implementation of new technology (NEWT), certain workers' flexible schedules were temporarily revoked and even higher levels of commitment and long hours became the norm. Finally, even in this caring, feminist organization, gender was used as a frame to interpret and understand fathers' caregiving. The gendered nature of the organization was reinforced and dads' care was rendered secondary to the primacy of work.

In my concluding chapter, I discuss some implications of this research as well as recommendations for policy and practice. I argue that comparing these two organizations allows

us to see how gender continues to operate as a frame for understanding and interpreting men's care at work, across very different organizational contexts. This points to the importance of not just adopting policies, in the case of more traditionally-run blue-collar firms like Manuco, though this is a vital first step, but also of transforming the culture in ways that challenge the ideal worker norm and the gendered nature of organizations. I conclude with some limitations of this research and ideas for future directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Contemporary fathers are caught at the cross-roads of competing expectations. New norms of involved fathering encourage them to be more involved in their children's lives, engaging alongside mothers in energy-, time-, and resource-intensive parenting (Hays 1996; Lareau 2003; Ranson 2010). Fathers themselves want to spend more time with their kids, particularly in light of their own relatively father-free childhoods (Doucet 2006; Townsend 2002). Evidence shows that many fathers participate in the hands-on care of children, perform the gendered work of 'thinking about' the child, and ultimately care and nurture in ways that "resemble what are often considered maternal responses" (e.g. Doucet 2006: 218; Shirani et al. 2012). Research has uncovered mothers and fathers who are "functionally interchangeable" (Ranson 2010: 175), 'superdads' who invest heavily in both family and work (Cooper 2000), and even prioritize family over work (Kaufman 2013; Reid 2015).

The ideal of involved fathering crosses class lines. Blue-collar men place high moral importance on being committed to one's family and often derive greater value from their family lives than their work lives (Gerson 1993; Lamont 2000). While this involves being drawn towards family and care, it is also about the nature of blue-collar/working-class jobs. Especially in repetitive jobs with high levels of supervision and physically challenging conditions (Halle 1984; Ouchi 1979), workers may view them as means to ends, sources of income but not identity (though see Gibson and Papa 2000). They may therefore feel pushed to find alternative sources of satisfaction and fulfillment. Middle-class white-collar workers may derive more personal satisfaction from their work, but also see childrearing as an opportunity for personal growth and self-actualization (Plantin 2007).

There are competing accounts as to which group of dads performs more care. Some scholars position working-class dads as more involved in the work of care (Brannen and Nilsen 2006; Coltrane 2004; Norman, Elliot, and Fagan 2013; Shows and Gerstel 2009). Economic pressures, the expense of child care, and working opposite shifts as mothers (tag-teaming) are some of the drivers behind this involvement (Brannen and Nilsen 2006; Deutsch 1999; Gillies 2009; Meteyer and Perry-Jenkins 2010; Shows and Gerstel 2009). Indeed, while working-class men are thought of as more traditional in their values, and may not verbally espouse egalitarian ideals around sharing the care to the same degree as middle-class dads, they may be more likely than middle and upper class fathers – whose working hours can inhibit greater involvement at home – to actually participate (Deutsch 1999; Shows and Gerstel 2009; Williams 2000).

At the same time, others have attributed greater involvement to middle-class dads (Plantin 2007; Sullivan 2010). The involved fathering ideal – in which fathers are viewed as “more emotionally involved, more nurturing, and more committed to spending time with [their] children (Wall and Arnold 2007: 510) – is in some ways a middle-class ideal, or at least started out as such (Larossa 1988; Ranson 2001). It aligns with the resource-intensive middle/upper-class approach to parenting characterized by concerted cultivation versus the working-class approach of ‘natural growth’ that keeps children cared for but not “purposively developed” (Gillies 2009; Lareau 2003; Vincent and Maxwell 2015: 4). Still others see no differences in involvement by class and argue that the intensive parenting approach has in fact become the standard of contemporary child-rearing (Braun, Vincent, and Ball 2011; Ishizuka 2019; Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004). Ultimately, and independent of the actual level of involvement, diverse fathers across classes express a “clear preference for new, involved fatherhood because it

contrasts with the previous, prevailing model of a breadwinning, disciplinarian and authority figure” (Henwood and Proctor 2003: 344).

Yet paid work remains a barrier to involved fathering. Work in blue-collar contexts is known to be rigidly organized, with clear and stark boundaries between work and non-work. Nippert-Eng (1996) describes the inflexible work world of her blue-collar interviewees in terms of ‘strict, segmentist’ tendencies (164) and as ‘regimented’ and ‘restrictive’ (239). Break and lunch times are timed and controlled, comings and goings are carefully monitored, non-work incursions are checked and kept to a minimum. Partially because the work is seen as tedious, boring, hazardous, alienating and physically demanding, there is a sense that workers are there simply to earn a pay cheque (Gibson and Papa 2000; Nippert-Eng 1996; Halle 1984). That is, their interests are not seen to align with those of management. There is thus little trust of workers by management and so a bureaucratic style of control consisting of “formal and informal rules” and intensive monitoring/surveillance tightly governs how workers spend their time at work and the extent to which they can integrate their work and non-work lives (Nippert-Eng 1996). In this context, it may be difficult for fathers to attend to care demands that arise during working hours (such as sick children or appointments).

On the other hand, while rigid boundaries may impinge on flexibility during work time, they prevent the incursion of work into non-work time. Indeed, some researchers have reported very low levels of work-non-work conflict in a blue-collar factory setting and this could relate to the ‘protective effect’ of routines and predictability (Popperton, Briner, and Kiefer 2008).

At the opposite end of the boundary work spectrum is full integration. This is where ‘home’ and ‘work’ are “one giant category of social existence” with few or no boundaries (mental, physical, emotional) between them (Nippert-Eng 1996: 5). This type of boundary

integration is demanded by ‘greedy workplaces’ which want all our energy, time and commitment and which allow work to infiltrate all corners of life. Greedy workplaces limit fathers’ caregiving, not via rigid, segmenting norms, but their opposite – by encouraging work’s primacy above all else.

In between greedy and bureaucratic workplaces are discretionary² workplaces which leave boundary work up to the individual worker. Discretionary workplaces have policies and practices in place that allow workers to combine work and home in ways they see fit. This is exemplified in the work world of white-collar scientists, who “come and go as they like” and “focus more on the tasks they do, rather than the time of day” (165). Nippert-Eng’s white-collar staff fell between the scientists and the blue-collar lab workers in terms of their freedom/flexibility to combine work and family. They had a “hybrid approach to time, a combination of an attenuated clock *and* task orientation while at work” (165). They were expected to reliably come and go at precise times during the day but experienced less scrutiny at work than blue-collar workers.

Unlike highly bureaucratic workplaces, which rely heavily on rules and surveillance to ensure workers work towards the goals of the organization, greedy and discretionary workplaces rely on the internalization of shared values and beliefs to generate commitment (and therefore productivity) in workers. These white-collar environments rely more on workers’ identification with the company to meet their goals. There is more trust in these environments because

² Nippert-Eng’s use of ‘discretionary’ is one of several ways I use discretionary in this dissertation. Here, it refers to agency/autonomy on the part of workers to shape their work-family boundaries. Later, and throughout, I also discuss ‘managerial discretion’, especially in relation to the application of flexibility policies and practices, in which case the agency/autonomy lies with managers. I further use ‘discretionary’ to refer to work itself. White-collar work, in particular, has some flexibility around how and when it’s done. This latter usage applies to the workloads of any white-collar workers (managers, non-managers) whose work is somewhat open to interpretation.

workers' interests are assumed to line up with those of the company. These 'high commitment' workplaces are also more likely to offer work-family provisions, partially to incentivize greater work commitment and effort (Osterman 1995). The downside for caregiving workers is that they may expect more work effort in exchange.

Nippert-Eng's framework on boundaries and integration/segmentation is useful for thinking about fathers' caregiving at work. However, this frame misses how the gendered nature of organizations plays an important role in facilitating of constraining dads' care.

Gendered organizations, breadwinning, and ideal-worker norms

More than thirty years ago, Joan Acker (1990) argued that the bureaucratic organizations were fundamentally gendered³, saturated with structural features, cultural symbols, and workplace relations that marginalize women. To say that an organization is gendered means "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker 1990: 146). The theory of gendered organizations can be used to think about how men's care becomes marginalized, in spite of increasing pressures for dads to be involved.

In her framework, Acker draws our attention to key mechanisms for reproducing gender – and therefore marginalizing the care of fathers. Organizations are structured according to

³ The theory of gendered organizations has primarily been used to understand the perpetuation of gender inequalities and women's lower status and positioning in organizations. However, this theory can also be used to understand men's lesser involvement in the home (Sallee 2012). While Britton (1997) asserts that "the theory of gendered organizations seeks to explain the ways in which masculinity shapes organizations and the processes through which male advantage is created and preserved" (798), we can consider how men's advantage at work is preserved through the marginalization of their care. In fact, we can see how gendered organizations preserve the overall advantage to masculinity and the structure of male advantage while still incurring costs for *individual* dads who may need or wish to be more involved with their children.

gender – divided along gender lines in terms of both vertical and horizontal sex segregation. They rely on cultural symbols and images to reinforce (or sometime oppose) gendered divisions (and ways of operating). Then there are interactional processes that reinforce the gendered structure. Finally, the whole of organizational logic – and the underlying assumptions and practices which construct most organizations – is underpinned by a gendered framework. I will begin by discussing organizational logic – focusing in on the ideal worker – and then discuss these additional mechanisms for limiting fathers’ care.

In organizational logic, jobs are filled – not with human beings who have complex lives and multiple responsibilities – but with an ideal worker – a “disembodied worker who exists only for the work” (149). This “hypothetical worker cannot have other imperatives of existence that impinge upon the job” and thus the closest this abstraction resembles to real life is the male worker whose “life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children” (149). Contrast this with the woman worker, who does not fit this model, but is conversely “assumed to have legitimate obligations other than those required by the job” (149). Indeed, workplaces are organized according to a myth of gender difference and domesticity – specifically, the idea that men are ‘providers’ and women are ‘caregivers’ (Swanberg 2004; Williams 2000). Everything from the timing and structure of the workday to interactions between coworkers belies this myth of gender difference and the ideal worker (Acker 1990).

The ‘ideal worker’ is one who is single-mindedly devoted to the interests of the employer and fulfills these expectations by working “full-time and overtime and tak[ing] little or no time off for childbearing or child rearing” (Bailyn 2006; Davies and Frink 2014; Williams 2000: 1). The normal, expected way of functioning in an organization therefore presumes little or no

interference and interruption from family responsibilities during what constitutes work time and an assumption that family responsibilities will be taken care of by someone else – presumably a wife or woman partner (Acker 1990; Reid 2015; Williams 2000).

The ideal worker norm is reflected in the structure and timing of work. Traditional ‘time clocks’ centered on conventional understandings of appropriate work time can push caregiving to the margins (Moen 2011). Most employers still operate according to a normative conception of worktime, expecting workers to put in “8-hour or more work days, 5-day or more work weeks, 48 weeks or more work years, and a lifetime of continuous work until retirement” (Moen 2011: 91). This schedule has become so thoroughly institutionalized in our culture that it is often difficult to imagine working otherwise. It has come to feel inevitable (Schein 2010). Although the gendered organizations framework was laid out over 30 years ago, the ideal worker norm continues to underpin organizational logic.

This is the case in spite of official organizational discourses that are ‘gender-blind’ and neoliberal post-feminist narratives touting the end of gender inequality (Benschop and van den Brink 2018; Smithson and Stokoe 2005). Organizations want to appear gender neutral and workers are keen to construct them as such (Kelan 2009). Workplaces may be seeking to avoid charges of discriminatory and unfair treatment – while also more generally reflecting broader ideological trends in the west of liberal individualism – and thus the official discourses center on equality and neutrality.

Yet evidence points to the ongoing relevance of the gendered organizations framework – that despite significant changes to organizations over the past three decades, organizational logic oft-remains gendered with resulting inequalities firmly in place (e.g. Balmer, Courts, Dougherty, Wolf Tuton, Abbuhl, and Hirshfield 2020; Mickey 2019; Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012).

At the same time, we know little about the implications of gendered organizations for fathers, specifically, and their care. While the ideal worker norm may have been closer to reality for a period, since the time of Acker's original writings on gender bias in organizations in the 80s and 90s, the number of dual-earning couples in Canada has risen significantly. In 2015, nearly 70% of couples with children had two adults working and 61% of mothers worked full time in 2019 (OECD Family Database 2020; Statistics Canada 2016; Uppal 2015). Much has been written about mothers' experiences with this work-family clash and the ways that it contributes to women's marginalization in organizations. For instance, scholars studying gender pay gaps have established that a major source of this gap is women's status as mothers and their disproportionate responsibility for childrearing (Budig and England 2001; England 2005; Gangl and Ziefle 2009). Employers assume that mothers will be less committed to their work because of competing parenting responsibilities and whereas this clash of responsibilities exists for fathers as well, they are less often perceived as the primary parent. For this reason, they are more likely to "pass" as ideal workers (Reid 2015).

In light of the labour market disadvantages stemming from women's caregiving responsibilities, feminist scholars have studied and advocated for 'family-friendly' workplace initiatives. Organizations have in some ways heeded this call and have implemented various policies and practices toward this end. Part-time employment, flextime, telecommuting, job sharing, compressed work weeks, family leaves, and other initiatives have been promoted as good for both women and business, allowing workers to adapt their standard schedules in ways that facilitate caregiving. Some of these policies have become quite common: in their survey of medium to large Canadian employers, the Conference Board of Canada found that the majority of organizations they studied offered some kind of flexible work arrangement (MacLean 2018).

Government policies also facilitate care. Through the federal government's employment insurance parental leave program, new parents are eligible for the 'standard' leave of up to 40 weeks of payments (at a rate of 55% of their previous insurable earnings) or the 'extended' leave of up to 69 weeks of payments (at a rate of 33% of previous insurable earnings). In both cases, parents must share these periods of leave in order to be eligible for the full length of time. With the standard leave, one parent has to take 5 of the 40 weeks, and in the case of the extended leave, the other parent must take 8 of the 69 weeks. The situation in Quebec differs: new parents are eligible for a leave of 25 weeks (at a rate of 75% of previous earnings) or 32 weeks (at a rate of 70% of previous earnings for the first 7 weeks + 55% of previous earnings for the remaining 25 weeks). New dads in Quebec are eligible for a paternity leave of 3-5 weeks (at a rate of 75% of previous insurable earnings and 70% of previous insurable earnings, respectively).

Beyond paid parental and paternity leaves, provincial employment standards acts also mandate unpaid periods of job-protected leave, several of which are specifically designated for caregiving (usually related to illness). Though these periods vary slightly in length by province, they are generally consistent across jurisdictions. They also may be accompanied by payments through employment insurance. Leaves include family leaves for a worker to deal with family responsibilities (e.g. 3 days), compassionate care leave for a worker to care for a terminally ill family member (e.g. 28 weeks; payments available through employment insurance for up to 26 weeks), and critical illness leave to provide care for a critically ill family member (e.g. 37 weeks to care for a child; payments available through employment insurance for up to 35 weeks). Some jurisdictions have additional leaves, such as the family caregiver leave in Ontario which allows for up to 8 weeks to care for a family member who has a serious medical condition. Employers can provide wages or a portion of a worker's wages while on leave, but they are not legally

required to do so (the job-protection and time away are legally guaranteed). For instance, employers may wish to provide wage top-ups – above and beyond what is paid under employment insurance – during the period of parental leave. Employees who receive top-ups are often required to return to work for a specific period of time or pay back the payments they received. Top-ups therefore increase the chances of an experienced worker returning to work following their leave and reduce employer costs related to hiring and training (Marshall 2010).

Under the Canada Labour Code, employees in federally regulated workplaces who have worked longer than 6 months have the ‘right to request a flexible work arrangement’ (in terms of where, when, and how much they work). These requests are left up to the discretion of the employer and can be denied. However, the employer must provide justification for doing so and the employee is protected from unfair treatment on the basis of the request (and is given avenues for filing an official complaint if they feel they have been treated unfairly).

Women are more likely to use many of these policies, such as part-time work and maternity/parental leave, which contributes to their marginalization at work. One of the prescriptions is for more father involvement which has benefits for not only mothers, but men and children as well (Allen and Daly 2007; Doucet 2004, 2006; Kershaw 2005). For mothers, increasing men’s involvement in care targets two of the most important bases for the gender pay gap: men’s longer work hours (especially in middle and upper-class professions) and employer discrimination against mothers (Fuller 2017; Weeden et al. 2016). Fathers themselves benefit through closer relationships with their children and the “rich emotional and psychological rewards that can shape one’s sense of self, history, belonging, and purpose” that accompany the caregiving of other human beings (Kershaw 2005: 96; see also Allen and Daly 2007; Doucet

2004, 2006/2018; Lamb 2004). Children reap developmental rewards from fathers' involvement (Allen and Daly 2007).

Yet there are costs to men for defying the ideal worker norm⁴. Fathers on the 'daddy track' – those dads prioritizing care and choosing flexible work – may suffer lower long-term earnings (Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan, and Stewart 2013). They may also face mistreatment and harassment at work. Berdahl and Moon (2013) found that amongst middle class workers (i.e. not managers or elite professionals, nor low-wage workers), those who violated traditional gender roles (i.e. fathers who visibly and actively cared for their children) experienced more workplace mistreatment and masculinity harassment in the form of teasing and insults than more 'traditional' fathers (Berdahl and Moon 2013). In a recent study drawing on Canadian data (caregiver discrimination suits), Hirsh, Treleaven, and Fuller (2020) found instances in which fathers were mistreated and laid off from their jobs due to childcare responsibilities: "In one [case], a separated father with joint custody of his children argued that he was harassed, scrutinized for his work absences, and ultimately fired because he prioritized caregiving for his three children" (771-772). Pedulla (2016) finds that, for men, part-time work can be as scarring as a history of unemployment because their work commitment is called into question. Other research uncovers and documents the negative evaluations and penalties at work when men defy the ideal worker norm and signal their actual or desired participation in care (Butler and Skattebo

⁴ Indeed, although scholars have uncovered work-related benefits to fatherhood, such as a wage premium (Fuller and Cooke 2018; Glauber 2008; Hodges and Budig 2010) and offers of higher starting salaries for dads relative to childless men (Correll, Benard and Paik, 2007) amongst other benefits (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004) this tends to apply to those high-earning fathers who most closely resemble the ideal worker rather than those who signal their care.

2004; Murgia and Poggio 2009; Rudman and Mescher 2013; Wayne and Cordeiro 2003; Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, and Siddiqi 2013; Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013).

These costs relate to masculinity and what happens when men fail to appropriately signal their gender. Masculinity is intrinsically tied up with breadwinning and performing as an ideal worker. While it is true that men's "right" to perform as ideal workers is reflective of their privilege – and this indeed nets them various rewards – it is also true that they are in some ways encumbered by an obligation to perform as such (Williams 2010). Men are expected to provide. Their identities as good, morally upstanding men hinge upon their provider role (Doucet 2006; Townsend 2002). As Townsend (2002) notes, "Men's labor force participation is long-term, consistent, full-time, and almost universal" (117). When men fail to live up this norm, they can come to be seen as "unworthy, morally inferior, and failures as men" (ibid).

Masculinity is also inherently relational – it cannot be understood, or even exist, without the contrast of femininity. The most idealized or honoured form of masculinity at any given time and place – hegemonic masculinity – is centrally about establishing symbolic difference from what women are and what they represent (Connell 1987). Men visibly performing care therefore becomes problematic in two ways – through its association with femininity and women and by signaling deprioritization of paid work.

Much has been written about the ideal worker norm in white-collar and professional/managerial contexts (e.g. Brumley 2014; Cooper 2000; Davies and Frink 2014; Kelly et al. 2010; Reid 2015). The ideal worker norm is indeed oft-thought as a white-collar norm (E.g. Britton and Logan 2008; Davies and Frink 2014; Kelly et al. 2010). Working-class families have been characterized by an inability to emulate a traditional caregiver-mother/breadwinner-father model because of more limited resources, relative to middle and

upper class families (Legerski and Cornwall 2010). And certainly, there is a pervasive understanding of blue-collar work as alienating and dehumanizing – because of its physically demanding, repetitive, and scrutinized nature – contrasting with the view of professional work as ‘calling’, entailing devotion and sacrifice (Halle 1984).

Yet while workers may not see their work as a ‘calling’ as such, ethnographic accounts reveal identification with and dedication to work among blue collar workers (Gibson and Papa 2000). Like dedicated white-collar workers, and especially professionals, they can feel the expectation to ‘act as though’ they have no competing demands on their time – working long hours, not using personal time, working hard, identifying strongly with their organizations (Gibson and Papa 2000; Kanter 1977). Even without the presumption of dedication and commitment, the act-as-though principle is apparent in the segmentist tendencies of blue and working-class contexts where management’s trust towards workers may be lower (than in professional contexts), work time is tightly controlled, and workers are discouraged from mixing personal and work life. In other words, in these less integrating environments, work time is strictly work time – there is little popping in and out of the workplace during the day, workers do not bring their kids and dogs to work, they rarely come in late or leave early. In this sense, the ideal worker norm should be thought of as a norm guiding the behavior of many workers – not just those working in white-collar, professional/managerial contexts (Munn and Greer 2015). It is the expectation in many jobs that workers will put work first. What we know less about is how the ideal worker norm plays out in blue-collar contexts, especially in relation to fathers and care.

Organizational logic, workplace policies, and managerial discretion

Gendered organizational logic takes its material form in work rules and policies (Acker 1990; Britton 1997). Work rules and policies can maintain gender inequality within organizations explicitly or more subtly. That is, they can be “discriminatory in their effect, rather than their stated intention” (Britton 1997: 815). When work-family and flexibility policies are in fact available, they can depend on implementation via managerial discretion, which can disadvantage fathers if managers see dads as secondary caregivers. Indeed, there is often much variability in implementation of policies within organizations and much variation in who can use what (Ryan and Kossek 2008). In some cases, policies are not available at all.

Somewhat surprisingly, women and mothers tend to report less access to flexibility than men and fathers. In one study, compared to men with dependent care responsibilities (including both elder care and child care), women with dependents reported less perceived flexibility to vary their work hours, to vary their work location, to take holidays when they wish, to leave work and come back, to take paid days off when their child is sick, and arrange their work schedules around family commitments (while they reported more flexibility than men with dependents to have meals with family and to be home when children arrive from school) (Higgins, Duxbury, and Lyons 2008). In terms of actual use of policies, 17% of women with dependents reported using flextime, compared to 27% of men with dependents. Women were less likely to work remotely than men (Higgins et al. 2008).

Other studies have similarly found that women tend to report less usage of flextime and telework than men (though see Dilmaghani 2020 for comparable rates of flexible work arrangement usage) (Comfort, Johnson, and Wallace 2003; Duncan and Pettigrew 2012). For instance, in 2005, 48.5% of men used a flexible schedule compared to 44.4% of women and

23.5% of men reported working from home compared to 19.5% of women (Duncan and Pettigrew 2012). Another flexible work arrangement – compressed work weeks – also shows this gender discrepancy: almost 9% of men compared to almost 6% of women have reported working compressed work weeks (Statistics Canada 2005) (though Higgins et al. 2008 found a slightly higher – 2 percentage points higher – rate of compressed work weeks amongst women with dependents, compared to similar men).

The one exception seems to be part-time work. Women have consistently been more likely to work part-time than men and recent OECD data (2019c) confirms this pattern: in 2019, 25.6% of Canadian women worked part-time compared to only 13.0% of men.

Ultimately, however, and across the board, usage of and access to policies remains low. This is especially the case in manufacturing sectors, which are recognized as less flexible than white-collar ones. Fewer workers in the manufacturing sector use both telework and flextime arrangements relative to white collar industries, such as business, real estate, health care, and finance (Comfort et al. 2003; Zeytinoglu, Cooke, and Mann 2009). Indeed, the finding that men often have more flexibility than women is true mainly for high-status professionals and managers (who tend more often to be men) rather than for blue-collar workers (Williams, Blair-loy, and Berdahl 2013). Like many other work benefits, access to flexibility seems to be partially a function of privilege, with educated, white, high-earning men often found to have greater access than less-educated, low-wage women and people of colour (Glauber 2011; Golden 2009; Swanberg, Pitt-Catsoupes, and Drescher-Burke 2005)

The lack of flexibility in the manufacturing sector is partially because this sector tends to have fewer policies available in the first place (Sweet, Pitt-Catsoupes, Besen, and Golden 2014). This makes sense in relation to policies around telework given manufacturing's typical

reliance on on-site equipment. However, it also holds true for a variety of other policies that do not necessarily hinge on characteristics intrinsic to the industry (Sweet et al. 2014). Ultimately, there is the view that family-friendly policies are “not seen as relevant” to blue-collar workers (Ravenswood and Markey 2011). This view reflects the fact that blue-collar unions place greater emphasis on improving working conditions and health/safety, and in this context, see work-family as lower priority (Ravenswood and Markey 2011). However, it also reflects gendered organizational logic, the fact that the manufacturing sector is male-dominated, and the view that men are ideal workers (Baek, Kelly, and Suk Jang 2012; Fortin and Huberman 2002).

Even in white-collar workplaces when policies are theoretically available, there may be limitations on their use. Kelly and Moen (2020) discuss ‘flexibility as accommodation’, flexibility that is available on an as-needed basis (rather than by default) to individual workers who need to request it from their managers. This form of flexibility reflects ideal worker assumptions that work comes first and ‘deviations’ from that are allowable in exceptional circumstances (but are not normative). Managers are key gatekeepers in policy implementation (Ryan and Kossek 2008) and whether workers can avail themselves of policies depends in large part on managerial discretion. Policies, indeed, are often actually written in ways that formalize this discretion (Kelly and Kalev 2006). This becomes a barrier to flexibility when managers have reasons for disliking it, such as concerns around increased work load for them or other operational concerns. In the end, flexibility often becomes a reward for superior performance, rather than an employee entitlement (Kelly and Kalev 2006; Kelly and Moen 2007). My work builds on these findings by examining the specific and nuanced accounts managers give of their implementation of policies (or lack thereof), specifically in relation to fathers and care.

Structure and gender composition

Acker argues that the gendered nature of organizations is maintained through gendered divisions of labour. Men often occupy higher power and higher status positions and this becomes a key mechanism through which male power/dominance is enacted and reinforced in organizational settings. In relation to men's work-family issues, the gender composition of work groups and management has important implications. For instance, it is generally thought that certain "core constituencies" – i.e. women, mothers, single fathers – are more invested in and supportive of work-family policies and practices (especially compared to single, childless men) given their own potential need for these (e.g. Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002). It is therefore feasible that the presence of women in workplace settings should have a salutary effect on the uptake of policies and the broad norms governing appropriate work-family behaviors.

Researchers have indeed found that female-dominated public sector organizations have more supportive work-family cultures than those private sector firms which are male-dominated⁵ (Mauno, Kinnunen, and Piitulainen 2005). Female-dominated firms have a more established history and culture of women taking advantage of work-family policies/practices and this becomes normative. When women are in senior management roles, they have the potential to directly shape workplace cultures and practices in ways reflecting their greater likelihood of being primary caregivers. This is borne out in research: Galinsky and Bond (1998) report that companies with greater shares of women in senior management offered more work-family

⁵ This effect can go both ways – family-friendly cultures can also shape the gender composition of workplaces. As Davis and Kalleberg (2006) note, "Offering family-friendly employment practices may... be a useful way for organizations to reduce work-family conflict and to recruit and retain their women workers" (198). In other words, the causal pathway – whether female representation is driving family-friendliness, or family-friendliness is driving greater female representation – is not always entirely clear.

programs and had more supportive cultures than companies with lower shares. Pitt-Catsouphes, Swanberg, Bond, and Galinsky (2004) found that the percentage of executive positions held by women predicts availability of work-life policies/programs. Similarly, research by Lyness and Kropf (2005) reveals the proportion of women in senior management roles relates to perceptions of a supportive work-family culture. Following from Acker (1990), they note that the “inclusion of women in critical societal or organizational roles may help to temper otherwise male-gendered organizational cultures, resulting in cultures that are more supportive of employees’ needs to balance work and family” (Lyness and Kropf 2005: 55).

While women’s own use of policies/practices may be greater in female-dominated contexts (compared to male-dominated ones), mothers may still experience penalties for partaking in work-family arrangements (Glass 2004). They may also experience less managerial support compared to male workers in these settings relating to the fact that they are less likely to hold the higher-status (professional/managerial) positions that are associated with greater authority and flexibility in the first place (Mauno et al. 2005).

Whether fathers themselves benefit from working in female-dominated contexts is somewhat debated. In relation to women in senior management, Haas and Hwang (2007) find no significant relationship between women in these positions and father-friendliness while Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) reveal a beneficial effect of supportive male supervisors and coworkers on fathers’ work-family policy use. They attribute this to the protection provided by higher-status male bosses and peers when it comes to the use of “risky” (i.e. potentially signaling lesser career devotion) policies in professional/managerial contexts. On the other hand, and in relation to the overall proportion of women in the workplace, Mauno, Kinnunen, and Piitulainen (2005) found that men employed in the female dominated Finnish public sector reported more managerial

support in relation to family needs compared to men in the male dominated private sector.

Similarly, career consequences for use of work-family arrangements were more pronounced and the work-family culture perceived more negatively in the latter. Haas and Hwang (2007) also found a relationship between an organization's overall sex composition and father friendliness: when women represent a greater share of the workforce, fathers experience more informal support from managers and coworkers for parental leave and part-time hours.

Breaking this down by class, Mauno et al. (2005) further found that organizations within each of their sectors (public/private) differed in their 'family-friendliness'. Men who worked in the blue-collar paper mill reported the least managerial support, the most career consequences, and the least positive work family culture compared to the other private sector firm (a male-dominated white-collar IT organization) and the white-collar public sector workplaces. This survey-based research gives a good idea of broad patterns and paves the way for more in-depth investigations into how fathers might manage their care in settings which vary in their gender composition.

Culture and an ethic of care

Culturally, certain underlying sets of guiding ethics and subtexts in organizations could facilitate fathers' caregiving. For instance, past research has looked at fathers' caregiving in the context of organizations with an 'ethic of care' (Haas and Hwang 2009; 2007; Haas, Allard, and Hwang 2002). An ethic of caring includes "concern for others, sense of social responsibility, and preference for collaborative over competitive interaction" (Haas and Hwang 2009: 309). Companies with a caring ethic would be sensitive to workers' non-work lives and would facilitate and encourage their participation in care (Haas, Allard, and Hwang 2002). A caring

ethic is associated with fathers' parental leave use in Sweden (Haas et al. 2002) and higher ethic of caring scores are associated with greater 'father friendliness' (formal policy and programs, informal support and flexibility to facilitate fathers' care) (Haas and Hwang 2007). An ethic of care contrasts with a masculine ethic which centers on an ideal worker and male norms such as a "compulsive orientation to task accomplishment" (Haas et al. 2002: 325).

Interactions and gender accountability

Acker discusses workplace interactions as one of the elements that reproduces gendered organizations. As in all social relational contexts, people in workplaces feel pressured to 'do gender', to act in ways deemed "appropriate for one's sex category" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 127). The reason people feel pressured is because they anticipate others will hold them accountable. For women, doing gender can mean visibly signaling involvement in care and for men, it can mean the opposite and performing like an ideal worker.

Accountability is key to doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987). It helps explain why individuals are motivated to do gender in the first place, and what happens when they fail to live up to gendered expectations. In interaction, people continuously take stock of each other's activities and behaviours, noticing and evaluating them according to existing "social frameworks" (136). One such framework is gender. People are assessed for their performances as recognizably gendered men and women.

One reason for this is that gender is one of several primary cognitive frames our minds unconsciously employ for relating to others (Ridgeway 2011). We automatically and immediately sex-categorize others with whom we interact in order to understand and interpret their behavior. Even in situations ostensibly unrelated to gender, our brains rely on this frame for

understanding. However, situations or circumstances which obviously relate to gender, such as those stereotypically associated with men or women (for example, caregiving), would render gender more salient and its influence on our judgments and reactions more pronounced. Once we have sex-categorized another person, our gender-based stereotypes become primed, informing our expectations for others. Because we know and anticipate that our behavior is often being assessed according to its gender appropriateness, we are motivated to continuously ‘do gender’, ultimately reproducing and legitimizing the “institutional arrangements that are based on sex category” (146).

Despite this accountability, individuals often deviate from expected gender performances. When this occurs, it can engender negative reactions in others. For instance, Caitlyn Collins (2019) describes the reactions mothers in Western Germany receive when they are seen to prioritize their careers over care, a stereotypically male orientation: they are called ‘rabenmutter’ or raven mother, a disparaging term for mothers who work when their children are young that is ultimately meant to shame and discipline them into conforming to the “culturally accepted definition of a good mother” (117). At work, mothers interviewed by Collins are seen as “worse employees” by their bosses and “sometimes deserv[ing] to be fired” (137).

Mothers are indeed stigmatized both for living up to the male ideal worker norm and disavowing it. They are caught in a bind. If they demonstrate work devotion and act like ideal workers, they may be respected, but seen as lacking interpersonal appeal, viewed as ‘bad mothers’ and confronted with backlash for failing to conform to gender stereotypes that position mothers as warm, but not necessarily competent (Berdahl and Moon 2013; Blair-Loy 2003; Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004; Okimoto and Heilman 2012; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, and Phelan 2012). If, on the other hand, they prioritize family and care over paid work, they may be

well-liked for living up to acceptable standards of femininity. However, they may also be seen as less competent and committed, compared to those perceived as ideal workers (i.e. fathers and childless men and women) (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004). Indeed, for women, being perceived as both a good mother and a good worker is a contradiction in terms. The reactions to and perceptions of mothers have important consequences: they help explain workplace discrimination and ongoing labour market disadvantage for mothers and women.

The ways in which fathers are held accountable in the context of workplace interactions differ from mothers. Fathers at work are perceived as competent and warm (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004). For men, fatherhood and breadwinning are tightly coupled: being a good father entails being a good worker and both are required for men's successful constructions of socially acceptable and moral selves (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013; Townsend 2002). In fact, men are often rewarded for becoming fathers at work (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Glauber 2008).

Men's provision and performance as an ideal worker links to masculinity. Fathers may fear deviating from norms of hegemonic masculinity if it means they are called out, deemed deviant. As Bird (1996) explains, "Within the existing gender order, meanings associated with behaviors that challenge hegemonic masculinity are denied legitimation as masculine" (121).

Indeed, the workplace benefits fathers receive may depend on their interactional performances as gendered ideal workers (Berdahl and Moon 2013). When fathers contravene ideal worker norms by signaling involvement in care, they risk incurring negative reactions from others. In Francine Deutsch's study on shared parenting, she gives examples of the criticisms faced by blue-collar shift-working dads for their involvement at home. One father said "I get

teased at work once in a while... my wife will call up about where the kids are... and they pick on me and they'll snicker in the background" (1999: 93).

Similarly, a British, white-collar public sector worker said of his request for leave to care for his children, that it "raised more eyebrows than rounds of applause" (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, and Sparrow 2013: 641). In that same study, fathers recounted how attempts to alter work patterns to provide care "were not taken seriously" (Burnett et al. 2013: 640). These comments and reactions serve to hold fathers accountable for their gender atypical actions. They discredit or invalidate men's participation in caregiving given their incumbency in the male sex category (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Reactions towards caregiving fathers at work stem from both a femininity stigma and a flexibility/poor worker stigma. In the first case, men who request leaves or signal their care in other ways – and are thus seen to be acting like women – may be impugned with negative feminine qualities (Rudman and Mescher 2013). Recall that dominant or hegemonic masculinity is centrally about not acting like a woman (Connell 1987). Flexibility stigma is triggered when employees request or signal a need for workplace flexibility due to care responsibilities, violating the ideal worker norm (Williams, Blair-Loy and Berdahl 2013). While both men and women suffer from flexibility stigma, fathers may incur additional negative reactions that stem from their perceived gender nonconformity.

Experimental studies do suggest that men incur more negative reactions for signaling their care at work. Wayne and Cordeiro (2003) found that men who took a 3-month long leave for a child's birth were perceived as less altruistic at work, compared to men who did not take leave and women who did. Butler and Skattebo (2004) found that even brief absences to care for a sick child (missing a full day or leaving early) resulted in lower performance ratings and

reward recommendations for men, but not women. Similarly, Berdahl and Moon (2013) found that caregiving men reported the most ‘not man enough’ harassment at work compared to traditional dads (low on caregiving), men without children, and women (with and without children). One reason why caregiving fathers are perceived more harshly is that they are deviating from gender norms. Indeed, Rudman and Mescher (2013) found that men who requested leave suffered from femininity stigma and were judged as weak which ultimately predicted rewards and penalties.

While managers and supervisors are the ones whose judgments may shape performance ratings and rewards, coworkers, too, may react negatively to caregiving fathers. For instance, fathers who signal their family responsibilities have reported “prejudice from fellow employees” and being treated as “‘second class’ or ‘part-time’ for working flexibly” (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, and Sparrow 2013: 641).

The judgments and perceptions of caregiving dads that occur in interactions marginalize fathers’ care and ultimately reproduce gendered organizations. However, the types of interactions, and how this occurs, depend in part on class and the specificities of the organization. Gender as a perceptual frame may be more or less salient, depending on work context. Ridgeway explains that “the extent to which gender stereotypes actually do modify people’s behavior and judgements in a given situation depends on gender’s salience or relevance for them, given the nature of the situation. The more salient gender is, the greater its effects on their behavior” (71, italics original). Gender is likely to be more salient in situations where it gives actors clues about how others will behave. Such settings are those which are “culturally linked to gender or to the stereotypic skills of one sex or the other”. Other such settings are those

which are mixed-sex because “identities that are different or distinctive attract attention and appear informative” (71).

Blue-collar and white-collar settings exemplify each of these. For example, blue-collar environments like manufacturing can entail dangerous and dirty work, not to mention physical risk, the “*sine qua non* of masculinity” (Ely and Meyerson 2010: 4, italics original). These environments are also often male-dominated, which are “breeding ground[s] for conventional masculinity” (ibid, 29). Mixed-sex white-collar settings may be thought to prime gender’s salience given varied gender identities and how these draw cognitive attention, yet “research has not born this out” (ibid). Workplace masculinity contests tend to occur amongst men vying for status (Berdahl 2018). Indeed, even in the absence of women, men try to establish their masculinity and men seem to “place the highest value on their identity in the eyes of other men” (Collinson 2003: 533; Ely and Meyerson 2010). All told, it would seem reasonable to expect gender and masculinity to be more salient in blue-collar contexts. The implications of this for men’s caregiving in particular – and for coworkers’ interpretations and understandings of men’s care – are underexplored. Indeed, we know less about the social relational contexts around men’s care in different workplace settings. How do people react to fathers’ caregiving at work? How does this differ by type of workplace setting?

Chapter 3: Methodology

For this project, I wanted to capture fathers' stories about their experiences managing paid work and care and get a strong sense of the organizational context around these experiences.

Qualitative analysis is best suited to the purpose of telling stories, showcasing context, and making theoretical links. As a methodology, it has an “unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about *how things work in particular contexts*” (Mason 2002: 1, italics in original). The focus on context, mechanism, and depth is why I chose to do a qualitative study, rather than an original survey or analysis of existing data.

I adopted a comparative case study approach. Cases can be thought of as ‘bounded systems’ (Stake 2000) – in this case, organizations. The point of case study research is to focus on the details of the cases selected and examine their contexts (*ibid*), while drawing “inferences from similarities or differences in patterns between pairs of cases” (Langley and Royer 2006: 82). The logic of case study research is idiographic – the aim is to present an in-depth, but particularistic portrayal, of the case(s) at hand. It is therefore well-suited to understanding how fathers' caregiving may depend on the unique contexts of workplaces.

This project was informed by a lens of feminist reflexivity – a focus on critically examining how ‘knowledge is produced’ (Pillow 2003). Thus, consistent with qualitative and feminist research aims, my goal is not to reproduce a view from ‘nowhere’. Rather, it is to present the research process and findings with transparency, and with critical self-awareness – offering an account of how this particular narrative came to be (Arendell 1997; Pillow 2003; Tracy 2010).

In the following, I discuss data collection (how I recruited my organizations and interviewees), the actual interviewing process, how I coded and analyzed my data (and ultimately constructed the specific narratives I ended up with), and limitations of the process.

Data collection

Recruiting organizations

In the initial recruitment stages, I pursued crown corporations, which are state-owned enterprises. I was aiming to do a case study of a single site and I wanted an organization that would be relatively family-friendly. I wanted to understand how the most care-supportive contexts shape fathers' care in ways that could provide lessons for less-supportive contexts. Ultimately, however, my pursuit of crown corporations led to dead-ends.

Through conversations with my supervisor, Sylvia Fuller, we decided that I should expand my search beyond crown corporations (given access was proving to be a challenge) and include an additional workplace, for the purposes of doing a comparative case study. Comparative case studies on work-family issues are rare (especially in the North American context) and there is much insight to be gleaned from the opportunity to compare and contrast workplace cultures and practices. Adding a less family-friendly workplace to the study allowed for an examination of fathers' care at both ends of the family-friendliness spectrum and illuminates not only the differences, but perhaps more interestingly, the similarities between family 'friendly' and 'unfriendly' workplaces.

From that point, I focused on recruiting two organizations – one that was relatively family-friendly and one that was not. To carry this out, I contacted organizations which might have an inherent interest in research on work-family issues and/or were connected with people I

knew. Leveraging my personal relationships to negotiate access was a pragmatic and necessary step in light of the oft-described difficulties gaining insider access to organizations, and indeed my own challenges recruiting organizations at the beginning (Beynon 1988; Buchanan and Bryman 2007; Crompton and Jones 1988; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Neyland 2008). Drawing on a personal relationship could have potentially led to bias – particularly if it was an especially important relationship and I was therefore invested in maintaining good relations with the organization to maintain it. However, this approach largely failed to net any benefit, with the exception of my recruitment of Manuco, and I do not think the risk of bias materialized for reasons I will describe below. If an organization seemed especially likely to be interested in my research because of their own work-family practices and values or I could leverage one of my personal relationships to negotiate access, then I made contact via email. I cold-contacted roughly 10 organizations (and also emailed several personal contacts to see if they had any leads). These organizations were crown corporations, interested in work-family issues, large and/or recommended by personal contacts. In some cases, I engaged in lengthy email exchanges as I tried to persuade organizations to participate.

Comco is an example of an organization with an inherent interest in work-family issues. My supervisor suggested I get in touch with them based on their emphasis on work-family balance, community focus, and other publicly displayed values. I emailed the CEO of Comco and did not receive a reply for several months. I assumed they lacked interest, until eventually an assistant emailed me back and put me in touch with one of the managers there, the person who would become my contact. This manager and I set up a phone meeting to discuss the project, met for a second time to further talk logistics, and then began setting up interviews.

For Manuco, the circumstances were somewhat different. I had been prepared to work with an entirely different organization, a public sector insurance provider, but this ultimately fell through owing to what was described as a sensitive time in the organization related to increasingly tense union negotiations. Following this unfortunate and frustrating turn of events, I told an acquaintance about my difficulties. This acquaintance happened to be good friends with a senior executive at Manuco. He put me in touch with this executive and we set up a time for me to present my project to both him and the manager who would become my contact person. Although this was an example of leveraging a relationship, I do not feel that it biased the results or outcomes of the study. My acquaintance was very much just that and though I was very grateful for his networking on my behalf, I was not concerned about upsetting the relationship through my research. Furthermore, I did not know anyone else at this organization (also true at Comco). In both cases (and in all instances where I pitched my project to companies), I promised reports based on my findings in exchange for access. While this may have helped tip the odds in my favour, neither organization was especially difficult to persuade. As stated above, I only emailed Comco once before they responded expressing their interest. My manager contact was enthusiastic about the project right from the beginning. At Manuco, I pitched my project to them, they agreed, and my contact promptly started setting up interviews. Both organizations gave me office space and helped recruit participants. Ultimately, I think their reasons for participating came down to Comco's own interest in work-family issues and Manuco's pragmatic interest in doing a favor for a friend – while also seeing a side benefit of gaining insights into their companies.

Recruiting interviewees

My sample was a hybrid convenience/snowball/purposive sample. Once I had gained access to the organizations, I gave my letter of recruitment (briefly describing the project and interview process) to my contact people, who then recruited interviewees on my behalf. At Manuco, my contact approached individual workers on the factory floor and in the office to describe the project and invite them to participate. He also emailed workers with my letters of consent and recruitment. He specifically targeted those who fit my criteria – men with kids, but also some mothers and childless individuals (whose perspectives, I told him, were relevant for getting a broad picture of how dads and their care are perceived). He set up interviews with those who were interested in participating. Manuco generously incentivized participation by putting participants' names in for a draw for hockey tickets. My contact person also placed my recruitment letter on a bulletin board along with the notice of the draw. At Comco, my contact sent out emails to individuals who were part of his network and encouraged them to do the same, explaining the project and encouraging workers to participate. Similar to Manuco, his focus was on findings fathers, with some additional moms and childless workers. At both organizations, information about the interviews also spread through word-of-mouth.

A limitation of this study is the reliance on organizational insiders – specifically managers – for recruitment. At Manuco, I interviewed several workers who felt somewhat disenfranchised and dissatisfied with their working lives making me think that bias resulting from managerial influence was limited. I wasn't under the impression that workers had been selected for their alignment with organizational interests. In general, they were frank in describing their work and care experiences. However, at Comco, most of the workers I spoke to were in particular departments that leaned themselves more to flexibility (reflecting my contact

person's own location and network in the organization) and many reported very positive experiences. These experiences demonstrate both Comco's strong work-family policies and practices, but also the positioning of the people I spoke to. If I had interviewed more workers from other departments, I may have produced a different account (and indeed, the account of one worker from a different department diverged somewhat from that of my other interviewees). It is possible that in both organizations, managers' recruitment of interviewees meant that certain workers (i.e. those happier and more satisfied with their jobs and work-family experiences; those with closer relationships to managers; those less critical of the organization) were more likely to volunteer to participate and that in our interviews, participants may have been more positive about their experiences than if I had recruited interviewees myself, independently of the organization.

In each interview, I asked people to tell any prospective interviewees about the project and have them get in touch with me. In this way I reached beyond direct manager referrals (particularly at Comco), finding some additional interviewees through word-of-mouth. However, most interviews were referrals from my contact people at each workplace. There were no apparent differences in the interviews resulting from manager versus worker referrals. I also sampled purposively: I told my contacts (and interviewees) that I wanted to speak mainly to fathers, and that the insights of mothers and non-parents were also welcomed. I wanted to get the perspectives of 'outsiders' (i.e. non-fathers) on fathers' caregiving, especially in terms of how it is perceived. I also told contacts and interviewees that I wanted to speak to a cross-section of workers – those at the bottom, middle, and top of the organization in order to capture a range of experiences. The sample reflects these decisions: I ended up speaking to 73 workers across the organizations (43 at Manuco, 30 at Comco), representing a wide cross-section of occupations

(including many managers – important for getting at the decision-making around fathers' flexibility and care). The majority (66 of the 73) were men and 54 of those were dads (plus two men who were expecting at the time of the interviews, for a total of 56 current and soon-to-be dads). There were seven women, five of whom were mothers. Most interviewees were white, Canadian, or European. However, a significant minority were Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, South-Asian, and Metis. Workers ranged in age from their 20s to their 50s. Furthermore, most workers were in dual-earner households. I was aiming to get as many interviews as I could, but by the time I reached my 73, I had well reached the point of saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge (Guest, Bunce, Johnson 2006).

Conducting interviews

Interviews were conducted at the workplaces (in private, closed rooms), and more rarely, outside the workplace in coffee shops, or over the phone. Interviewees were given a copy of the consent form prior to the interviews and I reviewed the consent form again at the beginning of interviews, at which point interviewees signed it (or brought an already-signed copy). I gave interviewees a \$5.00 gift card to a coffee shop for their participation. All interviews took place during the work day (in some cases, this may have helped incentivize participation, but it could have had the opposite effect for those who felt particularly overwhelmed by work demands).

Interview questions centered on fathers' experiences as working dads, how they manage paid and unpaid work, and lots of questions around work context: what is it like to work here in general? What is the culture like? How do people you work with react when you need to take time off for childcare duties? How do you think people at work perceive your caregiving responsibilities? Is work-family balance a priority for the organization? I told interviewees at the

beginning of interviews that they could skip any questions they were not comfortable answering and that they could contact me after the fact to delete any information from the transcripts. I asked some demographic questions at the end of each interview. Interview guides are in Appendix A.

The dynamic and ‘vibe’ of interviews at Manuco and Comco were very different. At Manuco, interviews were more subdued, responses were often short and to the point. At times, there was confusion around my questions – what did I mean when I asked whether dads felt they had ‘work-family balance’? I felt that there was some mis-match between my questions and their lived experiences. Comparing the transcripts from each organization, I was struck by how short some of the responses were from Manuco workers, compared to those from Comco which were often lengthy. On average, interviews lasted about 1 hour, ranging from 25 minutes to an hour and a half.

Indeed, the vibe and dynamic of interviews at Comco were almost Manuco’s opposite. There was an energy in the air that permeated interviews. People’s responses were long and not only did interviewees immediately understand what I meant by ‘work-family balance’, they actually instructed me that their organization had its *own* term for such a phenomenon (which I will not disclose here for the sake of the organization’s anonymity).

These marked differences in interviewing are reflective of my own identity and positioning. I constructed the entire project around a middle-class notion of ‘work-family balance’. Do fathers have it? If not, what factors in the workplace prevent it? This reflects my own middle-class background, as well as the context of the university and the conversations taking place – in both the scholarship I read, and amongst the people in my department. In general, workers at Comco were middle-class: they often had university degrees (several had

Masters' degrees), they had above-average earnings, and they worked in white-collar jobs. Many of the workers at Manuco were blue-collar workers whose worlds did not deal in 'work-family balance' as such. My particular account is also the result of my status and performance as a young heterosexual female interviewer interviewing men. In the first place, women interviewers are less threatening than men (because they are lower status) potentially generating greater disclosures from respondents (Brewer 2004). However, in addition, by adopting a gendered interviewing style – exuding warmth, laughing generously, actively signaling listening (lots of head nodding and verbal utterances like “uh huh”) – I created space for long and personal disclosures, especially on the part of Comco interviewees.

Other data sources

Interviews were my primary source of data, however I also relied on the organizations' websites, official policy documents, employee handbooks and annual reports. I used these to inform my understanding of the organizations overall, their cultures, and their policies and rules around working time and absences. In both organizations, there was very limited data on employees' use of flexibility policies so I had to rely on workers' own recollections and reports of their policy use, which I used to understand how fathers' use of policies and caregiving absences get shaped by the workplace context and to ultimately form my arguments about flexibility/inflexibility.

Coding and Analyzing Data

Once I had my interviews transcribed, I entered them into MAXQDA (qualitative data analysis software) and began the process of coding. I created codes based on the theory and literature around work, organizations, family, caregiving, work-family, gender, and masculinity. I applied

those codes to my interview data, and in this sense, borrowed from abductive and extended-case method approaches which advocate familiarity with theory prior to analysis, contra a pure grounded theory approach relying primarily on induction (Burawoy 2009; Timmermans and Tavory 2012):

“In-depth knowledge of multiple theorizations is thus necessary both to find out what is missing or anomalous in an area of study and to stimulate insights about innovative or original theoretical contributions. Rather than engaging with the scholarly literature at the end of the research project, as inductivist approaches have often advised, abduction assumes extensive familiarity with existing theories at the outset and throughout every research step” (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 173).

However, I also developed new codes based on the data. For instance, the non-salience of ‘work-family balance’ discourse at Manuco was one such code that emerged inductively and surprisingly from the data. In much of the research, concerns around work-family balance are taken as a starting point. Without a familiarity with the work-family literature – and a ‘sensitivity’ towards certain understandings and concepts (i.e. ‘work-family balance’; the assumption that people’s employment and care worlds conflict, etc.), I may not have heeded this important theme. As Timmermans and Tavory explain, “Unanticipated and surprising observations are strategic in the sense that they depend on a theoretically sensitized observer who recognizes their potential relevance” (2012: 173)

The non-salience of work-family balance at Manuco was a theme that came up with sufficient frequency that I created a new code for it (Ryan and Bernard 2000). The absence of work-family discourse reflects “underlying cultural assumptions” (ibid: 6). This theme in turn helps to understand the specific mechanisms through which gender and class operate to render fathers’ caregiving needs invisible, pushing them to the cracks in and around work time, and reinforcing the primacy of paid work.

The process of coding and analyzing was iterative. I came to the data with codes based in theory/literature, read through interviews applying all applicable codes as I went, and developing new codes along the way (then returning to previous transcripts to apply those codes).

I also wrote analytic memos as I went, documenting surprising passages, asking questions, expressing disagreement and noting contradictions, noting themes and connections (to other interviews, to literature, etc.), extending/expanding upon ideas (whether or not they were directly related to my main questions/arguments), and analyzing passages sentence fragment by sentence fragment. Following from Charmaz (2014), I treated memos as an “interactive space and place for exploration and discovery” (170), which ultimately guided my analysis.

Based on the coding and memo-writing, I then wrote longer memos, or mini-papers that fit themes together, which ultimately formed the basis of my chapters. I continuously consulted with my data throughout this process, reading and re-reading codes, relevant quotes, key passages and refining my writing based on this process.

Throughout the writing process, I discussed and consulted with my supervisor, colleagues, and family members. These discussions, alongside the continued process of writing, were instrumental in helping me develop my narrative/argument. For instance, Sylvia continually encouraged me to think of ‘countervailing’ narratives and counter-intuitive explanations for the data, e.g. maybe fathers actually find their workplaces to be fairly flexible? Thinking in this way – with a sensitivity towards the unexpected – helped me to develop pieces of my main argument, i.e. that fathers’ perceptions of flexibility stem in part from the influence of gender and the lack of expectations they may have for greater flexibility.

Presenting Data

In keeping with a lens of feminist reflexivity, and with the aim of presenting my research with transparency, the quoted passages are lengthy at times and include my (sometimes stumbling) questions, responses, and interjections.

Quotes were selected from relevant codes based on how illustrative/exemplary they were. They have been lightly edited for clarity.

Details relating to respondents and the organizations themselves have been concealed and changed to prevent identification of individuals and the organizations. It is not revealed where changes/concealments have been made. Changes aim to preserve confidentiality in ways that would not affect interpretation of important analytic elements.

Chapter 4: Manuco's facilitation of fathers' care

Workplace Context

Manuco was a small, male-dominated manufacturing firm. Located in an industrial park on the outskirts of a large Canadian city, it occupied a low, large building separated into white-collar offices at the front and a blue-collar factory floor at the back. The 'shop floor' (used interchangeably with "factory floor" throughout this dissertation) was divided between the area for machining, an area for tool and die, and shipping/receiving⁶. At the entrance was a small, low-ceilinged, and unremarkable reception area which lead to the offices and cubicles of the white-collar staff who managed and administered work, sales, and quality control. The majority of workers were blue-collar production workers, with a small minority handling the white-collar management and administration. The production workers belonged to a workers' association⁷. In total, there were around 300 workers at the facility. While the white-collar staff consisted of a mix of men and women, the factory floor was all male. Similarly, all senior positions at the facility (as well as the President and CEO) were men. Walking into the building, I was struck by the slow, laid-back vibe that permeated the space. Time felt sort of paused. No one was around except the receptionist.

The organization of time and space at Manuco was central to fathers' experience of the limits and possibilities of care. Work was organized with clear, rigid boundaries between work/non-work time and spaces that were reinforced at multiple levels: the nature of

⁶ Shop floor/factory floor worker includes anyone working in these areas.

⁷ The workers' association was essentially a union, though as one manager noted, members weren't seen as "militants". One reason for this may have been that in their current Collective Bargaining Agreement, the association had agreed to 'uninterrupted production' during the life of the agreement, meaning there would be "no strike, picketing, slow-down or stoppage of work either complete or partial" and Manuco similarly agreed there would be no lock-outs.

manufacturing work, formal policies (e.g. around schedules and breaks), shared cultural norms, and workplace interactions. As I show in this chapter, these features did not preclude fathers from caregiving. Indeed, certain kinds of caregiving (responding to emergencies and taking children to appointments) were both expected and encouraged. And indeed, fathers at Manuco typically characterized their work as sufficiently flexible to manage their caregiving responsibilities. In this chapter, I show why workers came to this assessment despite a generally rigid organization of work/non-work time. In particular, I highlight how informal accommodations on the part of managers facilitated particular forms of care, the positive aspects of rigid work-time boundaries, and how gendered understandings of work and care limited men's expectations for the type and amount of care they should provide.

Time and Space at Manuco

At Manuco, the atmosphere felt slow. There was no palpable sense of urgency or excitement and you could feel the sedateness as this decades-old company continued to plod forward. The work environment was quiet and people moved calmly and slowly, rather than with urgent purpose. Interviews often went longer than the hour I anticipated but workers were rarely in a rush to return to work, striking up small talk at the end and asking questions about the project or myself as a researcher. Even the environment surrounding the building was relatively quiet, consisting only of the occasional semi-trailer truck rumbling past.

The overall mood related in part to the physical nature of the work – bound as it was to the machines, tools, and materials that enabled the making of parts. For some – those working in the machine shop, for instance – moving in a slow deliberate fashion could mean the difference between leaving work injured or intact. It meant making fewer mistakes. Many of the workers

had spent their entire working lives at Manuco – or in similar manufacturing environments – and the repetitive nature of the work sometimes led to boredom, and likely, the type of methodical slowness that arises in the absence of novelty and excitement. Indeed, there seemed to be a sense of resignation that permeated the workplace, and this likely reflected in part both the long tenures of many workers combined with the nature of the work.

This quality permeated the whole organization – even the white-collar side, the tasks of which were primarily computer-based. White-collar workers could also have potentially worked remotely, independent, as they were, from the machines required by the production workers, but for the most part they worked exclusively at work with the exception of the managers who occasionally put in additional hours in the evenings and on weekends. The blurring of work-non work boundaries characteristic of so many contemporary workplaces was noticeably absent. The work itself, and the time dedicated to work, were rigidly organized. Workers were bound to the machines and materials used.

One of the factors contributing to this slow quality was that workers were on a work share program, agreeing to work fewer hours to reduce lay-offs. There had been an industry downturn, decreasing demand for their product. Few people were working overtime. No one was working mandatory overtime. There was no need to rush or work extra hours to fill orders. Many workers were pleased with being on work share because it provided them with additional time off, even while some experienced some anxiety about what a work share might signal about future lay-offs. A reduction in hours was also palatable to workers as eligible employees were receiving employment insurance benefits to help compensate for lost earnings.

The slowdown in demand might have reduced the pace of work somewhat, but it had not led to a relaxation of the organization of work time, which remained tightly controlled and

structured. On the factory floor, work was scheduled into three shifts, including one at night, to allow the machines to run 24 hours a day (the reduced hours from the work share came in days off, often Mondays or Fridays to allow for long weekends). All workers – including salaried managers – clocked in and clocked out and breaks were timed, with a buzzer signaling their beginning and end. Tardiness, especially for the factory floor workers, might result in docked pay, whereas for salaried white collar workers, there would be an expectation to make up the time. The rigid organization of work/non-work time was enforced by workers as well as managers. One manager, Douglas, recounted the clock-watching of his employees:

“So I’ll have a discussion with them and I’ll start like 10 minutes before break time. As soon as its break time, they will look at the clock. They’ll... make it obvious that they’re looking at the clock to see whether it’s break time....And I would never tell somebody... I don’t care that people take break ... But if I held them past break, and they wanted to go take a break, I’m never going to say like, no. Nobody reasonable’s gonna’ be doing that”

Though Douglas offers subtle rebuke to these workers whose clock watching seems excessive, their concern for time reflects a structure and culture of closely monitored time that is accepted at Manuco. Indeed, their clock watching could be seen as a direct result of the bureaucratic and segmentist rules and norms that Manuco has created and reinforces. As Nippert-Eng (1996) notes, workers’ extreme “sensitivity to the clock is a logical result of [a]... bureaucratic policy about the classification of time” (Nippert-Eng 1996: 164).

Their concern also reflects how foundational time is for people’s experiences of organizational life. Time is one of the constituents of an organizational culture’s “deep structure”, alongside equally profound and even subconscious elements like what constitute truth and reality (Schein 2010: 125). It is fundamental to how people experience the workplace. We may even feel anxiety or irritation – a sense of ‘ontological *insecurity*’ – when there is a

disconnect between our interpretations of time and those of others (Giddens 1991, italics mine; Schein 2010). Douglas exemplifies this in his recounting of the clock watching of his employees.

Managing care at Manuco: formal policies and informal accommodation

The rigid organization of work time at Manuco can be seen as reflecting a masculine organizational logic whereby workers are not expected to have caregiving responsibilities that might require flexibility or variability in scheduling to accommodate. Manuco likewise offered limited policies to help workers manage their time and various non-work demands. Provisions for vacation time, sick time, bereavement leave, and maternity and parental leave reflected statutory minimums set out in provincial labour laws. There were no provisions that would be considered ‘work-family policies’, with the exception of a 1-day paid paternity leave. There were no formal policies around telecommuting, job sharing, compressed work weeks, or flex time. No fathers I interviewed worked part-time.

I asked Peter, a manager, how important family-friendliness is to the company and he responded:

“Probably not very high. Yeah, um... You know I mean when you look at priorities I mean there's a lot, right. But I don't think we've ever sat in front of the computer thinking to develop this policy because of, you know, family kind of situations. I think it happens but I don't think, you know, I don't think we go and say we've gotta develop this policy for family situations I don't think it's ever... It wouldn't be like a phone policy or like those other things because we have these situations, but those things, family, no.”

Peter's comments reflect Manuco's gendered organizational logic, and the view that men are breadwinners first. Family care needs are relatively deprioritized and invisible to the

organization. Fathers are, in a sense, ‘ghosts’ in the organizational machine (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, and Sparrow 2013). The lack of work-family policies also reflects the environment of manufacturing firms more broadly and the limited access factory workers have to work-family initiatives (Perry-Jenkins 2005; Williams 2010).

Informal flexibility was also fairly limited. Workers occasionally adjusted their starting and stopping times to accommodate kids’ schedules – but few people did this and no one did it by more than a half an hour. Moreover, these types of minor schedule adjustments were far from ‘entitlements’ and seen instead as temporary deviations that needed to be corrected – either by ‘making up the time’ or returning to the default schedule once the period of need was over. There was no assumption that schedule modifications would continue indefinitely or become the new norm. No workers I interviewed were on any kind of significant or long-term schedule modification like part-time work. The one area of flexible accommodation that seemed to exist as an informal entitlement was around emergencies and occasional health-related appointments – a point I will return to later.

Ultimately, workers were expected to be on time, spend eight uninterrupted hours doing their jobs (with sanctioned breaks), and leave at the designated time. Tardiness was viewed negatively, tracked closely, and penalized if it became chronic. Leaving early, or ‘stealing time’ was also viewed negatively. Workers were discouraged from being absent, with the exception of vacation time, even though they had official sick days and the option of taking unpaid time. As mentioned above, beyond the standard policies set out in the provincial employment act, few additional policies existed to help workers manage family or non-work responsibilities.

Conditions supporting fathering at Manuco

On the surface, then, Manuco would not seem to be a context favorable to involved fathering. To some extent, all jobs and organizations are woven with masculine logic, presuming “a worker who exists only for the work” – one not responsible for reproduction (Acker 1990: 149). The rigid organization of work and the lack of work-family policies reinforced this traditional orientation at Manuco. One might imagine, then, that fathers would complain about difficulties managing care responsibilities in light of increased social expectations for father involvement. And indeed, fathers at Manuco recounted numerous instances of involved fathering: taking children to appointments, caring for them when sick, and taking time away from work during school closures. Yet somewhat surprisingly, they reported little difficulty in managing these responsibilities. Despite a context characterized by rigidly controlled work time, workers generally reported the workplace to be sufficiently flexible and accommodating to their non-work lives. When asked how flexible they found the environment, they gave answers like the following:

“It’s very flexible. I’ve never had issues in the whole time I’ve been here. They’ve always been very flexible with time off and, yeah, I’ve never been denied off. They’ve never given me a hard time for taking time off” – *Connor, factory floor worker*

“...I think that, for the most part, we’re one of the more accommodating companies that I’ve, you know, I’ve heard of” – *Reggie, supervisor*

“I’ve always had, you know, when a family problem came up, I was able to, you know, leave work and, you know, not worry about it, you know” – *Larry, factory floor worker*

Jack, a factory floor worker, describes the reaction of his supervisor when he needed time off for the eye appointments of himself and his child:

“I would say [my supervisor] is very flexible with - when it comes to kids. Every time I ask him if I could take a day off for, like, example, I think it was two weeks ago, my [kid] had an eye exam, and I had one, too, at the same time. I just asked him, hey, boss, can I take so-and-so this day off? It’s for my [kid]’s eye care and for myself as well. He’s like, yeah, sure. It’s no problem. He’ll just – he’ll think about it first because he has to adjust who’s going to be working where at this, at this machine and stuff, but he, he understands, for sure. He is very, for me he’s very flexible. I don’t know to other people, but for me he’s a very nice guy to do that for me.

Darren, a white-collar worker, attests to the flexibility of the workplace and links it to his work ethic:

“From my perspective, it’s flexible, because nobody ever questions my ethic, my work time.... I’ve had a few occasions where I needed to – one where I needed to take my [kid] to the hospital. I don’t want to take vacation time...., I’ve already got plans for it, so I’ll take four hours unpaid. And I wasn’t docked. Because I work well over 40 hours a week. But I mean, I had no problem, like I said, I was expecting I would take those four hours without pay”.

In general, workers at Manuco found the workplace to be sufficiently flexible to handle their non-work lives. When asked whether they had expectation or desire for greater flexibility, they generally said no (though the association was exploring the possibility of increasing the number of sick days while I was conducting interviews there and had asked for more sick days in the past). As long as Manuco helped workers meet a certain baseline level of need, which centered on emergencies and occasional appointments, they generally viewed the workplace as flexible.

Contingent flexibility: manager support for health emergencies, appointments, and occasional absences

Flexibility for Manuco workers did not rest upon formal policies or the routine adjustment of schedules. Work schedules were rigid, and there was little scope to combine work and caregiving, such as by working from home on a day a child was home sick. The nature of

production workers' jobs did not allow this, but workplace norms also worked against this even for white-collar workers whose jobs could accommodate it. Nor was it a function of broader provincial employment regulations providing sufficient protections to allow workers to miss work for caregiving reasons when necessary. Rather, flexibility was contingent and rested in specific decisions made by individual managers on a case-by-case basis.

One example of this related to workers' ability to extend vacation to facilitate the maintenance of important family ties in other countries. A large share of production workers had immigrated from the Philippines (or had parents who had immigrated). Given the expense of flights, some sought to extend their vacation time by taking unpaid leave or carrying over time accrued across years to allow for more extended family visits. Whether a long vacation was approved depended on the supervisor, and the timing. Workers were encouraged to time extended periods away with the company's annual summer shutdown. When I asked a worker how these long vacations were perceived, he said "For me, I've worked with them so long, it's just the norm."

More commonly, workers relied on managerial sensitivity to approve absences related to emergencies, health-related appointments and other occasional non-work related needs. Workers reported managers telling them to 'just go' in the event of emergencies and were generally accommodated for any health-related appointments.

Theo, a white-collar worker at Manuco, describes the immediate and unquestioning support of his manager when dealing with his child's health issues.

"[M]y [kid] had some medical issues [a while back], even back then, at the drop of a hat, if I had to leave, it was just like, go."

Damien, a manager, describes Manuco as 'pretty flexible' and relates flexibility to emergencies:

“I believe they're pretty flexible. On my standpoint they are and... if guys have to leave for whatever reason, they have an emergency, life goes on outside the work, so you know kids get sick, kids get in trouble at school, whatever reason you have to go, you go.”

Oliver, a tradesman, lists some recent emergencies and how the workplace views them:

“You have an issue like, you know, [one worker], last week, had a mechanical – had a bad tire. He needs to leave half a day to go get new tires. That's okay. You know, he travels to and from work on a highway. It's, you know, his loss of pay versus his lack of labour not being here. It's much better if he's safe on the highway. It's not an issue. You know, [another worker's] got, his child is born and they are at prenatal care or whatever. If you have a medical, go. [Someone else], last week, broke a tooth... You need to see the dentist, emergency, you can get in? Go. It doesn't matter what's happening here, we'll cover for it.”

The picture given is one of overall supportiveness: *It doesn't matter what's happening here, we'll cover for it.* Absences related to caregiving needs are recognized as an unavoidable part of life – managers recognize that just as someone might need to take time off to get a tire fixed, or go to the dentist, they may also need to leave work on occasion to manage care-demands. Note, however, that the examples proffered reflect one-time or relatively short term issues (in the case of prenatal appointments) that do not pose significant challenges to the culture of normative work time (discussed below). Mitchell illustrates this point by drawing on a narrative of reasonableness:

Natasha: How flexible or rigid is this environment in terms of enabling you to balance your family responsibilities?

Mitchell: It's not bad per se. They have understanding. They know that everybody has a life out of here. Within reason.

Natasha: What does that mean 'within reason'?

Mitchell: I can't, like... if I have appointments for my [kid], obviously, they're okay with that.

The word “obviously” in this exchange points to the taken-for-granted acceptance of appointments, their status as legitimate absences, their inclusion within a frame of reasonableness. It is acceptable to have a life outside of work *within reason*. The legitimacy of absences hinges on their occasional nature, the fact that they don’t disrupt the taken-for-granted organization of work time.

Compartmentalization and clear boundaries

Rather than see the rigid organization of work time and place-bound nature of their work as an impediment to family demands, some workers noted its positive aspects. The fact that work was rigidly organized and physically anchored to the workplace allowed workers a fair amount of freedom once they had clocked out. There were no expectations of taking work home, especially for blue-collar workers. But this culture of clear boundaries extended even to the white-collar workers.

Manny, a white collar worker, notes the boundedness of his work and attributes this to the relatively slow, low-pressure environment that is Manuco:

“There’s no crazy demands from Manuco. They don’t go, ‘well, this weekend you gotta’ go clock into a webinar and I need this report by Monday’. I can actually leave, do my duties during the day, go home and leave it here.”

Although some workers discussed the mental spillover of work into non-work life, the work itself could never be brought home, especially for blue collar workers. And most workers themselves were ‘segmenting’ – bounding the worlds of work and family and leaving work at work (Nippert-Eng 1996). This allowed workers to focus on family at home.

Restricting men's perceived family needs: gender and normative work-time

Despite the boundedness of work at Manuco in terms of both time and space, workers generally found the workplace to be flexible and accommodating to their family and non-work needs. Managers' willingness to let them leave work for emergencies or to tend to occasional family needs enabled them to take care of some of the "predictably unpredictable" demands of parenting, those events which are sure to happen at some point but which are unpredictable in their precise timing (Clawson and Gerstel 2014). In addition, the more limited work hours associated with work-share provided more free time, and the boundedness of their work sheltered them from extensive demands that might otherwise have limited their ability to provide care.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that workers' view of Manuco as sufficiently accommodating to family needs reflected a relatively limited recognition of what their fathering needs were and how they might be legitimately accommodated. In this respect, the organization of time and space and related normative culture of work time at Manuco intersected with their own masculine identity, an ongoing attribution of care responsibilities to women, and a concomitant reduction in their sense of need and entitlement to care-related absences.

The formal, bureaucratic control of time at Manuco was underpinned by a culture of normative work time that reinforced the rigid separation of work and family time and presupposed men's devotion to the former. Normative work time can be thought of as the moral or ideal approach to time at work that workers are expected to adopt by others, and themselves. In addition to formal rules around time – like being required to clock in and out at pre-designated times – a culture of normative work time includes the interpretations, beliefs, values and norms surrounding time, and its management, that ultimately reinforces what is considered a *normal* approach to time at work and therefore, the current status quo. To put it more simply, a culture of

normative work time creates the standard for what are acceptable time-related behaviors – behaviors which, in the current moment, reflect and reinforce the primacy of paid work above other routine activities. Moreover, a culture of normative work time has a feeling of inevitability about it. Workers experience this culture as ready-made, pre-existing them, *fixed* – in other words, unchangeable. A culture of normative work time implies a taken-for-grantedness and acceptance of work time as it is currently structured and a view that – even if questioned – it couldn't necessarily be altered. It forecloses alternate realities and possibilities, and makes them difficult even to imagine, let alone enact.

The normative aspect of work-time can be seen in workers' puzzled responses to my queries about more flexible scheduling practices or family policies. Conversations around parental and paternity leave illustrate these points. For both Terry and Damien, managers, the male make-up of the workforce is sufficient to understand people's use (or not) of leaves. I asked Terry whether workers were taking advantage of the 1-day paid paternity leave that was available and he answered thusly:

“Some people have. It's mostly guys here right? But I think somebody did leave.”

His response – “it's mostly guys here” – and the unstated presumption that the question is almost irrelevant shows how tightly and unquestioningly masculinity and male gender continue to be linked with paid work. Despite the fact that a paternity leave is a leave for men, the deeply held assumption that women provide care while men are divorced from it underpins Terry's comment and reinforces the notion that time-to-care isn't for men (even if, formally, it is).

Damien reveals how taken-for-granted gender is as an explanation for lack of leave use in the following exchange on parental leave:

Natasha: Do many workers [on the factory floor] take parental leave or [other] leaves of absence or things of that nature?

Damien: Not that I'm aware of, no. To be honest outside there [referencing the factory floor], it's all male ... It's all male ... There used to be the odd female over there, but right now it's all male.

The answer “it’s all male” is seen here to be a sufficient rationale for why workers don’t often take (parental) leaves. Further prompting is required:

Natasha: Okay, so what is the reason for them not using parental leave or taking leaves of absence then?

Damien: I really wouldn’t know; their wives could do it.

For both Terry and Damien, the gender of the workforce is offered as a sufficient and taken-for-granted explanation for understanding use of leaves (and lack thereof), illustrating that there is little expectation on fathers to leave work for care. Gender shapes people’s shared understanding of time – how it should be spent (for men: at work) and what constitutes a legitimate absence. For men, what is perceived as a legitimate absence may be more restrictive than for women, given women’s association with care work (Patton and Johns 2007). Normative work time is shaped by gender.

The exchanges with Terry and Damien also illustrate which scripts and narratives are available and taken up by people to understand and interpret time and work-time related behaviors. In a male-dominated manufacturing environment like Manuco, certain interpretations and understandings were more readily available than others. In these two cases, providing the rationales of “it’s mostly guys here” and “it’s all male” (not to mention “their wives could do it”) shows how automatically workers draw on gender to explain workers’ privileging of paid work while also reinforcing dominant organizational interests.

Masculinity and the negotiation of time to care: Not asking, just going

The normative culture of work-time at Manuco also intersected with masculinity in providing legitimation for fathers' responses to emergencies. As previously noted, workers generally described managers as accommodating to absences timed to care emergencies. Managers used their discretion to approve occasional absences. At the same time, workers were quick to assert that they had the final say over their time, and that in an emergency situation, they would leave regardless of managerial approval. Factory floor workers spoke assertively, and at times, somewhat defiantly, of 'not asking, just going'. This defiance reflects masculinity, which can be seen as giving workers a frame or script for asserting autonomy.

Felix illustrates:

“The thing is they, like, if something is wrong, something's wrong, they'll probably accommodate you. Because I'm - if something's wrong I'm leaving anyways. You know what I mean?”

Stefan echoes this sentiment:

Stefan: If I have to leave and somebody says, 'Oh, you can't leave,' no, they would never say that to me.

Natasha: Yeah, yeah.

Stefan: It's too bad, I'm gone anyway, [chuckles] so ...

In regards to his children, Albert says that it's not even a question – if he has to leave, he has to leave:

“It’s not even a question for me. It’s like okay I think I got to go pick [them] up. It’s like, I got to go. There’s usually – I never have issues with my boss cuz [they] understand. Also, I’m not really asking I’m just telling you I’m going.”

Another worker emphasizes ‘not asking, just going’ is especially linked with emergencies:

“[I]f I need to go, I need to go - no - no-one can like stop me, especially if it's [an] emergency, yeah.”

Masculinity is tightly linked with paid employment so that shirking this expectation – by privileging unpaid family work over paid work and thus transgressing foundational norms for men – constitutes a major gender deviation (not only for absences from paid work, but for absences from paid work *to provide care* – a feminine coded activity). In highly male-dominated workplaces especially, workers may face negative comments if seen as deviating from masculine codes. In this context, the way that workers framed their departures to attend to caregiving highlights a masculine defiance and assertiveness that allows workers to maintain a sense of dignity and control. This relates to William’s (2010) discussion of ‘caring in secret’. Working-class men in particular have been known to simply walk off the job when faced with caregiving demands in order to preserve their masculinity and defend against a ‘hidden injury of class’ related to their inability to single-handedly support their families (Sennett and Cobb 1973). Fathers may anticipate that they risk incurring harassment from others for signaling care (Berdahl and Moon 2013).

The key here is that worker narratives highlight *hypothetical* situations. In general (with occasional exceptions) workers did not defy managerial directives to stay at work. Indeed, as previously noted, workers generally characterized their managers as supportive of emergency

absences. In this context worker narratives of defiance are perhaps best read as narrative moves that highlight men's perceived needs to foreground their masculinity in the context of a discussion of caregiving. Moreover, by reserving the 'not asking, just going' narrative for emergency/urgent situations, to some extent they reinforced the structure/primacy of normative work time: in *only* very particular types of situations was it acceptable to assert yourself and challenge the control of the organization over your time – situations where the organization is likely to accommodate you anyway.

In sum, despite a relatively rigid work environment, and limited formal and informal flexibility, workers found Manuco to be flexible and accommodating of their caregiving needs. This was partly related to how workers defined flexibility and 'family-friendliness'. For one thing, workers appreciated the clear boundaries between their work and non-work lives. For another, as long as they were able to attend to emergencies, appointments, and occasional longer-term absences – absences which did not disrupt normative work time – workers had few complaints or expectations of greater accommodation. This is partially because workers held very narrow views around what men's caregiving needs actually were. Fathers were not seen as requiring extensive flexibility or control over their time to provide care because "their wives could do it". Thus, as long as they could attend to occasional caregiving needs, they felt their workplace was flexible (and if supervisors/managers denied their right to leave, workers felt they had recourse to 'not ask, just go').

Chapter 5: Manuco limits fathers' care

In the previous chapter I documented how Manuco fathers typically described their workplace as sufficiently flexible and accommodating to their caregiving needs despite the general absence of formal work-family policies and a rigid organization of work-time. This overall positive assessment was tied to managers' openness to excusing absences related to certain kinds of care work, but also reflected a taken-for-granted gendered notion of what fathers' care needs were in the first place that tended to limit the scope of perceived needs to those that could be fairly easily accommodated without serious disruption to the existing organization of work.

In this chapter I consider instances where fathering was not so easily accommodated at Manuco, delving further into workplace conditions that circumscribed fathers' caregiving. I document how managers and supervisors directly and indirectly restricted the flexibility of workers. They did this by denying care-related absences or schedule changes and by making flexibility contingent on performance and other factors.

The limits of flexibility

While Manuco managers were generally described as being accommodating of occasional care needs, they were also highly sensitive to when workers were perceived as more regularly deviating from work schedules. Some of the chief concerns of Terry, a manager, were punctuality and attendance, and these were monitored – both formally and informally – closely. For instance, he notes when the white collar staff come in late or leave early. He begins by highlighting Manuco's flexibility, how relaxed they are around time, and how it comes down to 'give and take':

Natasha: Are there any weaknesses that you can see [in terms of flexibility]?

Terry: No, I think we're pretty flexible, I think we're pretty... I mean... [O]ne of the things...that's been really relaxed is attendance out in the office. Especially the salary people, if somebody goes to an appointment we don't need to dock pay here. Sometimes I think some people in the office take advantage of that so... you know going to the dentist well he had a dentist appointment at one then they're gone for the day it's like okay well a cleaning takes about 45 minutes so stuff like that or some people book the appointment at 2 then they're gone so we would have a discussion about that, like I know you have an appointment but try to book it at the end of the day, or as close to the end of the day or beginning of the day [so you don't miss the entire day] or book it at 5:30 or something. But sometimes you can't help it, you know, but we've been really relaxed in the office on attendance cause we don't deduct pay so sometime people tend to take a little advantage of that. The guys in the shop in the back get three sick days, as part of the calendar. So we kind of mirror that here in the office, but we don't keep track of appointments. I just basically say well people just make up your time. It's an honour system. It's a give and take situation, I'm not going to do the report, I'm not going to monitor, it's an honour system. You tell me you're going to make up the time, I expect you to make up the time, I'm not going to sit there and be like 'hey you said you were gonna' skip lunch but you're actually... You know'.

Natasha: Everyone clocks in and out? But it doesn't sound like people look at those records?

Terry: Oh we do... We look at attendance and stuff right. It's more for the hourly people because that's how they get paid, based on their hours. So, we look attendance-wise, people being late all the time. And it's...a small office. I already noticed who came in late today.... You're late, whatever and you make up time, that's fine, that's how it should be but if you are constantly late then... It's really... [Another manager] will bring it up, we'll have a discussion with them you know attendance-wise.

Terry describes Manuco's flexibility – especially in terms of being able to make up missed time – but says unequivocally that they monitor attendance and tardiness, and that even without more formal records, he notices who comes in late, especially in the white-collar part of the office.

Being punctual and reliable are very important at Manuco.

Sanctions for violations of time norms

Workers who were perceived as violating time norms reveal the limits of flexibility at Manuco.

Archie, a shop floor worker, recounts being laid-off after declining to change his work schedule from days to evenings, which would have affected his time with his family:

Archie: “A little while ago we had layoffs, and it was – [they]... said if you want to stay you've got to go on evenings. I'm not going to know my family, then. You know what I mean? So I can't do that...

Natasha: So did you have to go on evenings? When they -

Archie: No, I let them lay me off.

Archie ultimately returned to his job later, but the realities of shift work are stark. The rigidly controlled time of the manufacturing environment echoes the ‘one sick child away from being fired’ ethos of other highly inflexible work environments experienced by hourly, non-professional workers (Williams 2010).

Workers could also be reprimanded for missing work. Some reported receiving verbal flak, while others reported formal verbal and written warnings. Marvin received some verbal flak for failure to give sufficient notice in requesting a day off, though ultimately he was granted the day off. Others reported being formally ‘written up’ for tardiness or too much missed work, receiving warnings for too many absences, and occasionally denied training opportunities because of what were considered excessive absences. Rarely, workers reported being assigned to less desirable jobs following absences.

One employee, Jared, described the resistance he could face for needing to leave suddenly to pick up a sick kid from school.

Natasha: So if the school calls you, your kid is sick, then what do you do?

Jared: I have to go pick them up

Natasha: Right, and so you tell [management]?

Jared: Yeah I tell them that. Sometimes [they] say no...[A]nd after that I have to go. I go 'if you don't let' - 'if you have something, write me up, I'm leaving'.

Natasha: Has that happened to you? Where you've been written up?

Jared: No... but [they] just, I guess [they] just try to give you a hard time.

Natasha: Have you ever not gone because of that?

Jared: No, family comes first.

Natasha: Yeah, so you just leave anyway

Jared: Yeah.

Patterned absences and 'abusing' the system

Workers who violated rules to attend to care-needs by coming to work late, leaving early, or refusing particular shifts could be sanctioned. Workers who were seen as 'taking advantage' of workplace rules and norms were also subject to suspicion. The language of abuse came up often in this context, signaling illegitimacy and a violation of rules.

Natasha: Do you think that the organization is sufficiently helpful in helping workers accommodate their family responsibilities?

Harry: I would...I think so but there are people I think have problems with saying their kids are sick and they get a little bit of flak for leaving but I really

haven't had to leave as much as some other people but - I've had to leave a couple of times but you know, it was fine.

Natasha: Okay, so the people getting flak, like what - is it because they leave more?

Harry: I think so, like they maybe abuse the system more.

Lloyd, a shop floor worker, put a number to what constitutes 'abuse'. I asked him how you know when someone is 'abusing' the system or taking advantage of the workplace in terms of absences. He responded this way:

Natasha: What's the cut-off? Like, what's the line between abusing it and not abusing it?

Lloyd: How many times do you mean?

Natasha: Yeah. Like, how do people know, how do you know if you're abusing it or not?

Lloyd: Well, if it's happening like, once a week, I would say that would be abuse.

Natasha: That's too much?

Lloyd: And, that's too much or, whatever, you know, how often, you know, kids, some kids get sick more than others, but, how often, you know. They don't get sick that, well my kid [doesn't] either. But, some kids do get sick more.

Natasha: Mm-hmm. But, it sort of depends on the person, I guess, on how likely their kid is to get sick.

Lloyd: Exactly, yeah, you know, but, I think, of a person even more than once, you know, I would say more than say three times a month, I would say that's...

Natasha: But, it's not formally stated anywhere?

Lloyd: No, it's not stated, you know.

Lloyd acknowledges that some kids get sick more than others, but despite that, being absent once per week or three times per month could be seen as abuse. This language is deliberate and serves to mark out what kinds of absences are legitimate/illegitimate, which absences should be easily accepted by the workplace and which should not.

Managerial discretion, worker reputation, and inconsistent treatment

Workers also reported that work-family accommodations were linked to their relationships with supervisors and managers. While managers were generally portrayed as responsive to occasional care demands, not all requests were granted.

Dylan recounts an instance when his manager resisted approving time off to care for his child when the latter had a day off from school. Dylan was only made aware of the time off a couple of days in advance. He asked his manager to take the day off as soon as he found out but according to Dylan, his manager declined the request.

In the end, after the manager realized Dylan wasn't the only worker in this predicament, he approved the request, but his initial reaction as recounted by Dylan is revealing. Only when other workers were impacted did the manager accede.

Flexibility was also seen to be linked to workers' reputations. A conversation with Edgar reveals this dynamic:

Natasha: So how flexible is the environment?

Edgar: Which way?

Natasha: If parents need to take off for a child emergency or if you have a doctor's appointment or something like that, how easy is it to do that? How flexible is it?

Edgar: You know what,... [It] depends on the reputation the worker has.

Natasha: It depends on the reputation of the worker?

Edgar: Yeah, because if you have a good reputation and you're a good worker, sometimes those flexibilities are a little ...

Natasha: Bit more?

Edgar: Yeah....But if you have a bad reputation, you miss so many days, come in late and stuff like that, sometimes management gets a little stressed with your position and sometimes you really need it at that moment and they don't believe you.

Natasha: So has that happened to you?

Edgar: No.

Natasha: Has that happened to people you know?

Edgar: Yeah.

Natasha: What exactly happened?

Edgar: Because some guys, they were missing a lot of days, phoning in sick a lot.

Natasha: Is it because they're sick?

Edgar: Not really, I don't know. Because they say they're not sick, but kids, when you have small kids....

Natasha: Okay. So there's people who take a lot of sick days, they call in a lot. So what happens if they ask to leave for something? The management doesn't believe them or –

Edgar: Sometimes they don't believe them. In their shoes probably I would be the same way, because the person is abusing the system...

When flexibility is a function of managerial and supervisory discretion -- rather than formal policy -- it becomes easier for managers to make decisions improvisationally. And easy for gendered biases about caregiving responsibilities to potentially enter the decision-making process.

For instance, Xander explained how management can make it more challenging for workers to leave because they do not necessarily believe dads when they claim sick kids.

Natasha: Do the dads here who have young kids, do they seem like they have enough flexibility?

Xander: I hear some guys, they complain about the -- They say the kids are sick and sometimes management can think "Oh, they're making an excuse for the kids to get away with free time."

Natasha: Okay, so you hear guys complaining about having sick kids and not being able to leave?

Xander: No, not, [not] able to leave. Making it hard for them all the time when they ask for time.

Natasha: Management makes it hard for them.

Xander: Yeah.

Natasha: Okay. So you hear guys complaining about that.

Xander: Yeah, I hear some guys complaining.

Natasha: They think that they're just using it to ...

Xander: An excuse.

Natasha: Yeah, as an excuse to go home.

Brendan echoed this idea of sick-child-as-excuse and illustrates how management can come to think of workers' absence requests related to sick kids.

Natasha: So when people take time off work to take care of sick kids or they leave early or they come in late or all of those things, how is that perceived here?

Brendan: I don't know. I think it depends on the person, because some people here use it as an excuse ... You know 'oh I got to go my kid's sick'. Like how many times does your kid get sick? This is the fourth time this year and we're only into March. You know. So do they use kids as an excuse for something else? Just to get out of here, you know which I tell people ... Like when people tell me, I'm like 'well if you got to go you got to go, you don't tell me why, it's none of my business why. You know you're not getting paid for being here ... If you're not here you're not getting paid, it's none of my business, if you got to go you go.'

Flexibility and accommodation were also sometimes contingent on the more general performance of employees. Max, a shop floor worker, makes this point:

"They're pretty flexible, like how I was saying,... . Yeah you can make something work and if they're getting the production out of you they will agree to it 90% of the time I believe".

Kevin, a white-collar worker, recounts a time when he was experiencing family-related stressors. Kevin's story further illuminates how flexibility was exchanged for performance. I had asked him to tell me how flexible or rigid he finds the workplace to be. He started by saying "it's pretty flexible" and then explained that while his family member was ill, he was able to attend to them: "[My manager] let me...come in pretty late". Anytime he would have to leave, Kevin says, "[there] was never really an issue"

I asked Kevin if his boss had ever said anything to him about coming in late or leaving early, and he responded:

“Uh, not really. Just as long as I – if it was reasonable to make up my time. Which I usually do.... [A]s long as what I needed to get done, got done.... So I did work from home, evenings, whatever.

This exchange of time was a common theme for white-collar workers, at both Manuco and Comco, and suggests that flexibility is contingent on meeting a certain level of performance. There appears to be less emphasis on adjusting workloads given employees’ enormous (and often, fleeting) non-work responsibilities, lowering expectations, or redistributing the work to others. The assumption is that the flexibility is there, as long as the performance stays the same.

Differences (and similarities) by occupation

Because of the nature of salary work at Manuco – that much of it takes place on a computer – salaried white-collar workers like Kevin, quoted above, had more flexibility than the shop floor workers. The shifts of shop floor workers – meant to accommodate continuously running machines – were seen as foreclosing greater flexibility by default:

“I’m okay with people flexing time, just [on the] [floor] we can’t, cause it’s on – we’re on three shifts, right?” – *Terry, manager*

Machine operators were seen to be lower on the hierarchy compared to other production workers. According to some workers, they commanded less respect. One worker said:

“[T]here is a difference between how... the operators and... tradesmen [are treated]. You know, there is a...lack of disrespect [sic] for operators at times.”

This lower status potentially contributed to less control over time, scheduling, and flexibility.

Members of visible minorities, including Filipino workers, held many of these lower-status positions, while many of the skilled trades positions were held by white workers. This racialized hierarchy reflects the racialization of the Canadian labour market more generally, with non-white workers disproportionately holding lower quality jobs (Block and Galabuzi 2011; Noack and Vosko 2011). Because of the types of jobs they held, and their racialized status, visible minority workers may have had more difficulty than white workers requesting flexibility, as noted by Jacob:

Natasha: Is there a sense if you take time off or needing to leave early, are people worried about [requesting that time]?

Jacob: Yeah, they're... there's some anxiety [about] request[ing] that time....especially with the minority groups of people.

Natasha: They might feel less comfortable asking

Jacob: Yeah.

Jacob emphasizes that especially with the 'minority' groups of people, meaning visible minority workers, many of whom occupied lower status positions on the shop floor, they may feel more discomfort around making a flexibility request in the first place. This speaks to the compounding of disadvantage that can occur for racialized blue-collar workers and how this might relate to job flexibility.

Flynn linked the irreplaceability of some workers to greater flexibility. When asked how flexible he perceived the environment to be, he said:

Flynn: It can be flexible. You know, there's guys that have to, say, come in at seven instead of 7:30 and so they need to - I guess they need to leave at 3:30, so they will accommodate you... It can be flexible depending on what you need, and of course what they need. And who you are.

Natasha: What do you mean?

Flynn: Yeah, like if you're an important, you know - so there's only a certain amount of guys that can do a certain [job]. So if I - if I - if I as the company or management feel that you're needed, you're an integral part of the process, well I might have more leeway and like I might have more flexibility to help you, like as manager, in helping you, okay, well you need to - you need to leave at three? Okay, so, you start at 6:30 now. You know. But if you're a guy that isn't as favourable or maybe you're seen as replaceable, you're not going to get that.

To some extent, cross-training facilitated flexibility for hourly workers, including the machine operators, who might be trained on 4-5 machines. Even for specialized workers there were back-ups. But in general, the time of hourly workers was seen as more rigid and less flexible than salaried white collar employees. I asked a manager if flexible schedules were available for workers with family responsibilities. He responded:

“Um, not for all positions. So as an example... if you work, say in the warehouse, or you work on the [factory floor]..., and you got hours that are say, 9-5, there wouldn't be as much flexibility in terms of, 'ok I'm staying home and picking which boxes to ship today', there wouldn't be as much flexibility there. But if you were, let's say, somebody who might be working on the computer, we'll allow that to an extent....”

This manager implies that because of the nature of the work – and workers' boundedness to physical materials – flexibility is limited. And thus, similar to other blue-collar environments, “few family-friendly policies have reached the factory floors” (Perry-Jenkins 2005: 461).

At the same time, flexibility was not extensive for white-collar office workers. One white-collar worker Glen, expressed interest in taking a leave and suspected that would not be allowed at

Manuco:

Glen: I don't know how happy [management] would be if I walked in and said I want [several] months off. I would say this environment is very [pause] very reasonable. You know, like, somebody puts in a lot of hours and they

need an hour off. There's no question.... There's no bridge to jump...Somebody knows they don't put in any extra time and they expect to take personal time off, Right. I mean I think it's very reasonable, and it seems honest, fair and appropriate.

Natasha: So if you wanted to go on leave, you don't think you'd be able to?

Glen: I've heard comments that would lead me to believe that I probably wouldn't be able to do that.

Ultimately, while workers attested to the flexibility of their workplace (previous chapter), in practice there were limits on workers' ability to provide care. Punctuality and attendance were highly important to Manuco and these were monitored both formally and informally. Workers experienced sanctions for violating normative work time. A narrative of 'abuse' and 'taking advantage' came up around absences seen as patterned or repeated, reinforcing the narrow view of what constituted 'acceptable' absences (i.e. occasional, emergency). Further, flexibility was conditional on a worker's reputation, their relationship with their boss/supervisor, and a worker's occupation (not only in terms of practical features of the work, but the status of the worker), though to some extent, all workers experienced a somewhat limited conception of flexibility.

Chapter 6: Constructing work-family norms at Manuco: The role of worker agency

So far, I have discussed ways that workers negotiated caregiving responsibilities in relation to managerial actions that enabled or constrained fathering, and how this reflects a normative conception of work-time that best accommodated occasional and, especially, emergency caregiving responsibilities for fathers.

Yet the upholding of normative work time wasn't simply the task of managers. In environments with collective bargaining, like Manuco, formal provisions around work-time and other policy elements relevant to caregiving responsibilities can be negotiated, and workers together determine what to prioritize in their negotiations with management. Co-workers can also play an important informal role in creating workplace contexts that are more or less amenable to family responsibilities. For example, their willingness to cover for workers who can't come in to work by swapping shifts, as seen amongst some Emergency Medical Technicians, can create flexibility in schedules that otherwise would not exist (Shows and Gerstel 2009). On the flip-side, workers can make organizations less amenable to fathers' family responsibilities by contributing to a cultural context that valorizes men's roles as breadwinners over caregivers, undermining their claims to time to care.

In this chapter, I zero in on the ways that workers, collectively, shaped work-family practices and norms at Manuco. For the most part, this occurred via practices that did not foreground caregiving per se, but that instead contributed to the marginalization and invisibility of men's caregiving through omission and incongruity. In particular, I highlight the role of

joking and teasing on the shop-floor as contributing to a normative work-time regime with limited space for caregiving.

Work-family policies in the hierarchy of worker needs

Workers' association representatives gave little indication that work-family issues were a priority. When I asked about whether specific work-family policies, such as the 1-day paid paternity leave were, or ever had been, on the negotiating agenda, association representatives said no. More broadly, when I asked workers how 'family-friendly' they found the environment, they sometimes responded by referencing the annual company Christmas party, to which families were invited. This interpretation reflects the non-salience and foreignness of that term. More often than not, when asked whether 'work-family balance' was on the radar here, employees would respond similarly to Max:

“No I don't think so; it's not really talked about. For me a priority is safety because you want to go home at the end of the night” – *Max, shop floor worker*

It is unsurprising that health and safety were the biggest concerns for workers. Work on the factory floor could lead to injury, illness, and even death. But sanctioned time away from work *was* important to workers. The worker's association was in the process of negotiating for more sick days. In practice, fathers used sick days not only when they were ill, but to care for sick children. Worker representatives were thus indirectly negotiating for provisions that were clearly relevant to how fathers at Manuco managed their care responsibilities. Such provisions were not, however, framed in terms of helping workers with family responsibilities per se, nor would they create scope for a major expansion of how caregiving needs were defined.

The almost complete lack of concern and/or discourse around work-family issues specifically was startling, almost as though Manuco had sealed itself in a bubble, protected from the shifting culture around it. Though others have also found a similar de-prioritization of family-friendly provisions amongst male, blue-collar union members and a concomitant emphasis on health and safety (Ravenswood and Markey 2011). At Manuco, the non-salience of flexibility and work-family issues/narratives points to the culture of normative work time and its taken for grantedness. Normative work time is seen as fixed, especially for men.

Shopfloor culture: joking and teasing marginalize caregiving

Past scholarship has shown that fathers who publicly demonstrate caregiving responsibilities can be subject to mistreatment from coworkers for perceived violations of masculinity (Berdahl and Moon 2013). I heard some examples of care-related teasing at Manuco, though in general, workers were broadly supportive of fathers' need to be responsible for children, especially in relation to emergencies. Even workers without children earnestly repeated the phrase 'family first' (or some variation of this), reflecting their respect towards parents and the widely shared view that family took priority over work.

More subtly, however, teasing, joking, and negative comments around leaving early, coming in late, and not coming to work in general indirectly reinforced normative conceptions of work-time that relegated caregiving to the margins. In this final section on Manuco, I document some examples of the kind of teasing that occurred in the context of care. These interactions acted as accountability mechanisms for fathers in terms of their gendered performances as ideal workers which ultimately helped reinforce the gendered nature of the organization (Acker 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Teasing/joking around missed time was widespread with workers frequently dismissing it as ‘just the way things are done around here’. Consistent with what other students of shop floor culture have described, humour performed multiple functions as I will discuss, but ultimately can be seen as reinforcing the culture of normative work time.

Here are some examples of the types of comments workers reported hearing or making themselves:

[Around individuals using up all of their sick days] “Oh, slacker didn't show up again Friday or Monday” – *Manuco shop floor worker*

[Around worker(s) who are frequently absent] “Just like, you know, they post signs: ‘this factory's worked 300 days without an accident’. You know, ‘this fellow – oh 13 days in a row without an absence’, right, poster kind of thing, stuff like that.” – *Manuco shop floor worker*

[Around leaving early due to illness] “They will say, oh, you are going out to go watch the soccer game, which you kind of -- stuff like that, so.” – *Manuco shop floor worker*

[Around leaving early] “They just make jokes like that: 'part-timer!' ‘Oh it's you, you're leaving again, you going somewhere?’” – *Manuco shop floor worker*

[Around employees who are absent] “Oh, they generally get a hard time. You get a hard time for everything here. If you miss a day, they greet you with, ‘I didn't know there was a new employee today’. Everybody gets a hard time here.” – *Manuco shop floor worker*

[Around frequent absences] “Every day we get in the locker room I announce C.J.'s attendance. It's been 22 days since C.J. missed time.” – *Manuco shop floor worker*

[Around absences] “Because you hear guys comment, like I don't know if they're just joking or if they're really upset – ‘oh he's not here again today, shocking.’” – *Manuco supervisor*

While workers often dismissed these comments as not deliberately hurtful and would often only bring them up later in our conversations after some prompting, jokes can “mean more than what

is directly said or done” (Fine and De Soucey 2005: 3). For example, Ben, a shop floor worker, initially dismisses any teasing as ‘just for fun’ but suggests it might bother others, even if not himself:

- Natasha: So how is that perceived, like when you have to miss time, or how do other people view that - like your co-workers?
- Ben: Yeah, they're really like (laughs) - well how come you're not here again today - we're teasing each other....
- Natasha: They're teasing, yeah. And what's the tone of that teasing?
- Ben: It's like just for fun.
- Natasha: It's just kind of light? For fun?
- Ben: Yeah.
- Natasha: Okay. Do you ever feel - does it ever bother you?
- Ben: No.
- Natasha: No, okay. Do you think it ever bothers other people?
- Ben: Maybe - maybe yeah?

Ben concedes at the end that maybe the joking bothers others. His denial that it bothers him could stem from a masculine bravado and survival pressures – especially pronounced in shop floor contexts – tied to the ability to “give and take a joke, to laugh at oneself and expect others to respond likewise to cutting remarks” (Collinson 1988: 187).

But these comments also play a social censure function. Veiling comments in humour and lightheartedness protects the jokester/commentator from criticism and also reinforces the

legitimacy of the jokester and their joke, especially if they're a colleague rather than a supervisor/manager. To censure another colleague's work practices is not legitimate when both occupy the same level of the hierarchy – that's the role of managers, who are seen to have the moral and institutional authority to do so. Therefore coworkers' comments about missed time, in effect, need to be packaged as jokes in order to be heard as legitimate and not rejected outright. And yet, the repeated jokes/comments of similarly-situated colleagues work effectively to reinforce normative understandings of worktime. Indeed, veiling a critique or censure as 'just a joke' makes it that much more effective in this respect. As Fine and De Soucey (2005) explain:

“Effective social units attempt to enforce social control in ways that do not appear oppressive; the best control is that which individuals perceive as beneficial in its own terms. A strong joking culture constitutes one of the more effective techniques of social control (Holdaway 1985; Garrett 1961). Individuals may be tested by joking, insuring that they know the normative expectations of the group (White 1975; Haas 1972), or the joking may be responsive to a perceived violation of those expectations. This response can either be mild and evanescent or consequential, as when a deviant receives a teasing 'reputation' for a major or repeated infraction. That this communication occurs within a 'play frame' (Bateson 1972; Fry 1963) means that a confrontation is unlikely. The control is imposed without seeming to be imposed —although at times it can be countered by joking (Tannen 1984: 134)” (11)

Thus, others have written about how workers' sub-cultures actually benefit the organization (e.g. Burawoy 1979). Here, too, joking around missed time reinforces organizational interests – even if that's not the intent – and the culture of normative worktime.

Humour as relief, superiority, incongruity

But why does joking/teasing around absences arise in the first place? The answer, surely, is more complicated than 'to blindly serve the organization's interests'. Indeed, why would workers necessarily care about the absences of others? And why are these jokes potentially funny?

Cooper (2008) describes three classical theories explaining the situations that arouse humor. The first is relief theory, stemming from Freud, which posits that humor can be a defense against an unpleasant or intolerable reality and/or a release from private impulses. The second, superiority theory, positions humor in the feeling (and its reinforcement) of superiority one has over others or over a past self. The third, incongruity theory, situates humor in the incongruity or gap between people's expectations and what actually occurs and/or when a person views a situation with two incompatible frames of reference. All three views can shed light on absence-related joking/teasing at Manuco.

Several researchers have described humour-as-relief in the context of the shop floor. Collinson, for example, argues that the "recurrent research finding of employee 'lightheartedness' demonstrates either that workers are generally satisfied with their fragmented tasks in the labour process or that they are able to 'let off steam' and so dissipate their frustration with deskilled and routinized jobs" (1988: 181-182). Joking and teasing become ways of dealing with monotony and boredom.

Jake describes this dynamic and how frequently it occurs:

Jake: If you take time off, if you take a lot of time off and then you take time off, then you are getting riffed on. You miss a day randomly, you're getting it. If you have some kind of, you know, medical appointment or something like that, you won't hear about anything, because it's not, you know -- there is, I guess, some -- how do you say that? There is, kind of, rules of engagement for that sort of thing, right? There is out of bounds and then there is good, hard ribbing, and then there is 'I'm going to make a comment because you gave me one', so, you know.

Natasha: Right.

Jake: Because it's all boy stuff, right?

Natasha: What do you mean by that?

Jake: Basically with that [worker] that is going to come capture my attention for three seconds 40 times a day, right? He's just, it's just boy stuff. He's bored.... I'm going to go by and he's going to be a pain in the ass, I'll [respond], you know. It goes on and on. All day long it's fun and games.

Natasha: Yeah.

Jake: Honestly, it goes on all day long.

Jokes and comments about missed time were fundamental to the culture and not merely one-offs because they provided workers with entertainment and amusement in an otherwise understimulating environment.

Jake's interpretation that "all day long it's fun and games" coincides with Bourdieu's (1984) views of teasing in working-class contexts as indicative of familiarity and camaraderie:

"The joke, in other words, is the art of making fun without raising anger, by means of ritual mockery or insults which are neutralized by their very excess and which, presupposing a great familiarity, both in the knowledge they use and the freedom with which they use it, are in fact tokens of attention of affection, ways of building up while seeming to run down, of accepting while seeming to condemn—although they may also be used to test out those who show signs of stand-offishness" (183)

However, others (E.g. Berdahl et al 2018; Collinson 1988) have discussed the potentially toxic effects these types of exchanges can have. There could also be power imbalances in these types of exchanges between different groups of workers.

Humour may also be used to establish the superiority of one worker over another and to mark boundaries. By calling out a worker who leaves or is absent, the joker establishes themselves as the one 'in the right', the one not shirking responsibilities, the one who is *at work*, while once again censuring the one who isn't. This elevates the status of the joker, lowers the

status of the target, and reinforces standard worktime norms – all under a guise of lightness or humor. This type of humour relies on a general consensus about what constitutes ‘moral’ versus ‘deviant’ behavior. In a workplace, moral behavior is showing up, being on time and doing your work. Deviant behavior is shirking any of these. Although the culture at Manuco legitimated absences for emergency caregiving, both workers and managers could be skeptical about repeated claims to need to leave work to care for sick children.

The third theory discussed by Cooper – incongruity theory – is perhaps most interesting as a way of viewing the joking around missed time because it makes salient which frames of reference are taken-for-granted in an organizational context and thus which sets of meanings are operating and framing experience. Missed time is only an object of humour to the extent it conflicts with people’s deepest expectations around what it means to be a man and to work in paid employment. It is so totally obvious and accepted – like gravity – that workers are at work during designated worktime that absences draw attention and reactions.

This is apparent in the ‘part-timer!’ joke noted at the beginning. Calling someone a part-timer as a joke – and expecting it to be funny – only makes sense in a male-dominated manufacturing environment where full-time employment is normative and hegemonic. Part-time work is essentially conceptualized as *absurd* here. If it were said in a female-dominated environment – as a joke – it would likely fall flat because – as a joke – it makes no sense. It would simply be taken as an observation. The humour relies on the disconnect between the notion that a man, in a manufacturing environment, would ever work part-time. As others have noted, for men “part-time work [is] unthinkable” (Kugelberg 2006: 160)

Mason notes the comedy in incongruity – and also in relation to inconsistent treatment – when he discusses how absences are perceived:

Natasha: How is it perceived when people have to take time off, sick time, etc?

Mason: Depends on the situation.... It's case by case... That's what comedic about the whole thing. You have a set of rules like in every organization, that's supposed to be a general statement for the whole facility. ...But there's grey areas.....Between the relationship between employees, management. Relationships vary.

In this case, the comedy lies in the incongruity between the standard rules organizations have and which are supposed to guide behaviour and the inconsistent ways in which employees are sometimes treated. Inconsistent treatment – in a bureaucratic context that purports to be systematic, rational, and fair – is seen as incongruent and becomes the source of humour.

Joking and the legitimacy of absences

Not all absences were seen as appropriate to make light of. The legitimacy of the absence determined whether it was joke or comment material.

Jake who earlier mentioned that medical appointments are off-limits, describes it thusly:

Natasha: So how do people distinguish between, like the situations about which you can say something and the situations about which you can't?

Jake: I guess that's etiquette and common knowledge, right? If you don't know... There is times where someone's missed legitimately and I've said something inappropriately. And then I've got to go and face the music afterwards and apologize.

Natasha: Like apologize? Yeah. Yeah.

Jake: It happens. But generally, you don't get it too bad on your way out, even though people are seeing you leaving.

Natasha: Yeah. Yeah.

Jake: Every[one] is going to say something for you leaving early. It will come, right?

Natasha: Right, right.

Jake: They don't know why I'm leaving, but you're getting a little bit, you know.

Natasha: So everyone ...

Jake: If it turned out [someone] died on the way back, everyone is going to apologize.

On the other hand, caregiving absences were legitimate targets for joking. For instance, workers who took time off to provide care received comments. These comments centered on gender and a view of time off as vacation. I asked one dad, Connor, what kinds of comments he had received:

Natasha: What did they say?

Connor: [Things] like 'Are you going to be the woman at home...?'

Natasha: How did you respond to that?

Connor: I got thick skin, didn't bother me a bit.

Natasha: It didn't bother you at all?

Connor: No, not at all.

Natasha: Okay. Was that fairly common then or like how many of those kinds of comments did you get?

Connor: Like from how many different people do you mean?

Natasha: Yeah.

Connor: Probably like three or four.

Natasha: Three or four people said things. What other kinds of things did they say?

Connor: It was mostly like “Oh, you get to enjoy [time] off work and you get to be lazy at home.”

Similarly, Norman, a shop floor worker, talked about the care-related teasing men might be expected to receive:

Natasha: Do you think there's a stigma against men participating in care nowadays?

Norman: Yeah, I would say so.

Natasha: Like in what sense?

Norman: Well, if a guy takes maternity [sic] leave, you know, he's going to get teased a little bit.

Natasha: Here?

Norman: Yeah.

Natasha: Can you tell me about that?

Norman: What do you want to know? He's going to get teased.

Norman goes on to say that any teasing that would occur is justified, inevitable, and underpinned by natural gender differences between men and women. For Norman himself, “it just makes sense that [mothers] should be home with babies for the first year”. Men who take time to care for babies are deviating from their expected gender performance and should expect to be teased. And indeed, in the very rare instances that workers took parental leave, they reported no flak from their supervisors, but received some teasing comments from people they worked with.

Another worker similarly notes the mild teasing other workers might receive for child-care related absences. He implies other workers wouldn't believe the absence was actually for child care:

Natasha: Okay. What about when, like have you noticed other people with kids or family responsibilities taking time off, or leaving early, or coming in late, or anything like that?

Henry: Oh, yeah. I notice that.

Natasha: Okay. And what is that about? Like tell me about that.

Henry: Oh, I get it.... They have [young] kids...but... [I]f there is an emergency at school or they're sick, I would expect them....

Natasha: Mm-hmm. Is there, like do they get any flak from anyone? Or do people say anything about it ever?

Henry: They probably get bugged a bit about it, but nothing really.

Natasha: What kind of bugging? Like what do people say?

Henry: Oh, they will say, oh, you are going out to go watch the soccer game, which you kind of -- stuff like that, so.

Sometimes workers do not realize the reason for leaving (e.g. child care), but simply default to teasing around absences, which is culturally normative:

Natasha: How do you think people's care responsibilities are perceived at work? So if you have a family and you have to leave work to care of them or whatever or you're missing more time from work because you have the family stuff going on, how is that generally seen in the workplace?

Taras: Maybe people don't realize why you're leaving, [but] they'll razz you a little bit..., "Oh he came to work today" or, "Oh you're leaving early, oh lucky you", but they really don't know the story behind the story that you're leaving, so people jump to conclusions that way and I just don't

like to do that because you don't know what the underlying story is and nowadays with a lot of the stories that people have to do deal with are not great stories, so I wouldn't want to jump to that conclusion.

Yet it is likely that workers do know the reason for absences, at least some of the time, and deem caregiving a legitimate target for teasing. Recall Edgar, discussed above, who explained the importance of reputation and flexibility. He said that management may not believe the worker who needs to leave often for sick children (who do in fact tend to get sick a lot). It is feasible and likely that as absences become repeated – even in the case of sick children – they take on an air of illegitimacy, and thus become the legitimate targets of teasing amongst workers.

In sum, fathers' caregiving was rendered marginal in several ways by coworkers. It was not seen as an especially important or relevant issue in the lives of workers, dwarfed by the ever-present concerns around health and safety. For instance, there had been no discussion around increasing the 1-day paternity leave and work-family issues were not especially salient to workers. Yet, occasional teasing centered on care-related absences was present, and perhaps more importantly, there was widespread joking and teasing around absences in general, reinforcing a culture of normative work time. This two pronged view – that caregiving wasn't especially relevant and absences were fair game in the joking culture – pushed fathers' care to the margins in and around normative work time, and ultimately reinforced the gendered nature of the organization (Acker 1990).

Chapter 7: Comco's facilitation of fathers' care

Workplace Context

Comco was a white-collar organization, and Manuco's opposite in some ways. Situated downtown, its headquarters (where I did most of my interviews) occupied a large, tall, gleaming building. The workers who filtered in and out throughout the day looked white-collar and professional. The building was relatively new and its interior felt modern and airy. Each floor was dedicated to a different department. I spent much of my time in Human Resources and other departments known for their flexibility. There was an atmosphere of purposefulness as people clipped in and out of the building, and even of excitement, which may have had to do with Comco's location amid the bustle of downtown and the continuous coming and going of people throughout the day. In total, there were around 1,000 people who worked there. There was a relatively even split of men and women. Similarly, there was higher than average female representation in the top ranks.

On the surface, Comco could not be more different from Manuco. Where work-family intersections were relegated to the margins at Manuco, largely absent from formal policy and minimized by normative work-time, Comco promoted a vision of its organization as dedicated to helping its workers succeed at work *and* at home. This was reflected in the wide array of family policies available and a work culture that respected workers' family responsibilities. Contra Manuco's bureaucratic, segmenting tendencies, Comco had adopted a discretionary approach to employees' work-non-work boundaries, leaving employees' boundary work up to them (Nippert-Eng 1996). In addition to all the statutory policies Manuco had, Comco also offered multiple formal policies around scheduling modifications (flextime, compressed work weeks, biweekly compressed schedules, job sharing, reduced work weeks (28-32 hours)). It offered financial top-

ups on parental and maternity leaves⁸. Similar to Manuco's 1-day (paid) paternity leave, Comco offered two paid paternity days. Unlike Manuco's 3 sick days, Comco offered workers 10. There were policies for telecommuting and for extended unpaid leaves: Workers could take "short" leaves of 12 months and extended leaves (between 12 and 24 months) for reasons ranging from child and elder care, to personal travel.

While scholars caution that available policies often fail to become fully implemented (Kossek and Thompson 2015), Comco appeared to not only allow but encourage workers to avail themselves of policies. This was because in addition to these formal measures, Comco had a culture of care. Its values centered on care for its workers, its clients, the community. It respected workers' non-work demands. This was in fact a formally stated value. And the nature of the workplace – with a large amount of flexibility and ease in coming and going for many workers – facilitated this in practice.

In this chapter, I show how Comco's culture of care brought fathers' family responsibilities front and center. Comco facilitated workers' ability to leave for emergencies and occasional absences, similarly to Manuco, but went well beyond this, by supporting long family leaves, significant schedule changes, and more generally, by embracing a de-gendered culture of care that saw men and women as 'parents'.

⁸ While the provinces and the federal government legislate the lengths of leaves and the amount paid out through employment insurance respectively, workplaces can choose to provide earnings top-ups through the Supplemental Unemployment Benefit program (SUB), administered by the federal government. Payments through the SUB program are not deducted from EI benefits.

Fathering at Comco

Workers generally felt Comco’s culture of care – and its flexibility – were authentic parts of the workplace, and not merely for show. A culture of care was evidenced in the ways workers talked about the organization accommodating their care responsibilities.

Fathers described Comco as flexible and accommodating of family needs

Comco’s broad commitment to workers, and the more specific focus on work-family balance, was felt by workers. Rocco, a dad and manager at Comco, described the culture straightforwardly, comparing it favourably to his past employers:

“They’re really into, like, family balance, and family dynamics. They've been actually really good. Much better than any company I've ever worked in.”.

Comparing Comco favourably to past employers was common. Nick, a manager, said that at his previous employer, a worker’s ability to handle their care responsibilities was a function of managerial discretion. At his past job, “It depend[ed] manager by manager how it would be, whereas I think there's a real culture here towards that family is important and a work, life balance”. At Comco, there was a culture of care – a culture that embraced ‘balance’.

Another father-manager, Chris, said, “I think, actually, it is a very supportive place for parents. Like, our policies and our practices are very supportive of families...”.

Keith described it as a ‘family-first’ culture: “I think it's just the culture within Comco that we have that kind of like, family's first”.

Greg, a father working in HR, said that although the emphasis on family-friendliness is especially salient in his department, it was also widespread “across [the organization] because it’s written in documents and everywhere: ‘Work-life balance. Work-life balance. Mental

health.’ It is across the organization.” Focusing on supporting employees – in terms of both work-life balance and mental health – were high priorities to Comco and frequently written about in internal documents, underscoring Comco’s broad organizational values and commitment to its employees.

Occasional high-priority family demands

When asked how flexible workers found the organization to be, they often responded by describing their ability to attend to occasional and irregular high-priority events, appointments, or emergencies. This demonstrates the sensitivity and respect the organization had towards its workers’ care responsibilities and its follow-through with flexible practices. It also reflects the general trend discussed at Manuco as well, that organizations accommodate family emergencies. Cooper writes, “[T]he most legitimate way in which the family can come into the workplace is through an emergency” (2000: 396). Here are some example responses:

Paul, a manager, said: “I was actually at my [kid’s] graduation this morning, so you know, the organization is so flexible at Comco that I can manage my own time, manage my own team, where I was able to take from 9 to 11 to attend my [kid’s] graduation, and not really feel too guilty about it”.

Paul emphasizes his lack of guilt – not a total absence of guilt – but a relative lack, which he attributes to Comco’s flexibility.

Like at Manuco, workers often mentioned the ease with which they could manage medical appointments. Rocco, a manager, said: “For doctor's appointments, they're very flexible with those kind of things.”

Chris, a manager, reported: “So like two weeks ago my [kid] had [an important medical appointment], so it wasn't sudden but we knew about it. But it's like ‘Yeah no problem’ I'm just going to take next Wednesday off, it's all good.”

Sam said: “...[C]ertainly... I was able to go to almost all of the medical appointments that my wife had when she was pregnant and most - I mean I could have gone to essentially all of the medical appointments that my [kid] had in those first years. And the only ones I didn't go to was just, it was irrelevant so I chose not to go but could have.”

Sometimes workers needed to attend to medical emergencies, usually involving an ill family member. Managers reported their responses to these crises in terms of a ‘just go’ narrative. ‘Just go’ was used as proof of the overall supportiveness of the organization, of the support of managers, and/or one’s own orientation towards workers’ unpredictable family situations. ‘Just go’ implied a no-questions-asked mentality and an immediate (rather than after-the-fact) support:

“Like we had one person who had to leave because there was a pretty severe health issue that they had to attend to. I mean, the wife was at home, but it was pretty severe, so you know, he had to go to the hospital. There were no questions asked, it was – he was trying to explain and everyone was like, go; you don’t need to explain, it’s okay, you know, like just drop what you're doing, go, that’s more important.” – *Manager*

Here, this manager alludes to the overall culture of Comco and the broad and immediate support given to workers facing health crises.

One manager illustrates the immediacy and the complete taken-for-grantedness of the support emergencies receive:

“And, you know, even...one of my staff members who his [child], very young... [had an urgent health problem] and he came in - I actually wasn’t in, I just went out at a meeting and he

came in and told Denton, my assistant manager and Denton's like go, get lost, get out of here, go."

This manager's description of his assistant manager's response is meant to illustrate the unwavering support that exists at Comco towards workers going through family health crises.

Rocco, another manager at Comco, explains the rationale for this approach:

Natasha: When one of your direct reports approaches you because they have some kind of emergency or their kid is sick, what goes through your head? How do you think about that?

Rocco: Go.

Natasha: Are you immediately, like, go? Or, are you thinking about, okay...

Rocco: No. Cause I was in that spot. Nothing is more important. Like, when your kid is sick. Nothing is more important than that. So, even if I said, no you can't go, then they're useless to me here. And, then they will resent me. They'll be thinking about their kid. They can't do the work, so why am I even keeping them. Get out of here.

For Rocco, 'just go' starts out as the appropriate moral response when a parent has a sick kid. It morphs into a pragmatic one when he surmises that a worker with a sick kid may feel distracted anyway, compromised in their ability to do their work, and actually come to resent Rocco if they can't leave to tend to their child.

While the "just go" narrative and approach to medical appointments and emergencies echoes workers' experiences at Manuco, Comfim fathers reported a wider array of more discretionary events/activities that they felt free to attend. Luke, another manager, said: "I've always attended the parent teacher things, the year-end shows, all those things. So I've always had that flexibility to do those things".

Arnold, a non-manager, said he personally found the environment to be very flexible: “And I see it with the people I work with too, I mean, you know, when there’s recitals or grads or any of that kinda’ thing, people make room for that because it’s – they’re important”.

These responses show that in many instances, workers felt supported and empowered to attend to occasional family care responsibilities.

Extended leaves

Unlike Manuco, Comco had an extensive framework of policies and practices in place that empowered workers to be involved in their caregiving. One such policy was long job-protected (meaning current job equivalent) leaves. These were somewhat rare amongst my interviewees, but I describe here two cases of fathers taking extended leaves to be with their families. Both held supervisory positions. One took several months to spend time with his family and the other took a months long parental leave.

Parental leave is not a workplace provision per se, guaranteed as it is through provincial and federal policies. Workers at Manuco took parental leave as well. The differences here are that Ernie took longer, he was in a more senior, higher-pressure position, and he received enthusiastic support for his leave. He also received a benefits top-up from Comco. Workers at Manuco who took parental leave received support from their supervisors but also experienced joking/teasing from some of the people they worked with (and received no earnings top-ups). It is likely that one of the reasons Ernie felt he could take such a long leave is because of the caring and supportive environment of Comco.

Ernie took a length of time informed by “what makes sense”. To arrive at the appropriate number of months, Ernie considered “what would work for our family... and what would work

for the organization”, striking a compromise between the two. At the time, he was a manager. He made the request to his immediate supervisor who asked: “why aren’t you taking [longer]?” As he describes it, the length of time felt long enough:

“It’s a pretty unique thing as a [manager] and to be male and to be taking that time off. I was conscious of that but was also – I took [a relatively long time], and like, people were like, wow that’s awesome, I’ve never heard of that before. I’ve talked to other dads who are – whose kids are older and they’re like, I wish I took more time with my kids, right. So I feel – that’s why I feel super blessed with that situation...”

Ernie’s gratitude for his ability to take leave is poignant - note that this is, in fact, guaranteed by statutory employment standards, although is not common in practice. He indeed underscores how unique it is, even at Comco. He later goes on to say that his leave was important for both practical learning and bonding, especially during the first several months when he and his partner were off together:

“And we had those first months off together, right, so I got to learn about parenting and what to do, you know, with this kid. And then like, develop my own relationship, like, you know. And then we also had that awesome family time during that time, so it was like really nice.”

This appreciation is likely also fostered by the supportive culture of Comco, and the fact that he didn’t perceive any negative consequences from his leave. He describes feeling completely supported by his managers and the broader organization, attributing this support partly to the fact that it’s partially women-run:

“I felt 100% supported,... You know, it’s one of the amazing things about Comco, like to be frank. It’s an organization that’s partially run by women, many of whom are mothers and they get it, right. And it’s something that maybe other organizations don’t necessarily get at, I’m not sure. [Have you worked elsewhere?] I have.”

Similarly, Norm requested an unpaid leave of absence to spend time with his family. Unlike parental leave, Norm's unpaid leave was a workplace policy. And while workers at Manuco took extended vacations to travel to the Philippines, these were usually in the range of 6 weeks, rather than several months. In response to Norm's decision, his managers were "supportive and excited". They said "that's fantastic" and he felt "completely supported". This was partially because he gave lots of notice, which eased the transition. Upon his return, he took another managerial role – a lateral move from his previous position.

Not only did workers occasionally take extended leaves, but they felt supported by Comco when they did and didn't report any leave-related penalties.

Ultimately, Comco's care for its workers extended beyond family-friendly policies/practices to far-reaching commitments to employees. One such commitment was to cultivate a context in which employees could reach their full potential. This emphasis on growth could be interpreted as reflecting an ethic of care, which prioritizes the "use and development of people's full capacities, within the context of their self-defined needs and aspirations" (Liedtka 1996: 185). From an ethic of care perspective, caring for workers isn't about fostering dependence, but instead, respecting their autonomy and enhancing their ability to make their own choices. This would include facilitating workers' care choices and decisions, not only out of respect for their autonomy and their non-work demands, but also out of an interest in enabling their full human development through the act of care (Liedtka 1996). Through care, caregivers are able to reap the "rich emotional and psychological rewards that can shape one's sense of self, history, belonging, and purpose" that accompany the caregiving of other human beings (Kershaw 2005: 96; see also Allen and Daly 2007; Doucet 2004, 2006/2018). Comco appeared to embrace

an ethic of care given its facilitation of care and its stated objectives of helping workers reach their potential.

This differs markedly from Manuco's approach to work-family – bound to normative work time and highly segmentist in both policy and practice (Nippert-Eng 1996). Manuco facilitated necessary and occasional absences (e.g. medical appointments, emergencies). It occasionally flexed starting/stopping times. And workers were able to extend their vacations for trips to the Philippines. To workers, this relatively limited flexibility was acceptable in the context of gendered and limited conceptions of care and fathering. Comco, in contrast, was expansive and discretionary in the flexibility it offered workers, as well as in terms of the kinds of care it recognized and valued, empowering workers to combine work and family in ways they saw fit.

Formal schedule modifications

Several workers I interviewed had taken advantage of Comco's available policies around scheduling modifications.

Natasha: Has anyone ever approached you and asked for any kind of flexible scheduling arrangement?

Aidan: We occasionally get people come in that would say hey, um, you know, uh my child's school is starting here, can I come in 15 minutes later, or 20 minutes later and that sort of thing. And you know, it – there are reasons that we do start, that we have everybody start at the same time, which is morning meetings and that's when we, um – that's when we have everybody together. It's the only time we can ever have everybody together as a team, talk to them. So, so those are – we don't take those lightly. But we will make, you know, um – we'll make arrangements, especially if they're just temporary. And they say, it's only for 3 months. Or something like that. We would, we would accommodate.

This manager underlines the fact that schedule modifications are available for workers, especially if they are temporary. This approach exemplifies ‘flexibility as accommodation’, where flexibility is available on an as-needed basis to individual workers who need to request it from their managers (who have discretion over whether or not to grant it) (Kelly and Moen 2020). I asked Devon, a father, about his schedule modification:

Natasha: What made you decide to take every second Monday off?

Devon: It's something that - it's nice, it's a bit of a reward. You work longer hours in the week to accumulate hours to take, have a long weekend every second weekend.

Natasha: Okay. And was it easy to request that, like was it easy to get that?

Devon: Yeah I think it was fairly easy, yeah.

Natasha: Okay, tell me about that.

Devon: I mean you - I mean in the beginning my manager... obviously had to see what was right for the business in terms of making sure she had enough staff on deck all the time and making sure that if I wanted the Monday off, 'cause usually you had it on the Friday or the Monday. So, as long as we had enough staff here on the Monday, then it would be okay for me to take the Monday, if not I probably could have gotten the Friday.

Natasha: Nice.

Devon: So in my team most of us have flex days so we would take the longer shifts for Friday and Monday off and it's the manager who staggers the shifts.

Natasha: Okay. But it was relatively straightforward.

Devon: Yeah.

Natasha: Okay. Did you have any resistance around doing that?

Devon: No.

Devon notes that “most of us have flex days” and that it was straightforward to organize. Importantly, the manager had to “see what was right for the business”, but presuming she had enough staff available, Devon was able to take every second Monday off (having accumulated enough hours during the week).

Although this kind of flexibility was unheard of at Manuco, at Comco, flex schedules were generally conditional on being temporary arrangements and also on the staffing needs of the organization.

The conditional nature of these arrangements was exemplified by Dan whose flexible schedule was temporarily rescinded (like other workers with flexible schedules who were working on NEWT) when the organization was undergoing a major change in technology, NEWT (discussed later). Dan originally had a day off every week, in exchange for working a day on the weekend. This schedule allowed him to keep his child home from daycare an additional day a week (given his partner was on child care duty on the weekend). When Comco temporarily rescinded flex schedules (in order to have all hands on deck to help with NEWT), Dan and his partner had to find alternative child care to cover for that day. Thus, while Comco offered flexible schedules through their policies, these were generally seen as ‘flexibility as accommodation’ and contingent on the organization’s priorities and needs.

De-gendering care: masculinity and fathering

At Manuco, masculinity limited understandings of fathering and care. Workers spoke of the mostly-male workforce as sufficient rationale for why hardly anyone took parental leave. At Comco, men and women were viewed similarly.

Indeed, in a progressive organization like Comco, dads' care should theoretically be treated in the same way as women's care. In some respects, this was the case. For instance, in relation to rush-out scenarios and family-related emergencies, Gerry said "[Moms and dads] are not viewed differently".

Several interviewees said that at Comco, moms and dads were viewed in the same way but in the broader society, gender mattered. I asked Rocco whether moms and dads were viewed differently and he responded: "Not at Comco. I think it's all the same. If you're a parent. Like no-one.... Yeah, they treat us the same. Everybody's the same." But when asked about the world more generally, Rocco said: "Yeah. It's very different. No matter what people tell you". A similar theme unfolded in an exchange with another manager:

Natasha: Do you think that moms and dads are viewed differently in the workplace?

Manager: At Comco, no, but in the workplace, yes. Like being the father of a daughter, that's one thing I keep telling her, period, you know. All her life we've told her we're not bringing up – I'm not bringing up a daughter, I'm bringing up a strong independent woman.... It's one of the reasons actually people have asked me before how do you feel having a woman as a boss? I have no problem with it, I'm surrounded by women, always have been. But I think there is definitely – in the workplace as a whole I think people look at moms and dads differently.

Natasha: Like generally but not specifically –

Manager: Not specifically – again my experience at Comco [is] I don't see that but I think generally yes, without a doubt.

Some dads were unequivocal about the lack of difference:

Natasha: Do you think mothers and fathers are seen differently here?

Sam: Oh, I don't know, I don't think so. I mean I don't think - like if you're implying that, like, it's understood that a mother would leave to go stay home with their sick child but a father, that would be odd for instance, like if that's what you're getting [at], sort of implying, I don't think so at all, no. I think people are pretty balanced like that, yeah.

Fathers didn't think mothers and fathers were viewed differently, and talked of feeling supported:

Natasha: Do you think that mothers and fathers are viewed any differently in the workplace, here at Comco?

Arnold: I can't think of anything specific to make me think that it isn't. No, I can't think of... So many of my team mates have been really supportive, you know when I'm on the phone talking to [my kids], giving them advice on things, and that kinda' thing. Like "oh, you're such a good dad," all that sorta' thing. So I kinda' feel supported.

These responses reflect multiple factors, including these men's own lived experiences and possible discomfort about critiquing their employer to an outsider, especially considering that employers are legally required to be gender-neutral in their treatment of employees, and aim to be so for the sake of their own legitimacy. There is even evidence to show men have more difficulty identifying instances of sexist treatment against women (Drury and Kaiser 2014), and as such, they may be less attentive to differential gendered treatment in general. Yet, these men's responses also reinforce Comco as a caring, progressive, and even feminist organization. And certainly it was in some ways. But as I'll show later, there were limits on Comco's caring and feminist culture and on the flexibility it offered dads.

Factors supporting care at Comco

Comco's culture of care stemmed in part from the nature of its work – white-collar office work. Not relying on machines to perform the work (other than computers), workers automatically had more flexibility and more porous boundaries between their work and non-work lives than did production workers at Manuco. But other factors also contributed to Comco's culture of care and flexible practices.

Comco's gender composition

An emphasis on care and work-family policies/practices stemmed in part from Comco's women leaders. Comco's top ranks had higher than average numbers of women. Empirical evidence shows that women's presence on boards – especially women with interlinks to other firms – predicts socially-conscious policy such as better environmental practices (Glass et al. 2015). Especially relevant is research showing that a greater proportion of women in senior management is associated with greater adoption of family-friendly policies (Dancaster and Baird 2016). Having women in leadership roles has the potential to put women's issues on the agenda and can lead to the adoption of family-friendly policies and practices, partially because women leaders, rather than less senior women, have the power to do so (Ingram and Simon 1995; Kowalewska 2019). In theory, gender-diverse leadership teams and boards may mitigate the ideal worker norm and a culture of putting work above all else – a quality associated with workplace masculinity contests – because women have predominantly been the ones responsible for caregiving (Berdahl et al. 2018).

Reputational rewards for being family-friendly

Another factor potentially explaining Comco's culture of care was reputational benefits. Comco had received positive recognition for its culture and practices and this potentially helped contribute to its competitive market position. Past empirical evidence indeed shows that being recognized as 'family-friendly' can generate positive returns for companies' stock prices (Arthur and Cook 2004; Jones and Murrell 2001). Other research shows that the presence of work-life policies increases organizational attractiveness to prospective applicants (Bourhis and Mekkaoui 2010) and can have positive effects on job pursuit intentions, even for those who may not have dependents to care for because of what these policies signal in terms of broad organizational support (Casper and Buffardi 2004; Wayne and Casper 2012).

Comco's Culture of Care and Commitment

Comco's orientation stemmed from its underlying ethic of care, a framework emphasizing the "relational dimensions of life, such as empathy, helpfulness, caring, nurturing, interpersonal sensitivity, long-term orientation toward the collective interest, preference for cooperative and egalitarian relationships, and interest in community" (Fletcher 1998; Fondas 1997; Haas, Allard, and Hwang 2002: 325). This caring orientation extended to multiple constituencies: its own workers, its clients, and even the broader community.

Work on 'caring' organizations has its origins in existing scholarship on ethics of care. Feminist theorizing on an ethic of care emerged in the 1980s with Carol Gilligan's book (*In A Different Voice*) arguing that the human condition is one of relationality, responsiveness, connectedness and interdependence rather than independence and self-sufficiency. Business ethicists later incorporated this writing into their own work, recognizing that viewing business

relations as hinging upon just that – *interdependent relations* – carried important implications for management and that a focus on care and connection could even resolve some of business’s “inefficiencies”, increasing the chances of market advantage (Liedtka 1996; White 1992).

At Comco there was a broad internalization of caring values. Workers described Comco as a “caring organization” (Ian, non-manager), having a “deeply caring culture” (Norm, manager).

Ian (non-manager) elaborated:

Ian: Yeah I mean I think it's a caring organization. We're proud in kind of what the organization does for the community and gets involved.

Natasha: Yeah, so caring in that sense.

Ian: Yeah I think there's caring for the staff members, most of the time you get the sense that the executive's trying to do the right thing. There's always a few little things but, you know, I think it's a caring organization in terms of the staff with each other, I think people care about each other for the most part.

Gerry, a manager, echoed Ian’s point about Comco’s care towards the community and said the types of workers hired are those who are nurturing and want to help others:

“[T]he people that come here,... have a propensity to be more nurturing, have a propensity to want to help people, and you work at Comco because of [its reputation], and because of the things that we do in the community and you're über proud to tell people you work for Comco”.

The sense that a feeling of care was central to the organization was echoed by many, from lower level employees to those more senior. The following quotes assert the perceived authenticity of Comco’s culture of care in relation to its own employees:

“They care about you. People ask how you are doing, not just out of politeness or office small talk, but it's actually caring and they actually follow up on it.” (AJ, non-manager)

“I think that we, we as an organization do believe, like quite intrinsically and deeply, in employee well-being” (Gerry, manager)

“[D]oing the right thing for our employees is embedded in everything we do. It’s not just kind of... lip service, or employee, you know, engagement washing. It literally is how we feel in everything we do.” (Martin, manager)

These descriptions are consistent with an underlying ethic of care. As Haas et al. (2002) explain, companies with this ethos are “sensitive to employees’ lives outside the organization and... encourage men’s participation in caregiving activities” (325). Through its policies/practices and broad culture of care, Comco saw its employees – not as autonomous ideal workers detached from non-work connections and responsibilities – but as interdependent, relational beings with multiple competing demands on their time (Acker 1990; Gilligan 1995).

Comco also cared deeply about its clients. I asked Norm (manager) what it was like to work at Comco. He described meeting the needs of clients as Comco’s purpose. He said:

“...[H]aving some passion for the work you do, being very respectful for each other and caring. Caring about our clients and understanding what we need to do for them, why we’re here. Then connecting that all back to our vision. So I think that at Comco there is -- most people work here with -- I mean, not a higher purpose, that seems a bit lofty, but a belief that we’re working for an organization that actually is a benefit to society.”

Norm emphasizes the caring culture of Comco and links it to workers’ beliefs in what it’s doing as an organization. Workers believe in Comco, largely because they see it as being beneficial to the community. They share in its values, derive a sense of purpose from working there, and identify with the goals of the organization. In this sense, Comco was a high-commitment workplace (compared to Manuco’s more bureaucratic environment), the implications of which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Having a caring culture meant Comco facilitated a ‘discretionary’ approach to work and family (Nippert-Eng 1996). Workers were provided with policies and practices and empowered to use them at their discretion, according to their own unique needs (recall the manager who took a leave to spend time with his family). This contextualized, individualized approach to the work-family interface reflects a feminist ethic of care⁹. A caring, discretionary approach to workers’ care goes against universal and abstract principles associated with a masculinist, bureaucratic framework. The gendered logic of bureaucratic organizations is challenged by a view of workers as contextualized (Acker 1990).

In sum, Comco offered a wide array of policies and practices that helped fathers facilitate their care. Like Manuco, dads were able to leave work for high-priority and/or occasional events, emergencies, and appointments. However, unlike Manuco, workers availed themselves of flexible schedules, extended leaves, and more generally described Comco as a father-friendly and gender-progressive place to work. This was partially because of Comco’s gender composition, its reputation as a progressive, family-friendly employer, and its caring culture.

Yet, there were limits to Comco’s culture of care. In the next chapter, I will discuss some of these limits and how they marginalized fathers’ care. Indeed, the same caring culture and high commitment context that benefitted dads also resulted in loose boundaries between work and non-work and in high levels of work commitment and overwork. Comco’s discretionary application of policies also had a downside – as described above in relation to flextime, and as I will discuss further below, managers had the ultimate say in the take-up of work-family policies/practices. These policies were not viewed as entitlements, like sick or vacation time.

⁹ It also reflects the trend of growing customization of (some) employee contracts. Rousseau et al. 2006 discuss the growing prevalence of I-deals (amongst privileged workers), those employment arrangements that are both idiosyncratic and considered ideal for both worker and workplace (Rousseau et al. 2006).

Finally, when Comco underwent a significant technology change, policies were rescinded temporarily for those working on the change, and the culture of commitment and overwork intensified.

Chapter 8: Workplaces barriers to fathers' flexibility and care

In the previous chapter, I discussed how fathers considered Comco to be flexible generally and laid out the specific ways in which this was the case. Comco not only accommodated high priority and occasional non-work demands, but also extended leaves and formal schedule modifications. Further, Comco operated in a de-gendered fashion, viewing mothers and fathers the same way. The flexibility and gender-neutral view of caregiving reflected factors like Comco's gender composition, its reputation, and its culture of care and commitment.

In this chapter, I will consider the factors that limited fathers' involvement in care. First, unlike at Manuco, the boundaries between work and non-work were quite porous at Comco, allowing work to flow into non-work time. Work was often performed (and sometimes expected) during evenings and weekends. This was facilitated by workers' high levels of work commitment. Furthermore, family-friendly policies and practices were not fully institutionalized: managerial discretion and significant changes to the organization's operations rendered them conditional. These changes to the organization's operations also intensified the culture of commitment and long hours and resulted in the temporary rescinding of flexible schedules for those working on the project. Finally, gender still operated as a constraint on men's care. Dads were seen as secondary caregivers, even though this was not Comco's official position.

Although the mechanisms differ, I will show how Comco and Manuco – two radically different organizations with very different approaches to fathers' care – shared similarities: they both limited fathers' caregiving and reinforced the gendered nature of their organizations.

Permeable work-non-work boundaries: Emailing

Comco's porous boundaries – owing in part to the white-collar nature of work performed there – were a double-edged sword in terms of dads' involvement in care. Emailing, for instance, flowed into non-working time. This was partially because workers didn't define it as work per se. But it meant that individuals were tasked with developing their own personalized emailing policies in the absence of any formal work ones.

It isn't unusual for email to flow into non-work time. Based on a survey of 1600 managers/professionals, Leslie Perlow notes that over half of respondents checked their smartphones within an hour of waking and going to bed, and checked continuously on vacation, while just under half checked on weekends. An Angus Reid poll of around 1500 Canadians found that over forty percent are checking their emails regularly, or daily, outside of standard office hours and thirty one percent is responding regularly or daily. Forty percent of those polled said technology has increased their working hours (Angus Reid Institute 2015).

Checking and responding to emails outside of work time could be explained partially by the fact that workers at Comco didn't consider email to be work in its pure form. Whether email 'counted' as work depended upon how effortful and active it was – whether it was simply monitoring or responding, too. Workers often passively monitored emails – without actively responding – on weekends and evenings to avoid potential surprises or crises come Monday morning. Continuously monitoring email was a way of mitigating against uncertainty, especially around what others might be doing (Brannen 2005). This strategy, often entailing a quick skim of emails, was dubbed the 'turbo skim' by Norm. It wasn't quite "work", nor was it leisure or family time. This view of monitoring emails as not-quite-work stemmed in part from the fact that many people's inboxes were vessels for both private and public communication.

I asked Rocco, a manager, if there were certain aspects of his job that made parenting easier and he said, “The thing about Comco, also you could talk about, is it stays here. You never take work home”. I went on to ask if he checked emails in the evening, which initiated the following exchange:

Rocco: I do because it's on my phone.

Natasha: Do you count that in your hours?

Rocco: No. Looking at an email is not, I'm not going to count an hour for that. It's something to do because I'm also looking at my personal emails. So, it's all mixed together. But, if I have to respond, or I have to do something, it can wait until Monday.

Natasha: Okay, so you'll check them, but you won't necessarily respond.

Rocco: Yeah. Unless it needs a response.

Natasha: But, you monitor that.

Rocco: But, that doesn't count as hours. It's not like I'm working. Not, like I'm sitting there, actively, like sitting there waiting for an email.

For Rocco, and others, monitoring emails is not ‘work’ because his work email is mixed together with his personal email, which he would be checking anyway. Further, there is an ‘active’ element to work, which, unlike email *responding*, or waiting for an email, doesn’t apply to email monitoring, even though later he describes the mental triaging associated with monitoring:

“Do I need to look at this right now? Does this need a response, or can this wait to Monday? If it can wait till Monday, I'm moving on. If it says, like it's an emergency, I need something. It's like, okay. Always on the weekend, it's like a one liner. Like, yes, approved. Yes, do this. I'll talk to this person. It's never grandiose long emails, like essays, explaining what the problem is, how we got here and everything else.”

The mental work of sorting emails and assessing their urgency isn't really considered work, even though sometimes brief responses may be required and the process of mental sorting could be considered 'active'.

The following exchange with Tom concisely illustrates employees' general approach to and view of email:

Natasha: Do you check your email outside of work hours?

Tom: Yes.

Natasha: Do you respond?

Tom: Very rarely.

Natasha: Okay. Do you count that in your total work hours tally?

Tom: No.

Natasha: Okay, so... you're not counting it?

Tom: No, but I don't spend a lot of time. It's more of an email cleanup where somebody sending me a meeting invite and I'll accept or decline it or I'll read something and go, "Okay, that's more than I can digest right now so I'll read it tomorrow." Yeah so that's where I spend 20 minutes here, 20 minutes there doing that.

The labour of triaging email – mentally organizing emails according to their priority, dealing with easy ones and filing more complicated ones away for later – is not considered 'work' by Tom either.

Because work email was so porous, spilling into private inboxes and private time and space – and in the absence of formal workplace policies and even established social norms around emailing in off hours – workers often developed their own personal policies and

strategies for managing it. The ‘passive’ monitoring described above was one strategy noted by many, and helpful for giving workers a sense of control in the face of a continuous flow of work-related email. Nick, for instance, talked of monitoring email on vacation to avoid coming back to “a thousand emails”.

Another strategy was to have specific cut-off times for email checking in the evenings. One father said he stopped at 6:00 in the evening, another said 8:00, one dad said 10:00, and one dad liked to check one last time before bed, just to make sure nothing was falling apart. Tom, quoted above, was especially reflective about his work-family boundaries in relation to emailing and this part of our conversation is worth quoting at length:

Tom: Yeah and one of the things I do is when I get home I look at this [phone] one last time, I plug it into my bedside and I don’t look at it again until I wake up at 6 in the morning and then I spend the first 20 minutes of my day before I start looking at it to sort of do the cleanup that I mentioned. But that way from 6 o’clock until I go to bed is my time with my family.

Natasha: Okay, so you don’t check emails during that time at all?

Tom: No. Well, the odd time but I work hard not to...

Natasha: Do you ever feel guilty for doing that, like saying, ‘I’m going to put my phone aside. I’m not going to look at it until the next morning?’ What are your feelings around that?

Tom: I don’t feel guilty about it. I am very clear. So I’ve had people say, “Hey, I sent you something at 8 o’clock last night.” I said, “Good. I stopped working at 4:30 technically.” And so my conversation is always around, “What was the risk of me responding the next day?” And so it’s kind of the, “It’s not you, it’s me” kind of thing. It’s sort of, “I want to know what was their driver that they felt they needed a response that evening?” And so I try to manage other individuals’ expectations of how I use my time and I try to make it very clear that, ‘If you send me stuff after this time,’ and it’s a behavioural thing because I’ve been there before where I’d be doing work at night and Natasha sent an email at 10. I responded at 10:15. She sent it back at 10:30. All of a sudden we’ve created a behaviour.

Natasha: You're in this loop.

Tom: Yeah, and now, you know, and you all of a sudden say, "Well if you sent something to Tom at 10 o'clock at night he'll respond" and they tell two friends and so on and so on. So now I look at it the other way is, "Well if you respond to Tom at this time, he's not going to respond until the next day."

Natasha: So consistency is important?

Tom: Yeah, and managing other people's expectations of how you work.

Natasha: Yeah. Do you have a lot of those conversations? Are people often approaching you and saying, "I sent you an email at 8 o'clock. . .?"

Tom: Not anymore.

Natasha: But before?

Tom: Well, being a [longer-term] employee, I've gotten to know and being in projects I've gotten to know a lot of people and it becomes very evident as to how I work. So for my own sanity, I try to stay in control of what I can control. I can't control you in when you send stuff but I can control how I behave to that and that gives me the peace of mind. But there is times where you kind of go, "How many [emails] is she sending me?" and can you let it go? Sometimes you can, sometimes you can't. That affects your personal life as well right?

Tom tries to "manage other individuals' expectations" in terms of emailing, knowing that if he responds to evening emails, he might not only initiate occasional instances of late night back-and-forth, he may also become widely known by others as someone who does. He is guarding against the pernicious expectation of continuous availability associated with internet and communications technology (Heijstra and Rafnsdottir 2010). He can't control the emailing behaviours of others, but for his own sanity, he tries to 'stay in control of what [he] can control'. Even he admits though, that there are times when you can't let it (the emailing) go completely.

Tom had somewhat more defined boundaries than other workers I interviewed, possibly because he had the self-confidence of a longer-term employee. Other workers didn't have such clear boundaries between their public and private lives in relation to email.

Another strategy workers used was to disable notifications, or even use two different phones – one for work and one for personal use. Sam had described the stress of receiving urgent or “bad news” emails on the weekend and how then “you spend the rest of the weekend thinking about it and worrying about it”. Weekend emails were common, according to workers. Sam discussed the strategies he developed for establishing boundaries between work emails and personal ones:

Sam: Like - I mean it's shitty to come into work on a Monday morning and find out something is not going well and you need to fix it. But it's certainly a lot shittier to find that out on Saturday and then have to spend all the weekend not to deal with it, so, to the point where I have actually on certain occasions intentionally turned off notifications on my phone, right?

Natasha: Yeah. So that's one strategy for dealing with that sort of really integrated work life,...

Sam: Yeah. Yeah it should be said that's where a lot of my colleagues for instance would have two cell phones. They'll have their personal cell and their work cell. That's sort of a normal thing. It just shows you how fast cell phones have become, or Smartphones, have been critical at our job. I remember when I was first given a cell phone for work it was kind of like oh, do we even really need this? And it was a Motorola flip phone so it was a phone with voicemail. So now that you have - it's not a phone anymore, it's an email, it's a mobile email device and everything comes in on email. So, I only have one phone, I just have my work phone, that's it. And so that's a personal choice because I just find it a pain in the butt to carry two phones with me everywhere I go.

Natasha: It's one more thing to lose.

Sam: One more thing to lose, one more thing to worry about, it's just hugely inconvenient. However, it also means that when I'm using my phone for

personal reasons on the weekend or the evenings and an email notification comes up it's like, psychologically it's almost impossible not to read it, right?

Although Sam talked about the stress of finding out “something is not going well” on the weekend, he chose to carry only one phone out of convenience. The risk to him is reading work emails which are “almost impossible” to avoid. Others also talked of the pull of email notifications. Tom said, in relation to the “little red lights [that] start flashing” that indicate new emails: “You get curious like a cat and go, ‘Oh, what is that? Maybe something important’”.

Indeed, workers would assert their boundaries, only to give in to the pull of email. Carl describes his personal boundary-setting strategies and ultimately, conceding:

“[W]hen I go on vacation, I actually try to disable my Outlook, and even the calendar, I turn it off. I just have my work calendar and my personal stuff on the same phone. So, I'll just turn that all off. Like I'm pretty good. But this last time I did check though, half way through my vacation...”

Workers didn't define attending to email in their downtime as ‘work’ – seen, as it was, as a passive monitoring – and yet still felt the need to implement individual strategies for bounding this activity. With the advent of smartphones, work email is difficult to avoid, as attested to by workers because “you get curious like a cat”.

Working long hours

High levels of work commitment

Comco's culture of care – towards its own people, its clients, and the broader community – generated a high level of commitment and dedication on the part of its employees. This

commitment potentially prolonged the work day and ironically limited flexibility and fathers' involvement in care.

Gerry, a manager, told me that the image of Comco resonated with people and created a committed workforce – one that stayed late to get the work done:

Gerry: A comment I would make about Comco is the people that work at Comco are incredibly committed to the organization. And our [image] and what we do resonates with people so well, that that for a lot of people it becomes almost a bit more like a vocation than a job. And so, it's harder to say you know, oh, it's -it's, you know, it's 4:59 or whatever, I'm packing up, I'm walking out when you have this sense of -of um...

Natasha: Like, almost duty

Gerry: Yeah, I was gonna' say obligation, um, to our [clients]. And to our colleagues, because you know Natasha believes in it as much as I believe in it and I really like Natasha and she needs this done so I'm gonna' stay late cuz I don't want to leave her hanging.

Because workers believed in Comco's image and its goals, and there was a sense of obligation to both clients and colleagues, workers didn't relate to their jobs in a purely instrumental fashion watching the minutes carefully to ensure remuneration but not over-commitment (recall Douglas's discussion of his clock-watching employees at Manuco). They treated their jobs like a vocation and stayed late to help the team. Few workers reported working 35 hours (the hours for which they're paid) and most said they worked closer to 40, with some as high as 75. They felt a high level of investment on behalf of Comco and wanted to reciprocate.

Feelings of commitment and dedication were widespread and dads talked of not only staying late but also of avoiding flexibility policies and any kind of reduction in work hours in order to 'get the work done'. I asked Nolan, a manager, about whether he'd ever taken advantage of any kind of flexibility policy:

Nolan: I know that it's possible, as long as it works within your work group, yeah, but yeah, never – yeah, I don't know. Yeah, I'd be interested in looking into it, but yeah, I see that as kind of hard to do too, just because there's always meetings – like I've got meetings every day, right, so...

So yeah, I mean – although I think we like the idea of telecommuting and being able to have a flexible work schedule where you have those – the flex days. Yeah, it's difficult. I mean, I'm working more hours than normal anyway, so, you know, like – that would be – that would be kind of weird to have a day off, even though I work more than the regular eight hours –

Natasha: Then that would bring you down to the 35 hours --

Nolan: Yeah, exactly, right, and how am I able to get my work done. Yeah, I would just have to work that much more efficiently, I guess. But yeah, it would be harder to do.

For Nolan, and for many workers, working more flexibly – in this case, having a regularly scheduled day off – was prohibitive in light of meetings and a large workload. He wasn't sure how he would get his work done given schedule modifications, but suspects that it would require greater efficiency on his part. His work load is a fixed entity and ultimately his responsibility.

For Nolan, the workload presents as an immutable fact – inevitable, external to him, objective, unchangeable. And indeed, when workers worked long hours or avoided policy use, a feeling of accountability and commitment towards the 'work' – and a sense of its fixity – was often the rationale. Workers' work loads were reified, in a sense.

At the same time, in this white-collar workplace, like many others, workers were able to exercise some discretion around the quantity, quality, and timing of their work. Another manager explains the discretionary nature of work at Comco:

“There's limitless work to get done. I could stay here all night because I have tons of documents that I need to read.... I'm not gonna' do it. I'll piece it together over the – somehow I probably will make a decision myself that I'm not gonna' read this... We all

make those decisions every day when we're at work that actually that work is not going to get done.”

This quote illustrates that work at Comco, like in many white-collar workplaces, is always somewhat discretionary, especially for certain privileged workers, like managers. Obviously, workers are constrained by deadlines (which can be negotiable), accountability to colleagues who require a certain piece of work to do their own, and bosses explicitly or implicitly making demands. But there is also a heavy component of interpretation in terms of what needs to be done, when, and how. White-collar work is often less rigidly surveilled and controlled than blue-collar work. In this sense, workers maintain some control over their working time.

This sentiment is echoed in Gayle Kaufman's book, *Superdads* (2013). In her description of 'new' dads – those dads who make minor adjustments to their work lives in order to spend more time with family – she presents Russell, the dean of students at a private school:

“Russell refuses to let work consume him. Instead he talks about leaving work while he still has ‘a desk full of work’. This suggests that working until his desk is clear would entail working too many hours. He acknowledges that he could get more done at work, but then he also realizes that the work will always be there, and it is up to him to walk away. In the end, he chooses family” (118-119).

Russell, like the manager quoted above, sees the partially discretionary nature of work and draws a line, realizing that the “work will always be there, and it is up to him to walk away”. This view of work is important from a work-life balance perspective. It can be empowering for workers to realize that in some ways, work-as-never-ending is a fact of life for white-collar workers (especially managers and professionals) and something to resist. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that, like the workloads themselves – seen as individual responsibilities, rather than

organizational ones – the task of walking away and choosing family is an individual one. It is not up to the organization to draw boundaries – it is up to workers. In a high-commitment context, where there is social pressure to ‘get the work done’ no matter what (and workers have potentially internalized that pressure), this may be no easy task.

While face time remained important at Comco, ‘getting the work done’ operated as an additional kind of constraint. In the context of a relatively flexible workplace – and therefore one in which the employer arguably had less control over worker – ‘getting the work done’ operated as a check on loafing.

Getting the work done can be seen also as a marker of masculinity and class. One father interviewee in another qualitative study linked ‘getting the work done’ to acting as a ‘gentleman’: “I work what is laughingly referred to as ‘gentleman’s hours’; which means you work until the work is done: only of course the work is never done” (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, and Sparrow 2013).

While flexibility was seen as an impediment to getting the work done by some, for others it was viewed as the *means* to getting it done. Conrad (manager), when asked about the challenges to the organization presented by employees’ family demands, responded in this way:

“I think if the work wasn't getting done. Like, there is assigned work that you have to get done by a certain date. If the work wasn't getting done constantly, then it would be an issue. Comco would probably want to talk to them first and be like, how can we help you? What's the best way? Do you need more flexible hours? Do you need to work from home more? Like, let's worry about...when you change your entire schedule to be at work more at certain times. You work more at night, or you start early in the morning.”

In this case, flexibility is seen as an aid in getting the work done, rather than as an impediment to it, or even as a reward for it. This view – from the father of young children, not incidentally – while reinforcing the reified notion of ‘getting the work done’, challenges the flexibility-

productivity binary set up continuously in my interviews. The underlying assumption that productivity – getting the work done – is contingent upon a standard all-day/all-week/all-year schedule – a schedule built around the bodies of ideal workers – is challenged by Conrad’s implicit view that impediments to getting work done might actually include too much structure, rigid schedules, too much time at work.

Complicating Comco’s culture of care

As discussed in chapter 7, Comco’s culture of care facilitated fathers’ involvement in care. At the same time, it drove greater work commitment (and long hours) on the part of workers, including dads. In effect, it should be viewed as part of a strategy to generate greater levels of worker commitment and effort.

Increasingly, employers are pulling back from the historical social exchange between employee and employer. In the context of global economic pressures and the growth of external labour markets, alongside a weakening of labour unions and labour market regulations, there has been an erosion of employer commitment towards employees and a rise in precarious work with important implications for job quality (Fuller and Stecy-Hildebrandt 2014; Pugh 2015; Stecy-Hildebrandt, Fuller, and Burns 2018; Vosko 2009). Work appears to be increasingly characterized by transactional, short-term exchanges (Cappelli 1999; Tsui et al.1997). Comco’s culture of care runs counter to these types of employment relationships.

Tsui et al. identify different types of social exchange between employer and employee and examined their implications for performance. They found that organizations characterized by mutual-investment relations, wherein “open-ended inducements provided by employers are balanced by open-ended contributions from employees” performed better and had workers who

engaged in more organizational citizenship behaviours. This type of exchange, characteristic of work at Comco, and opposite to transactional, short-term exchanges, can indeed be viewed as a deliberate outcome of employers wanting to gain a competitive edge. A culture of care – and its corresponding work-family policies and practices – can induce greater discretionary effort (see Konrad and Mangel 2000 for a discussion). In the context of widespread work precarity, these inducements might have great impact given cognitive assessments workers make comparing their own employer to others. Workers may feel gratitude in light of our ‘insecurity culture’ and increase their efforts accordingly (Pugh 2015). In this sense, generous work-family policies and flexibility cultures can have the opposite to their stated effect.

Incomplete implementation of work-family policies

Managerial discretion: Consistent with an ethic of care?

Another factor that potentially limited fathers’ involvement in care was managerial discretion in relation to flexible practices and policies. Comco’s discretionary approach to work and family meant that individualized solutions were negotiated with one’s manager. This approach, which seems to reflect a feminist ethic of care, has important implications for fathers’ flexibility.

Provisions for minimum vacation time are legally guaranteed, though Comco offered more than the statutory minimum (see Table 1). With vacation time, a worker goes on to Comco’s internal employee portal, schedules the desired period, and informs their manager, who normally approves it. There is some managerial discretion around when workers can use their vacation time, but because it is a legal entitlement, this discretion is generally limited to timing rather than use (though this wasn’t always the case – during NEWT, discussed later, some managers cancelled or postponed vacations).

In contrast, flexibility policies existed on paper but were applied according to managers' discretion. A discretionary approach in the context of formalized (i.e. written) policy reflects a 'restructured' workplace management regime, characterized by marketized employment relations and decentralized authority (wherein workers' direct managers/supervisors make decisions around flexibility), and is a common approach adopted by employers (Kelly and Kalev 2006). Comco operated on a 'right to ask' basis: employees were welcomed to have conversations around flexibility with their manager, but there was no guarantee flexibility would be granted and ultimately the decision rested with the individual manager. A discretionary approach can be seen as an intentional strategy on the part of organizations and managers to avoid the language/category of entitlements, rights, and therefore, any kind of external accountability (Kelly and Kalev 2006). In this way, a discretionary approach appears somewhat antithetical to a feminist ethic of care, at least in relation to employees.

Nick, a manager, describes managers' approach to considering whether to grant a flexibility request:

“...I'd have no problem being able to look at the situation and then try and figure out does it work and does it work for them and does it work for us? I'm a believer in a triple win, so a win for the [clients], win for the organization and win for the staff member.

The focus on a “triple win” reflects some of Comco's core constituencies – its clients, the organization, and its workers and underscores the notion that flexibility is always conditional.

Charlie, a manager, said his decision-making around granting flexibility hinges on “what's the right thing to do” which “depends on the situation”. In other words, each flexibility request requires a decision to be made by the manager, reflecting the unique situation of the employee, and a lack of hard and fast rules governing flexibility.

This discretionary approach wasn't accidental, but deliberate on the part of Comco.

Chris: "...I think the perspective we have is how do we make things simpler for people so that we can accommodate situations as opposed to being policy-based, rule-based. Allowing different areas of the business to be able to apply the judgment and discretion.

Natasha: You want to have sort of a baseline level of treatment but then you want to leave room for discretion?

Chris: Yeah absolutely. Like, we want managers to be *managers* right, so as opposed to 'oh that's not what the rules say.' What works, what makes sense in that situation for your line of business, for you, for the employee, for the manager because you know, maybe somebody needs to take an extra few days off like over and above their sick days/their care time because they have some issues they need to deal with, right? How can we still accommodate that like just because the policy says you get X amount of days? Yeah, maybe some judgment/discretion needs to be applied because it would be better for the employee and ultimately better for us as the employer, right.

Chris says the route to balancing the interests of the organization with those of the employee is through discretion and a shift away from the mindless application of bureaucratic rules. To make things "simpler", the organization wants to move away from rules/policies and let managers manage. In this view, a more discretionary approach is good for all parties. A rejection of bureaucracy is consistent with a feminist ethic of care (Liedtka 1996), but is also consistent with a move away from 'legalized' management regimes to more market-based ones (Kelly and Kalev 2006). These restructured management regimes emphasize flexibility in both how the organization operates and in the relations between managers and employees over the formalized rules of legalized regimes as a way of securing market advantage. Evidence also shows that discretionary application of rules/policies can open the door for biased decision-making. As William Bielby concisely notes, "everyone relies on stereotypes" to process information (2000:

121). He was discussing biased decision-making in relation to hiring, pay and promotions – the kind that results in job inequalities by gender and race, but this thinking applies here as well.

Reliance on cognitive schema and stereotypes (an inevitability, according to social psychologists) muddles our ability to attend to individuating information about a person, and we're often also unaware of this process (Bielby 2000). At Comco, the emphasis on discretion was intended, in part, to take the unique situation of the employee into account, as per a feminist ethic of care, but cognitive biases potentially made that difficult. As I'll discuss later, this has important implications for managers' decision-making around whether to grant *fathers* (versus mothers) access to flexibility.

Beyond subtle processing distortions, discretionary decision-making also opened the door for managers' strategic use of flexibility. For instance, flexibility could be – and was – used as a reward for good behaviour, similar to Manuco, in 'quid pro quo' fashion (Kelly and Kalev 2006). This is consistent with a restructured management regime, in which a market mentality pervades organizations and workers are seen as free agents. Those who are 'in demand' (because of strong performance or a tight labour market) are able to negotiate individualized (and superior) employment terms/conditions (Rousseau 2006). This contrasts with a legalized regime, in which workers are treated the same for the purposes of equity and compliance with legal standards. Thus, like the organizations studied by Kelly and Kalev (2006), Comco advertised its policies to the public and prospective workers, but in practice, managers sometimes granted flexible work arrangements as rewards for excellent performance.

One manager describes part of his decision-making around whether to grant someone a flexible schedule. He contrasts a high-performing worker with one who isn't as high performing:

“... [H]e’s a fantastic employee. He's a great person to have on the team. He's super smart. If he needs, uh, some time, he can have the time. But when you've got somebody that's not a strong performer, and they take a [sick] day, you know, once a month, and it's always on a Friday or a Monday, right, they show up at 5 after 9 every day, and then leave at 5 to 5 everyday, those are the people that I'm not as keen to give the accommodation to”.

In his thinking, flexibility is a reward for high performance. Though he doesn’t say explicitly, it may even be withheld from those deemed to be low performers. In this sense, flexible time was deployed strategically. A discretionary approach to written policies has important implications for theory because it is often assumed that formalization of flexibility policies is key to making workplaces more flexible, but this ignores partial formalization that doesn’t proceed all the way to law.

A discretionary framework – unlike a legalized management regime – has the risk of appearing inconsistent or unfair to workers. Under a legalized framework, employment conditions are formalized and there is uniform treatment of workers – both of which limit the power of potentially “capricious” managers (Kelly and Kalev 2006). Gerry, a manager, discusses the challenges associated with discretionary application of policy:

“The challenges it presents is that because we have the freedom as uh - within the, you know, manager-employee relationship - within some policy standards, but they're pretty open, to create what we think works for the two of us. If the manager in the office next to me doesn't choose to do the same thing for somebody else on their team, then questions start to ask. "Well, how come Lou got it, Suzy doesn't". And so the, um, so you, you do kind of have to deal with that”

The way you deal with it is through honest conversation with employees. Because flexibility was tied to performance, and performance sometimes constituted the reason for denying flexibility requests, “conversations” would center on performance. One senior manager describes a worker

who wanted to work remotely when they saw others being offered the same opportunity.

Ultimately, their manager had to “have a conversation with [them]”:

“...[I]t forced [their] manager to have a conversation with [them] that said, we need to be really comfortable with your work, before this can make sense for us, right. And so it almost forced the performance conversation that wasn't happening in the way that needed to happen. So it forces some of that.”

This manager wanted to be “really comfortable” with their work before allowing them to work remotely, like their peers were doing. Expressing interest in working remotely actually “forced the performance conversation” that wasn't happening. In this way, discretionary application of policies can really concretize the link between flexibility and performance. But as Pete describes, it also gives managers an ‘out’ – a rationale for not granting flexibility across the board:

Pete: ...[I]t could be something that managers could leverage in their favour as well, right.

Natasha: In what sense?

Pete: In the sense that if it's inconsistent, and it's on a case by case basis, I don't have to turn to somebody and say, well just cuz [someone else] gets it, you don't have to get it, this is my discretion to allow me to operate my team the way that I want to operate it. But it forces me to be able to tell that person, this is why I'm not giving it.

Natasha: That's true, like it holds you accountable, you have to then provide a rationale to this employee

Pete: Right, I can't just go, ‘yeah, computer says no... I'd do it for you, but naw...’

Pete's last comments were delivered in a joking, humorous tone, highlighting the absurdity of an arbitrary approach to policy application. He argues that a discretionary approach holds managers accountable to the extent they need to provide convincing rationales to their workers for

inconsistent treatment. This is not the same level of accountability provided by law but provides some legitimacy for the discretionary approach. At the same time, discretion ultimately allows managers to have the final say and operate their teams the way they see fit. Discretion – in and of itself – can act as the justification for why a manager denies a request. No other reason is needed. In other words, although Pete makes fun of the decision-making process with his computer joke, the risk of discretion is just that – the inconsistent application of policies.

Managerial discretion, illegitimate absences, and ‘abuse’

In granting absence requests, one factor multiple managers relied upon in their decision-making was whether workers were seen to be ‘abusing’ the system. Abuse here consisted of illegitimate absences, like at Manuco. Legitimacy is key to understanding absences which are seen as deviant or non-normative when the widely held expectation is that workers will show up to work.

Absence legitimacy varies across cultures and across reasons given for absences – even different illnesses vary in terms of their relative legitimacy, though illness is generally seen as a more valid reason for absence than other rationales (Addae, Johns & Boies 2013; Harvey and Nicholson 1999; Johns and Lin Xie 1998; Patton 2011). Illness may be viewed as more legitimate because of its perceived unavailability, similar to child care-related absences.

Unavoidable absences, like child care emergencies, are acceptable absences when the expectation is that workers will be at work. Legitimacy is indeed tied to control – how avoidable or unavoidable an absence is perceived to be (Nicholson 1977), although this dichotomy is muddled somewhat by context, and as Patton (2011) notes, “when others are directly affected, it seems that *all* absenteeism, including illness absence, is viewed by others as a choice made by

the absentee” (775). This reflects ideal worker logic (Acker 1990). Absences will be viewed with suspicion when the default expectation is that workers prioritize work above all else.

In considering absence requests, managers assessed the legitimacy (i.e. the acceptability) of workers’ requests based in part on their past track record, whether past absences were ‘patterned’ and/or frequent, and whether they felt they could trust their employees. Patterned and frequent absences were seen as illegitimate because of the control managers imputed to workers in these instances. If worker A was truly sick or their child truly had a doctor’s appointment, their absences would likely be random, not patterned and frequent (e.g. every Friday or every Monday). The patterned/frequent nature of the absence puts its authenticity – and its unavoidability – into question. Patterned/frequent absences thus violated the organization’s trust and the implicit/explicit agreement struck between worker and workplace that workers would show up to work on time and for specified periods.

I asked Carter, a manager, how absences around caregiving were perceived and he responded like this:

Carter: I think, um,... I think it’s one of those things where um, it depends on how often it happens. Um, so like a one-off or you know, very rare, it’s, yeah no problem. But when it seems again that it’s – oh yeah, you know, um, every Monday this person is taking, you know, the day off um you know because we tend to get suspicious when days off occur on Mondays and Fridays, the extended long weekend. So we get a bit suspicious when we look for patterns. And if they do happen. Um, but I would say again, it depends on whether or not it’s believed that the person’s abusing it or if it’s just, you know, they would be here if they really, if they really, you know could, sort of thing.

Natasha: Ok, and like the idea of ‘abuse’ would be like... a pattern of emerging, like consistently taking Monday/Friday off...?

Carter: Yes.

Natasha: Is there any other evidence that, um, you would use to sort of say that person is abusing...?

Carter: Um, you know, there's – we place personal kind of judgments on people and you know when you work with them, you, you know, you believe this person's a hard worker and they sacrifice [for] the team and this person is in it for themselves and you know, they do as little as possible in order to... so that personal kind of judgment of a person also plays a role in it.

This exchange with Carter highlights several points: absences are perceived more favorably when they are rare, they are viewed with suspicion when they occur on Mondays or Fridays because 'caregiving' could be a cover for wanting a long weekend, that the legitimacy of an absence depends on whether it's viewed as 'abuse', and 'abuse' is linked to judgments about the particular worker making the request. In other words, the legitimacy of the absence depends on the individual manager's view of that person.

I asked Arthur about his decision making around accommodating people's non-work lives and whether it was straight-forward. He responded:

Arthur: Not always, right, because if there's tendency to suddenly you're seeing it very often.

Natasha: Yeah tell me about that

Arthur: Yeah so we've had situations where the employees just suddenly like every day - or not every day, every *week* - and it's happening twice a week or more than once a week. Like "oh my kid's sick" and then the next couple days later "oh I'm just not feeling well." So just trying to understand, are they truly - is it truly an accommodation issue versus maybe other - are there other issues *happening*? As a manager trying to understand that right, maybe just like - or what the root causes to those issues [are]. Like, maybe it's just a bad run for that person, so understanding that.

Natasha: How do you know?

Arthur: Yeah, I mean, it's about building the relationship with that person right, so before this happens, making sure I have a good relationship with them, as their leader. And then when it's happening, you know, having some open conversations - open and sincere conversations - like "hey, I've noticed this is happening for a while, just wondering, what's going on, is everything okay?" Like coming from a sense of care versus like a sense of blame and punitive stand point. I think that makes a huge difference. So it's like "hey, you know what's.." - and kind of asking those questions to really understand what's happening because yea, maybe these things are happening - there are multiple absences - but if we can address the core issue like, oh you know what "you have a lot going in your life" but you know maybe the commute is getting a big chunk of that right. They live further away so they don't feel like - they're tired because there's impact from the family, which means to get here for 9 o'clock they're having to leave extra early so they can't help get their kids ready for school. So what can we do to help accommodate that? Like what's the core issue versus "oh you've been missing."

Like Carter, Arthur's decision-making around accommodations involves assessing their past absences. He frames frequent absences as a potential cause for concern and reason to check in with his employees. He expresses the care that's central to Comco's culture, wanting to have open conversations out of concern for his employees rather than blame or a desire to punish.

Rocco, a manager, echoes this approach – patterned/frequent absences invite conversations with one's manager:

If it's a pattern, like if it's constant, then I would bring it up.... I'd be 'hey, since your kid is having a lot of problems. What's going on? How can [I] help?'

I asked Nick, a manager, if he had ever refused anyone's request for a leave or flexible work arrangement. He said:

Nick: ...I don't think I would refuse unless it didn't make sense. If you've got somebody who is abusing the system then I would probably look and say no to that, if it's reasonable and within, I don't have an issue with it.

Natasha: So what does that look like, like abusing the system? What does that actually look like in concrete terms?

Nick: The employee who every Monday there's something wrong or every Friday that there's something wrong.

For Nick, refusing a request would result if it “didn’t make sense” – reinforcing the importance of managerial discretion. Like Carter, he draws on the language of ‘abuse’ to frame absences that violate expectations and links abuse to patterned and frequent absences – particularly noting the problematic nature of being away on Mondays/Fridays.

‘Abuse’ implies misuse and exploitation and some kind of power differential. We usually use ‘abuse’ to describe exploitative actions between a more powerful actor and one who is less powerful. It’s revealing that managers use this language to describe worker absences and speaks to the importance of absenteeism for the organization as well as the perceived sense of injustice associated with ‘illegitimate’ absences.

The language of abuse ultimately demarcates which absences are legitimate and which are not. Abuse rhetoric circulates throughout the organization so workers know what the expectations of them are, and what they can expect from the organization. It therefore serves a purpose and is not simply incidental or reactionary. In fact, abuse rhetoric – like other kinds of organizational stories and narratives – can serve as a powerful justification for maintaining the status quo or even eliminating employee benefits and privileges. This was seen at TOMO, the organization studied by Erin Kelly and Phyllis Moen (2020). They document how the circulation of abuse stories served to rationalize the rescinding of an employee-friendly work redesign initiative.

Similar to the language of ‘abuse’ is the language of ‘taking advantage’, which also implies exploitation. Nolan, a manager, associates ‘taking advantage’ with frequent absences and once again draws attention to the situational decision-making routinized at Comco. As with others, in considering workers’ missed time, he underscores the importance of performance and that performance is always included in the calculus around absences.

If it’s reoccurring and it happens often, I can’t – I don’t know if I can quantify how often it is, but if it’s every week or, you know, twice a week, then there may be a perception that maybe someone is taking advantage of the flexibility, I guess. But I guess that would – I guess people’s tones for that would vary, right, like I may be able to tolerate that once a week or once every two weeks. Some maybe say well, maybe once a month would be okay, but anything more than that would, you know, like – we still need work to be done.

But it really depends on a multitude of factors, right, like how often it is, what their reasons are that the person’s giving; what kind of pattern is there, is it always on a Friday, you know, that kind of thing.

And you know, how much work does this person produce? How many hours are they putting in, aside from the fact that they’re gone for a couple of hours out of that day? Someone’s here early and then stays late and does go often, maybe it’s okay, but if someone’s checking out a bit early every day and still does this, then I guess the perception would be different.

These managerial responses reflect Comco’s ‘absence culture’: the “set of shared understandings about absence legitimacy in a given organization and the established custom and practice of employee absence behavior and its control” (Johns and Nicholson 1982: 136). Even though policies were formalized, managers’ decision-making operated on a largely discretionary basis. However, through repeated and collective practice, individualized discretion became institutionalized in a sort of ‘formalized practice’ – formalized informality – which in turn, became the framework according to which managers made decisions.

In sum, managers relied on their own discretionary decision-making in handling flexibility and absence requests. They rarely cited policy, and instead looked at employees on an individualized, case-by-case basis, harkening back to an ethic of care. They considered their track record – whether they had a history of ‘abusing’ and/or ‘taking advantage’ of Comco through repeated/regular absences – and their performance. Flexibility/time away could be rewarded to high-achieving workers or withheld in the case of low-performing ones. Managers tried to balance the competing interests of the organization and the workers. And although they applied policies in an individualized, contextualized way this ultimately gave managers control over flexibility that detracted from a ‘culture of care’, with important implications for fathers’ care

Implementation of NEW Technology (NEWT)

While I was conducting interviews at Comco, the company was implementing new technology to improve the experiences of their clients. NEWT – NEW Technology – was a large undertaking for the organization – requiring large investments in both financial resources and person power. It changed the dynamics and vibe of the workplace, marking a new period of higher intensity at work. Paul, a manager, said that work under NEWT represented a “culture shift for [the] organization” with a faster pace and higher expectations.

Organizational change initiatives are common (Vakola and Nikolaou 2005) and scholars argue that normal and routine organizational life should not be viewed as routine at all – but as characterized by continuous change and dynamism as organizations adapt to globally competitive landscapes (Mack, Nelson and Quick 1998; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). While change may represent the status quo, the uncertainty it causes can put strain and stress on workers.

In interviews, when asked about the general atmosphere, people were quick to reference NEWT and how it had created a faster, more pressure-filled environment with higher expectations. Here are some descriptions of Comco under NEWT:

“[I]t’s a hard – it’s a hard time at Comco right now. Like, it’s affected, like, me at work... It’s affected my, like, relationships, how much I have to be on, and that’s for sure happening with folks across the organization”

“NEWT is really high stress right now”

“...[I]t is a very, very busy, very stressful time in the organization”

NEWT was added on to workers’ existing workloads so one of the reasons behind the increased stress was this compounding of work volume. Marvin, a manager, described it as such, when I asked about the general mood and tenor at Comco:

“Right now, um, it’s very busy. I would say, yeah, I would say that in the years that I’ve been here, this is busiest and the most stress that I’ve seen in the organization.... [A]nd because of NEWT, we don’t have the resiliency to deal with some of the other stuff that comes up. So while over these [past] years, there’s been lots of other things that have come up, lots of other issues, um, but we haven’t had NEWT at the same time. So to me, that’s the - like if we didn’t have any other issues coming up, NEWT would be fine. If we didn’t have NEWT, dealing with all the other issues would be fine. Between the two of them together, it’s feeling pretty heavy right now.”

The heaviness was evidenced in some workers’ hours. Jesse reported “80 hours a week” during a two month period related to NEWT, while Tag reported somewhere around 50. A few workers reported 70, or 75 hours with one manager reporting “over a hundred” during some particularly intense weeks. Managers and senior managers were more likely to report longer hours even without the exigencies of NEWT, but for many, NEWT had increased their hours, not consistently over the months-long implementation period, but in periodic bursts. In some

instances, working hours extended into the weekends, with workers reporting marathon hotel sessions to meet deadlines.

An increase in hours reflected higher expectations under NEWT. I asked one manager about why he felt the need to put in extremely long hours – whether that was an explicit or implicit expectation on the part of Comco:

Natasha: So, like, where is that pressure coming from to work those hours? Was it external? Did your bosses specifically say, ‘I need you to put in this number of hours per week?’ Or was it more implicit than that?

Manager: I’d say, I’d say, generally, there’s just, like, a vibe, and it’s, like, it’s sort of like, sort of unnameable, but not really. It’s just like this is important. It might be the most important thing we’ve done. It’s...probably, like, the biggest in terms of cost and people and scope project we’ve ever done. So there’s a bit of that. And then I think it’s just, like, the vibe would also just be, like, you don’t need to be a genius to, like, kind of look at email and time stamps of, like, when people are sending things and seeing, like, oh, if I don’t, if I’m not, like, on, like, a weekend or at night, like, I’ll miss stuff.

The scale of NEWT communicated a high degree of importance which helped increase workers’ hours. But as this manager notes, “you don’t need to be a genius to look at email and time stamps of when people are sending things”. There is a fear of missing out on the decision-making process, but also, a sense that people are working around the clock. Paul, a manager, echoes this:

“[F]or this project that I’ve been part of – NEWT – the long hours are actually quite normal and probably expected. So it’s been a bit of a culture shift for this organization.”

Long hours were normal and expected under NEWT, reinforced by things like email time stamps and the general ‘vibe’.

They were exacerbated by the occasional postponement/cancellation of vacations and the temporary elimination of flexible schedules for employees working on NEWT. Recall the

discussion of Dan whose flexible schedule was rescinded under NEWT, leaving he and his partner needing to find alternate child care.

There is a historical precedent to this: Yahoo, Hewlett-Packard (HP), Bank of America, Best Buy, Honeywell, Aetna, and IBM all revoked flexibility initiatives owing to “significant organizational changes or significant business challenges”, sometimes in relation to the emergence of new technologies (Kelly and Moen 2020: 189). The idea at Comco was that this was a temporary revocation. Though it is possible to see how its framing as temporary would help to make it more palatable to employees.

Managers noted that the increased pace/volume of NEWT was taxing the entire organization and taking a toll on workers.

“It isn’t sustainable, right. People are burning out pretty regularly here” (manager).

“...[T]he executives and the board recognize that NEWT is taxing the entire organization. And so how do we make sure that our people are ok, right. And we are genuinely concerned about [them]. We also know that if you burn out all your employees, we're not going to get to where we need to get to (manager)

Because of the increased stress and strain faced by workers, concern about them was heightened under NEWT, according to Torren, manager, reflecting Comco’s culture of care:

“[T]here's a heightened sense of concern about employee well-being right now. And so, like, you know, I've got um, somebody on my team that hasn't taken a lot of vacation. I've been on his back, right, like you better take some time off, because as we get deeper into the fall, I'm gonna have to say no. So, - and I want you refreshed...I want you to get some rest. But it's because, like, my expectations going forward are gonna' be pretty high. So, um, so it's a bit selfish, it's a bit selfless, because I want the person to take care of themselves. But it is more challenging right now.

As evidence for the heightened concern about employees, Torren describes encouraging one of his workers to take vacation because he hasn’t taken a lot of it and he wants the worker to feel

refreshed. His concern is “selfless”, but underpinning it is also the knowledge that his “expectations going forward are gonna’ be pretty high” and he wants the person to be able to deliver. Here again is the twinning of care and commitment. There is an implicit and expected trade-off between encouraging a worker to use vacation time and higher expectations after the rest period is up. Encouraging rest is predicated on higher performance in the future.

While workers struggled with the pace and intensity under NEWT, managers also lauded the new way of working as an improvement on how things were done before. One manager verbalized the consensus view of work under NEWT – that a change to the ways work gets done, and how efficiently, were ultimately desirable:

“I don't think we want to see the same pace of work go on, but I think we do want to see a change in the way we work. Our vision is that we will be doing some very different and very interesting things in the future. And our ability to deliver on that will require us to be more agile, more dynamic, probably more flexible in the way that, in the way that we work. Definitely, more efficient...”.

While managers recognized the cost of a speedier pace and heavier workloads, they also celebrated the fact that work, and decisions, were faster. Parker, a manager, said at one point he hoped the pace would remain the same and lamented the fact that, historically, people “take too long to make decisions here”.

When I asked whether NEWT marked a permanent cultural shift, a manager, said:

“Yeah that’s a good question. I think, I think some of our leaders would like to see that.”

Another manager confirmed that view and emphasized this change would be beneficial for both employer and employee:

Natasha: Do you think that NEWT marks a permanent cultural shift in terms of
pace and intensity?

- Martin: I think, um, it is a first-step in terms of a different type of work place culture here. I don't know that we'll sustain that level of intensity. But, um, the follow-up intensity after everything all settles will [probably] be bigger, faster than it was prior to NEWT.
- Natasha: Is that good or bad?
- Martin: Good.
- Natasha: It's a good thing, okay.
- Martin: Yeah, uh, this place needs to be a little bit more efficient, it could benefit from feeling a little bit of pressure. I think there's, like, good pressure to be had because I think that people would gain a greater sense of accomplishment when they put a little bit more effort into it to achieve a goal. And, there's, like, chunks of Comco that prior to NEWT were comfy.

For Martin, and others, a faster pace and greater efficiency represented a boon for both worker and workplace. The costs associated with increasing the pace and expectations aren't seen as such. But another manager, noted the tension between Comco under NEWT and old Comco: "We really value work-life balance at Comco, and I think that's one of the things that makes a lot of us very proud to work here. But in these types of projects, I think...[...] some of those expectations have to shift a little bit in order for us to get the work done. That to me is a bit of a competing philosophy."

Gender as frame

In theory, in the context of a caring organization, men's care should be encouraged and facilitated. In practice however, employees at Comco still relied on gender to understand and interpret men's involvement in care. Gender operated as both a subtle perceptual frame and as an explicit criterion for evaluating women and men differently.

Several workers noted the subtle surprise engendered in interactions when men did something that contradicted masculinity norms. When asked whether moms' and dads' caregiving absences are viewed differently at work, Carl replied thusly:

Carl: "I think so, a bit, cuz I definitely hear a lot more of the moms taking that time off. It's like, oh my kid has a school recital or whatever kind of thing. It's usually the mom that's going. I don't hear as often the dad going.... [A]nd then when a guy says it, it makes me remember them. I'd say, oh, well they're doing it? Interesting. Whereas like if a woman does it, I don't even think much about it. It's like, oh, yeah that's cool....[B]ut then, yeah, when the dad says it, it's like, oh! He's going, ok.

Natasha: So there's still a little bit of a double take or like a bit of surprise?

Carl: Yeah, and then you're just like, oh yeah. That's ok, that's good. But like... It's not, just, like totally equal. I wouldn't, yeah. I don't think it's like that, not for me and, I don't know for other guys...

Carl's surprise – and the fact that he remembers men who leave work for child-related events – reveals that when men attend to something family-related at work, it violates gender normative expectations. He affirms that 'it's not totally equal' from his perspective. The reaction of surprise is not merely reaction though – it is also interactional performance (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2006). By performing surprise in the context of men providing care, he reinforces what is normative (and ultimately, the gendered organization itself (Acker 1990)). Surprise draws attention to a perceived breach in the normative order.

Todd, a manager at Comco, echoes Carl's thinking that women are assumed to be the default caregivers: "I think there's still the assumption that, that women will be the first ones to go and take care of kids...". He imagines that mild surprise is how many in the organization would react to a request for childcare accommodations by a father versus a mother:

“I think if, if a dad wanted to have like, a change to their work schedule to accommodate childcare issues, then that might be looked at differently than a mom that wants to change their schedule to accommodate childcare issues. And I don't think they would say, yes to one and no to the other. But I just think it would be – I believe it would be perceived a bit differently, it might be um, I dunno. I'm trying not to overstate this. Because like I don't think it's like a black and white difference. It's different shades of gray. I just think that it's a bit darker towards the men than it is towards the women. So I'm trying to be careful in my comments, cuz I don't wanna overstate it as being worse than it is. But I just think if a woman - maybe to be simple - if a woman came and said I needed some accommodations for childcare issues, they would be like, ok, you know, what do you wanna' do? And if a man came in, it would be like, oh, oh ok, well what is it that you wanna' do, how's that gonna' work with your wife's schedule. Right, like, I just - and then I think they'd [be], oh ok, that's fine. But it would just be that little bit of... yeah”.

Todd verbalizes that many would react with hesitation and be slightly taken-aback when confronted with a male employee requesting childcare accommodations: ‘it would be perceived a bit differently’ compared to a female employee making a request. He’s careful not to overstate the differences in reaction towards men asking versus women, but he thinks there would be that “little bit of... yeah”. When a woman makes a request, the decision-making goes to “ok, what do you wanna' do”. When a man makes a request, his *wife's* schedule is cognitively primed.

Todd’s quote illustrates the subtle bias (e.g. stereotypes around who is and isn’t a legitimate caregiver) that can enter into decision-making around accommodations. Men still aren’t seen as default (and therefore, legitimate) caregivers like women and this can influence managerial reactions to flexibility requests, especially when decision-making is discretionary.

Subtlety was in fact key to how gendered expectations operated at Comco. The mild reactions of surprise and hesitation of both Todd and Carl reflect not only that a violation of the normative gender order has occurred, but also that any kind of differential or discriminatory treatment on the basis of gender is seen as unprofessional and illegitimate. Indeed, professional work norms operated in a way that restrained the more explicit gendered behaviour characteristic of Manuco’s shop floor.

I asked Perry, a manager, how it's viewed when mothers and fathers are involved in child care, and whether it's perceived differently. The following exchange is revealing for illustrating the discrepancy between what's expected and what may be done in practice:

Natasha: Okay. Do you think that it's viewed differently when moms and dads are sort of involved in childcare? Like, if a dad has to pop out early versus a mom, or if a dad goes on a leave versus a mom, or if a dad goes on a flex schedule versus a mom, do you think those things are perceived differently?

Perry: Um, the official position is there is no difference.

Natasha: Yes, officially.

Perry: And like, depending on who the leadership team is in a particular work group, it isn't different. But I think in reality, you know, like any organization that's larger, there's, like, pockets of groups and little mini cultures and/or leaders who uh... still don't quite treat people the same.

Natasha: Okay, have you ever witnessed that, or do you have any evidence to . . . ?

Perry: I haven't witnessed it, but I, um, certainly had to have some coaching chats with various [managers] who phone or were made aware of situations that weren't necessarily equitable. So, just to remind them that there is no difference.

Natasha: Between men and women?

Perry: Yeah.

Natasha: That's interesting. What do those conversations actually look like? Like, can you tell me a little more about that?

Perry: I can't give you a specific example, but it might be a [sick] day for a kid and the father has to go home, 'cuz the mother's at work somewhere else. And it isn't that they say no, but it's sort of like, 'why are you doing that?' kind of comment.

Natasha: Like, where's your wife?

Perry: Yeah. Like, you know, yeah, it's a little bit of a gender paradigm thing versus a denial... there's that sort of, "Okay, but, where's your wife?" Like, there's a proviso at the end that . . .

Natasha: And so, how do you approach that?

Perry: Usually try to just coach it in the moment or encourage [managers] to be gender-neutral on all requests, essentially.

Perry calls out those who 'don't quite treat people the same' and discusses needing to 'remind them that there is no difference'. He illustrates the types of comments or thought processes managers might have in relation to fathers' flex requests, saying, like Todd above, that the response won't be a firm 'no', but a more subtle, 'why are you doing that' kind of comment – a proviso that isn't a denial necessarily, but a signal that the manager may not be completely comfortable with the request being made. Because Comco's official position is equal treatment of women and men, the problem may not be viewed as the organization writ large, but rather the individual erring managers whose behaviour occasionally needs correction.

Penner, a worker, discussed the guilt he felt around missing work frequently because of his oft-ill child and attributed it, at least partially, to his perception that others may think it should be moms – not dads – taking care of sick kids:

Penner: But the guiltiness that you're missing work, the expectations that, you know, you have expectations for other people, commitments... I have so much work on my plate already, I'm going to be behind another day. And you can't do it from home, that's where the guiltiness comes or when you're just missing a lot of work. As a dad I feel that it's a little bit - I feel that females look at dads like, why is the dad doing that and not the mom?

Natasha: Do they [say] that?

- Penner: They don't do that per se, it's my perception, it's how I feel inside.
- Natasha: Have you ever gotten any comments from anyone or any sideways glances or anything like that, or even teasing?
- Penner: No, I haven't had teasing or anything like that but I've had people question – and I don't think they mean it in any harmful or judgmental way but, you know, people will say, so what is your wife – how come she's not home or how come she can't take care of [them]?

Initially, he attributes this perception to his own internal feelings, which is itself telling, signifying as it does a well-entrenched and taken-for-granted worldview shaped by gender and implicating fathers' own self-policing in why they may be less likely to take advantage of workplace flex policies. However, he goes on to admit that he has received comments from coworkers along those lines. This exchange points to how a feeling of gender accountability can operate regardless of the presence of an audience and still influence behaviour (Ridgeway 2011). We are always performing gender, even if only for imagined others (West and Zimmerman 1987).

The fact that Penner attributes no ill-intention to his coworker's remark is also revealing. It suggests that he perceived it as a fleeting or perhaps innocent comment – but nevertheless, one that stayed with him. The speaker intended no harm, according to Penner, but the remark stuck. Perhaps because, as he notes above, he feels guilt over his actions (missing work to provide care) and he feels his guilt is justified in this context (his wife *should* be at home taking care of their child). The coworker's comment is so aligned with our cultural expectations that in a sense, Penner feels legitimately called out. His primary responsibility is not in fact to his child, but to his workplace.

Despite officially ‘gender-blind’ discourses (Smithson and Stokoe 2005), workers at Comco still relied on gender as a frame for understanding and interpreting men’s involvement in care. Both workers and managers admitted to operating with a gendered lens and references to wives still came up in conversations around dads’ care. These interactions reinforce the gendered nature of Comco, the ideal worker norm, and views that fathers and mothers are different and have distinct roles. Though gendered thinking and language operated more subtly here than at Manuco, it was still present and informed managers’ and coworkers’ reactions to fathers’ involvement in care.

Conclusion

Comco’s culture of care was exemplified in its formal policies/practices and workers’ use of them as well as workers’ general impressions of the workplace. But this culture of care was complicated – and the primacy of work maintained – by several factors: permeable work-non-work boundaries, workers’ high level of commitment and dedication to the organization, long hours and pressure to get the work done, managers’ discretion around granting flexibility requests, the implementation of new technology, and gender as a cognitive frame for understanding men’s care. In many instances, and in different ways, men’s caregiving was rendered marginal relative to the exigencies of work. Like Manuco, Comco reinforced the ideal worker norm and its gendered nature. To some extent, Comco was effectively balancing its care for multiple constituencies over time, ensuring its own longevity and therefore, ensuring the survival and even spread, of its way of operating. Organizations should be viewed as inherently paradoxical, rife with contradictions. Embracing that might mean a greater chance of success and survival as an organization, which means enhanced legitimacy in the organizational field. This,

in turn, could translate to greater influence over other organizations which could help the spread of caring cultures and family-friendliness more generally. By subsuming the needs of individual workers to the survival imperatives of the organization, Comco was ensuring the durability of its way of life.

Chapter 9: Discussion

Recap

This research examined two distinct workplace contexts, Mancuo and Comco, and their flexibility for fathers. I investigated fathers' experiences managing their work and care and found that although there was variability in how each workplace constrained fathers' caregiving time, they both confined fathers' care to the margins in and around work time/space. The primacy of work was preserved at both sites, though the mechanisms differed. Fathers' ability to enact involved fatherhood was limited – and the ideal worker maintained – in these gendered organizations. The analysis of these sites demonstrates how blue and white-collar work organizations continue to devalue and gender caregiving in western, capitalist economies, like Canada.

While a large body of research has explored mothers' experiences in the workplace, fathers have been less well studied, especially both white and blue collar workers in a comparative fashion. Understanding some of the workplace barriers to fathers' care addresses one of the most resistant sources of continued gender inequality – women's primary responsibility for caregiving.

In my research, fathers found – and managers corroborated – that workplaces were flexible in some respects. Fathers tended to characterize their workplaces as flexible – a fact potentially owing to their own minimal and gendered expectations – and workplaces supported specific kinds of absences.

At the same time, flexibility and fathers' ability to attend to their caregiving responsibilities, were constrained. Manuco was an explicitly gendered and masculine context. It presumed a male ideal worker and this was visible in the structure and control of time, the lack

of workplace policies, and even in how workers informally interacted with one another. In this mostly-male environment, masculinity pressures operated subtly (and sometimes not-so-subtly) to hold workers to account. Workers teased one another about absences – calling out deviations from masculinist normative work time – and workers themselves defined their care needs in limited ways. In this way, masculinity operated as a strategy of worker control (c.f. Cooper 2000).

Comco was Manuco's opposite in some ways – a white-collar workplace with a feminist and family-friendly culture of care. Here, fathers' caregiving was challenged by a seemingly gender-neutral high commitment work context (yet, underpinned by the ideal worker norm). The high level of commitment amongst Comco workers meant workers went the extra mile, trying to scale the mountain of, in one manager's words, the "limitless work to get done". Though this work intensification was not explicitly gendered, it operated alongside the more gendered understandings of fathers' care that were especially visible in managers' and coworkers' reactions.

While both organizations operated in gendered ways, Comco's ideal worker expectations and constraints on care were democratized in a sense, symptomatic of the broad capitalist devaluing of care work and the push towards work intensification more generally. Indeed, the gendered effects were most apparent in the subtle reactions and responses towards fathers' care by managers and coworkers. Manuco's constraints on care more obviously hinged upon gendered understandings of fathers and men, perhaps most evident in the noticeable absence of work-family discourse and the lack of work-family policies in this male-dominated organization. These differences are important because they point to different organizational solutions to fathers' lower involvement in care.

Yet, the outcome – that fathers’ care is constrained because organizations continue to presume an ideal worker – is similar. Analyzing these two radically different organizations comparatively demonstrates the resilience and staying power of gender and the ideal worker norm. While past scholars have highlighted the differences between different classes of men and their work-family issues (Williams 2010), my research underscores persistent similarities as well. We may not think of workers in blue and white-collar environments as sharing similar work-family struggles, but indeed, they are both coming up against the ideal worker norm and gender normative attitudes around care.

We see in this research the enduring relevance of Joan Acker’s framework and her theory of gendered organizations, over thirty years later. While this framework has often been used to examine how gender inequalities *within* organizations are maintained, it is also useful for considering how organizations maintain inequalities without. By reinforcing men’s roles as breadwinners and the primacy of paid work, these organizations contribute to the preservation of the gendered division of labour at home and the overall structure of male advantage, even while presenting barriers to individual fathers who need or wish to be more involved in domestic labour and the work of care.

Acker’s framework directs us to the important, but under-explored, mechanisms through which gendered organizations are maintained and men’s care marginalized – structure, culture, interactions, and organizational logic. These mechanisms intertwined at Manuco, resulting in few work-family policies in the first place and the apparent irrelevance of work-family issues writ large, a culture that foreclosed certain caregiving possibilities, and shop floor interactions that reinforced the primacy of paid work and marginalized care. Even though the ideal worker norm is typically seen as a white-collar norm, it operated in this context as the underlying assumption

of how workers would act. At Comco, the structural feature of a more evenly gender-split workforce, a culture of care, and organizational logic that saw workers holistically and offered work-family policies, were counter-balanced by a culture of commitment and interactional processes that reinforced the primacy of paid work and men's roles as breadwinners.

Ultimately, Acker argues that the processes of organizations are “posited upon the prior exclusion of women” (154). To this we can add “and caregivers”. Restoring the absent bodies of those who are excluded means “redefining work and work relations” wherein “the rhythm and timing of work would be adapted to the rhythms of life outside of work” (154-155) rather than (exclusively) the other way around.

What are some implications of this research? And what policy recommendations follow from the results? In what follows, I will discuss some ways this study can inform current research and practice, and make some recommendations for change at both the levels of policy and culture. I will conclude with some limitations and future directions.

Extension and implications

My research shows that in two very different workplaces, coworkers and managers/supervisors continue to rely on gender to understand and interpret men's care at work. This means that facilitating fathers' care is not simply about offering more family-friendly policies (though availability of flexible policies/practices is certainly a first step), but requires culture change, as scholars have pointed out previously (e.g. Bailyn 2006). However, in Comco, which had a ‘culture of care’, fathers' care was still constrained, suggesting that even in the most progressive workplaces, care may continue to be deprioritized relative to paid work, especially for men, as long as the broad cultural context around fathers, care, etc. fails to change in more radical ways.

Another implication is that focusing on both flexibility and inflexibility is important in considering how workers manage their care-work lives. We need to consider how workplaces both limit and facilitate fathers' care – and how they may do this in a simultaneous and complex fashion (Brandth and Kvande 2019; Lewis and Stumbitz 2017). This leads away from describing workplaces as flexible *or* inflexible and instead points to their complex mixtures of flexibility and constraints. For instance, while Manuco was generally less flexible than Comco, its rigidly defined boundaries helped workers leave work at work. Conversely, the dedication and commitment that Comco workers had for their jobs (which partially resulted from the flexibility they had) led workers to work more outside of official work time. Thus, while scholars have argued for specifically targeting traditional blue-collar, male-dominated organizations with work-family measures (e.g. Mauno et al. 2005), it is important to consider that many workplaces would likely benefit from a variety of different work-family interventions. What matters is the specific ways in which workplace organization and practices intersect with workers caregiving obligations.

Finally, with the ongoing pandemic, fathers, care and working flexibly have been thrust into the spotlight. To some extent, the pandemic has normalized fathers' care as governments have declared lockdowns and organizations have sent certain workers home, particularly those white-collar workers who rely on information and communications technologies (Reuschke and Felstead 2020). For many men, this time at home has increased their participation in child care, demonstrating the effect remote working can have on involvement in care (Carlson, Petts, and Pepin 2020; Shafer, Scheibling, and Milkie 2020). Yet, other research shows the employment-related penalties women have incurred during Covid owing to their continued, increased and disproportionate care responsibilities (see Bariola and Collins 2021 for a discussion). For

instance, the pandemic widened the existing gender gap in employment for women workers, especially those parents of young school-aged children and those with a high school education or less (Qian and Fuller 2020). With many parents reporting no changes to their domestic labour during the pandemic, and many mothers taking on a greater share of the work than pre-pandemic, Carlson et al. (2020) conclude that “policies that allow men to be at home more (e.g. job flexibility) are insufficient to fully alleviate gender inequality in domestic labour” (28).

Furthermore, organizations themselves appear to be ambivalent about flexible and remote work. Their support depends partially on their sector. For instance, technology companies were often operating remotely pre-pandemic, while older financial companies have been more resistant to changes. Many companies might ultimately adopt a hybrid approach of remote and in-person working (Yeung 2021).

Ultimately, there are limits to possible reconfigurations of work and care in Covid. For one thing, less privileged workers have less likelihood of working from home (Mongey and Weinberg 2020). Indeed, pandemic egalitarianism is likely much more possible for affluent couples whose jobs and financial resources allow for this (Qian and Fuller 2020). And then there are the existing gendered employment gaps that preceded Covid and were widened because of it. Organizational policies for flexibility don’t address the gendered nature of care, and thus may fail to significantly alter gendered patterns of care.

Policy and practice recommendations

Leaves

Scholars and practitioners interested in increasing father involvement in caregiving have devoted much attention to policy parameters around parental leave Baird and O’Brien 2015; O’Brien

2009; Duvander and Johansson 2012). This attention stems partially from the fact that fathers' involvement in care at birth predicts involvement over time (Wray 2020). Yet caregiving demands extend well past infancy, and my research points to the importance of additional leaves, like personal days, sick time, and other job-protected periods of time off for fathers' involvement in care. Making these provisions more accessible to workers and dads might incentivize care just as use-it-or-lose-it paternity leaves increase fathers' long-term involvement in care (Wray 2020).

First, employers should offer more sick days especially in cases where workers have few, like at Manuco. Sick days should also have more expansive uses. At Comco, for instance, workers were able to use their ten paid sick days to care for themselves or other members of their family. Workers were happy with the number of sick days available to them (with many saying they do not use them all each year) and with their general all-purpose application. At Manuco, on the other hand, workers said three paid sick days was too few (as one worker pointed out, a single case of flu often requires a whole week to recover), having to use unpaid time (or vacation time) in the case of longer-term illness or injury – their own or their children's. Workers also recounted the generalized suspicion present when dads left to care for sick kids – the widespread tendency to view these types of absences as illegitimate reflects a very narrowly defined 'sick day', and also the view that men who leave work for sick kids aren't really tending to them, but using their sickness as a cover for some other activity. In the past, Manuco's workers' association proposed increasing the number of days and also changing them to personal days in

order to facilitate workers' care of sick dependents; these proposals were denied¹⁰. While legal minimums for sick days are set by provincial/territorial employment standards acts and federally, in the Canada Labour Code¹¹, organizations can choose to implement more, as did Comco. The costs to organizations of implementing more sick days (broadly defined) are offset by the gains from increased productivity, reduced turnover, and fewer instances of workers working while sick (or while their children are sick) – a costly risk in non-pandemic times but even more so in the era of Covid-19¹².

Workers should also be given personal time during the year for appointments, emergencies, and other sporadic periods of time away. Vacation time should be expanded beyond provincial minimums to help facilitate fathers' care and from an organizational perspective, in recognition that planned absences help stem productivity declines (Amato 2017) and use of vacation time is associated with better worker health and satisfaction (Hilbrecht and Smale 2016). More generous vacation time may be especially important for immigrant workers, like the Filipino workers at Manuco who took extended time away to visit family in the Philippines. Beyond this, allowing workers to bank their vacation time was helpful in allowing them to save up sufficiently long periods to make these extended trips. Researchers have noted

¹⁰ Other groups, such as the Workers' Action Centre – a Toronto-based advocacy group for workers' rights – have also made the call for statutory sick time. In light of Covid-19, they recommend the provinces and the federal government institute 10 days of paid sick time to be paid by employers. (<https://workersactioncentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Implementing-10-days-of-paid-sick-leave-May-2020.pdf>)

¹¹ Most jurisdictions only mandate a minimum number of unpaid sick days. Federally, and in Quebec and P.E.I., there are also minimums for paid days.

¹² The federal government has instituted the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit to help workers during Covid-19. It provides \$500 (for up to two weeks) to individuals who are sick, need to self-isolate or have an underlying health condition that makes them more vulnerable to the virus. While this paid period of sick time is undoubtedly helpful to some individuals, there are issues around delayed payments because individuals need to apply (unlike sick pay paid by employers which is received like regular earnings) and there is no indication whether it will continue post-Covid.

that workers often fail to use all of their available vacation time every year (e.g. Hilbrecht and Smale 2016), so offering more time may not be effective in facilitating involved fathering without corresponding culture change (see below).

Other leaves such as paternity leave should also be expanded at workplaces. At both Manuco and Comco, there were one and two paid days respectively. While not legally required to offer these days – and they can indeed be seen as gestures of goodwill by employers – these should be expanded to acknowledge that norms around fathering are shifting and many dads desire intensive hands-on involvement right from their children’s births. Providing longer paid paternity leave at the workplace should accompany government efforts in this regard. Although both Quebec and the rest of Canada offer use-it-or-lose-it leaves targeted at dads, these periods are rather short (up to 5 weeks in Quebec, and 5 weeks under the standard leave and 8 weeks under the extended leave outside of Quebec) and would likely benefit father involvement if they were extended. Furthermore, the payment amounts are low, especially outside of Quebec (55% for standard leave and 33% for extended leave) and would likely increase take-up if they were higher.

Flexible working

Workers should have the option of compressed work weeks, part-time schedules, job sharing, reduced hours, telecommuting and flexible starting and stopping times (flextime) where the nature of work allows. Yet flexible work policies in and of themselves are not a complete solution to the issue of balancing work and care. For one thing, as discussed with Comco workers, flexibility can mean work spills into non-work time. In addition, flexibility can trigger ‘flexibility stigma’ for the user and can create problems around work coordination for the organization (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013). I did not observe flexibility stigma at

Comco, but Comco had a culture of care and policy use that helped counter it (especially in Human Resources and the other departments where I spent much of my time). Indeed, as I'll discuss below, a culture of use is vital for the effective implementation of policies. Addressing the issue of work coordination can be done by organizing work collectively, by teams, in a bottom-up fashion (Kelly and Moen 2020). Finally, policies are often only available to certain privileged workers, and even then, often at the discretion of managers, a pattern not unique to Comfim (Comfort, Johnson, and Wallace 2003; Kelly and Kalev 2006; Kelly and Moen 2007; Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, and Drescher-Burke 2005). Ultimately, policies such as these should be seen as part of a broader toolkit that helps workers combine their paid work and care.

Flexible working options also need to be tailored to the job. Blue-collar workers, unlike many white-collar workers, need to be on the premises so remote work does not make sense. However, the other forms of flexible working mentioned above do. In fact, in some manufacturing firms, voluntary hours' reductions/part-time schedules may be one way of maintaining jobs in the context of industry downturns (a move potentially beneficial for dads providing care to dependent children). At Manuco, for instance, workers were on a voluntary work share program and while there were mixed feelings around it (especially because it potentially heralded upcoming layoffs), some appreciated having the extra time at home. Indeed, a policy like that can be seen to benefit both employers and employees. While it may seem counter-intuitive to introduce flexible working options when organizations are facing difficulty this may in fact be an opportune time to counter flexibility stigma by taking judgments of commitment out of the equation and normalizing alternative ways of working.

Given that men are less likely to use available workplace policies (Hill, Jacob, Shannon, Brennan, Blanchard, and Martinengo 2008), workplaces should consider publicizing widely that

family-friendly policies are available for both women and men. Workplaces could offer periodic reminders about what policies are available and to whom. They could do this through emails, internal communications platforms, physical postings on shop floor bulletin boards, and in group meetings. While I did not find that workers were unaware of the policies available to them, publicizing policies can help shape the normative context around use. This would help facilitate fathers' caregiving, especially when dads do not feel that specific policies, like reduced hours schedules, are available to them (Cook et al. 2020).

Cross-training

Though Manuco engaged in some cross-training (in which workers were trained in multiple processes and on multiple machines, instead of just one) implementing this to a greater extent – at both workplaces – would help ease the burden when employees take time away from work. This would have multiple salutary effects – fathers would feel less guilt knowing they have coverage (and would therefore be more likely to take time when they need to rather than muscling through), coworkers would communicate more positively about fathers' absences, and the whole organization would benefit from greater productivity. The key with cross-training is to adopt it while also avoiding work intensification, which could have the opposite intended effect (Lambert, Haley-lock, and Henly 2012).

The problem with workplace policies

One takeaway from this research is that even in a progressive workplace like Comco, available policies had limits on their use and could always be rescinded (even temporarily). As long as workplace policies fail to be undergirded by law, they are subject to removal and discretionary

application by the employer. This may be especially true for policies that lack full institutionalization like work-family arrangements. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine an employer suddenly revoking sick time (even if their paid sick days exceed provincial minimums), in light of how sick time is viewed. Yet, we regularly hear about workplaces backtracking on flexibility policies – not just at Comco, but at Best Buy, Hewlett Packard, IBM, Yahoo, Bank of America, Honeywell, Aetna, and TOMO (Kelly and Moen 2020). For policies to be more helpful to workers, they need to be more fully institutionalized, underpinned by law, and cushioned by a culture of use.

Culture recommendations

Without changing organizational culture, additional and expansive policies will not facilitate fathers' care to the extent required for broad gender change. Organizations' work-family cultures – including norms around caregiving and time away from work – need to be adapted to the current workforce, one that is responsible for (and invested in) both care and paid labour.

Managerial discretion

Though the model of policy implementation via managerial discretion has its upsides – individualized work arrangements that can be tailored to workers' particular needs – my research highlights that it leaves room for managers' own biases to enter into decision-making. Even when *explicitly* gendered bias is subtle (like at Comco) managers still often operate according to ideal worker logic, viewing time away from work as something out of the norm. And although managers and supervisors at Manuco seemed to be more forthright in their denial of time off (thinking here of Dylan's last-minute attempt to care for his child on a day-off and the initial

denial from his manager, as per Dylan's recounting), the limits of discretion at Comco are still clear. In the absence of legally mandated flexible work options, workplaces should do their best to treat flexible work in a similar vein as vacation and sick time – as available to workers, with minimal limitations on their use.

Ideal worker norm

Offering more policies to more workers, as I discussed above, is in some ways a half measure for the real, deep culture change that needs to be happen in order to facilitate fathers' caregiving. Organizations need to challenge the idea that workers have "no other loyalties, no other life" (Kanter 1977: 15). They need to view workers holistically and to "accept their necessarily circumscribed relation to the company in which they work" (Bailyn 2006: 135). This goes beyond occasionally allowing workers to leave early to pick up the kids from school. It involves a radical rethinking of "conventional time expectations" (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, and Moen 2010: 284). For instance, when Best Buy implemented its Results-Only Work Environment, workers were given autonomy in terms of when and where they did their work, as long as the work got done (Kelly et al. 2010; Ressler and Thompson 2008). Not only that, ROWE was premised on deep culture change, rejecting "long hours, visible busyness, and accepting unplanned work as signs of commitment or productivity" and validating "the daily integration of work and personal life, including the prioritization of personal responsibilities at times" (Kelly et al. 2010: 297-298). Workers engaged in role-play sessions where they were confronted with normative responses to work time like "Your kid is sick again"? They were encouraged to respond in ways that challenged old time norms, by responding with "Is there something you need?"

While initiatives such as this go much farther than typical work-family measures and reduced workers' feelings of work-family conflict (Kelly, Moen, and Tranby 2011), other research has found that ROWE did not actually increase parental time with children (Hill, Tranby, Kelly, and Moen 2013). And while mothers eagerly adopted these measures, younger men in particular were more cautious, attesting to the ongoing resiliency of the ideal worker myth. Furthermore, some senior men in the organization opted out entirely, choosing to maintain the existing cultures of their departments (Kelly et al. 2010). ROWE is an example of what systemic change could look like in an organization – an earnest attempt to change not just policies but a culture centered on the ideal worker norm. What would improve ROWE – and what workplaces should do in order to facilitate fathers' care – is to apply ROWE-type policies/practices as consistently as possible across the organization and legitimize workers' care responsibilities to encourage fathers' participation as well.

More recently, Erin Kelly and Phyllis Moen (2020) wrote about their plan for work redesign at TOMO (the Fortune 500 company they studied), and addressing the problems of “the unrealistic demands and unsustainable toll of working long hours and feeling always on” (77). Work redesign is not simply about “policy changes written in some employee manual” or “individual accommodations” or “encourag[ing] individual workers to simply be more organized” (78). It is about constructing a “new normal” around “what is expected and what is done” (78). It gives workers control over how, when and where they work and instead of ‘flexibility as accommodation’, flexibility (period) becomes the new normal. Their initiative – STAR (Support. Transform. Achieve. Results.) – is an example of a ‘dual-agenda work redesign’ meaning it targets the dual agendas of organizational concerns around performance and effectiveness and employee concerns around family time, their own health, etc. It is based on

ROWE and thus similarly challenges the ideal worker norm in its presumption of continuous availability and total dedication to the job, not only recognizing but “affirm[ing] that employees are people with responsibilities and interests outside of work” (82). While STAR was ultimately rescinded as the result of a merger with another company, it proved successful and did not face the same gendered resistance as ROWE. This likely relates to the fact that TOMO employees were older than those at Best Buy (and therefore included many people caring for children and older adults) and the hierarchy at TOMO was relatively flat – meaning workers were perhaps not as concerned about promotion prospects and the implications a work redesign program might have for them. STAR was also implemented collectively, in a bottom-up fashion, meaning that flexible work practices were adopted by whole teams, rather than individuals in need of accommodation. It therefore lacked the same gendered framing that ROWE seemed to have.

Valuing time for care

Reframing care-related absences so that workers are not seen as shirking, but rather as responding appropriately and responsibly to legitimate needs will help to facilitate fathers’ caregiving. This is partially about the broad cultural devaluing of care, which is a complex issue that extends well beyond the context of any one organization. Indeed, it is likely that mothers experienced some of the constraints I discuss as well – that even when organizations act in relatively gender-neutral ways (like Comco did), they still prioritize their own goals above the caregiving needs of their employees. However, there is also a gendered element to valuing and reframing care, especially evident at Manuco. As long as men continue to be seen as secondary caregivers and primary earners, organizations will continue to cast a side-eye at involved dads.

One possible way workplaces can raise the legitimacy of caregiving is by tying it to business performance. Work-family policies/practices are rationalized by evidence showing they may lead to improved consumer and workplace safety, greater employee commitment, enhanced productivity, reduced employee stress, and decreased turnover/greater prospects for recruitment (see Williams 2010, pp. 66-71 for a review). If organizations were to publicize why they themselves have a vested interest in workers attending to their care needs – that indeed, workers feeling able to attend to their care responsibilities is a good thing for the workplace – then care-related absences may take on a sheen of validity and even, of the collective (organizational) good. For instance, STAR’s positioning as a dual-agenda work redesign, benefiting both employee and employer, may have made the initiative more palatable to men because of its emphasis on ‘working smarter’ and increasing workplace effectiveness – rather than being presented as a ‘work-family balance’ initiative implicitly targeted at mothers (Kelly and Moen 2020).

Tying care to business performance is a pragmatic, neoliberal, and partial solution to the problem of undervaluing care. For caregiving to be truly prioritized – in workplaces and beyond – there need to be broad and seismic shifts in how it is viewed.

Rethinking Normative Work Time

Ultimately, a broad rethinking of work time is in order. Organizations can benefit from changing and adapting. Reimagining work time – not just when and where work should be done, but *how much* – would reflect the fact that workers are not ideal, i.e. existing without other responsibilities. In fact, workers’ family lives are integral to (rather than separate from) working life. Embracing that allows both workers and workplaces to benefit.

Limitations

One of the interesting findings from this study was the non-relevance/salience of ‘work-family balance’ for Manuco workers. Yet, this is also an important limitation. The use of this term in my interview questions – and as a tool for thinking about these issues – reflects my own interpretive framework and the middle-class, white, academic positioning thereby indexed. There is always the risk in the application of concepts of subsuming actual lived experiences to academic abstractions (Smith 1974). This is one rationale for the transparent accounting of how (local, contextual) narratives get produced. Future work might investigate work-family issues differently, especially amongst blue-collar workers for whom popular and academic work-family discourses might be less meaningful.

Another limitation is the recruitment of interviewees through managers at both workplaces. I talked to more workers at Manuco, including some who felt somewhat disenfranchised and dissatisfied with their working lives making me think that bias resulting from managerial influence was less pronounced. At Comco, many of the workers I spoke to were in the HR department and other departments known for their flexibility and many had very positive experiences, reflecting both Comco’s stronger work-family policies and practices, but also the positioning of the people I spoke to. If I had interviewed more workers from different departments, I likely would have produced a different account.

Triangulating fathers’ accounts – either by speaking to their partners or by analyzing policy use data, or perhaps both – would help to verify their stories. Neither workplace kept extensive data on policy use, but speaking to fathers’ partners in some cases would have given an outsider/insider perspective on how flexible dads really do find their workplaces, and what their

caregiving actually looked like at home. Along that same vein, Andrea Doucet's (2001) methodology of the household portrait would help to give a more reliable account of what care is done by fathers in the context of their paid work. Household portraits involve couples documenting visually and interactively who does what with respect to specific domestic and care tasks. This technique, underpinned by a relational view of domestic life and labour, illustrates how couples negotiate tasks and can offer important insights into how the workplace shapes fathers' domestic and caregiving work and responsibilities from the perspective of both partners.

Finally, though my study specifically targeted fathers, speaking to more mothers at each workplace would have aided in pinning down the gendered aspects of how workplaces constrain care for dads. It is undoubtedly the case that mothers face many of the same barriers to caregiving documented here, but that they are not gendered in the same fashion. For instance, a mother may not be teased or chided for missing work by coworkers; she may just be quietly sidelined, though as with fathers, it would be context-specific.

Future directions

Future research should continue to explore fathers' caregiving in work organizations. There is much to be gleaned from the specific ways in which workplace organization and practices intersect with workers' caregiving obligations.

One important avenue for future research is considering what kinds of absences and time away from work are especially easy to accommodate and why. Under what circumstances are fathers ushered out the door? My research shows appointments and child-related emergencies are examples of absences that are relatively easy to accommodate, if not simply expected by organizations. What are the implications of facilitating some absences and not others? What

kinds of mental time frameworks do fathers develop in specific flexible-inflexible workplace contexts? What kinds of caregiving are produced?

More research is needed on blue-collar contexts as these sites continue to be underrepresented in the literature. One avenue forward would be to examine workplaces which are especially family-friendly. Blue collar firms are still often thought of as highly regimented and restrictive – not unsurprisingly – and learning about those sites which facilitate fathers’ caregiving would help provide a positive model for other workplaces looking to change their practices, as well as dismantling the stereotype that blue-collar always means less family-friendly.

Longitudinal research on organizations would be a valuable contribution to the field. This may be especially true in the cases in which organizations have rescinded previously available flexibility policies, like at Comco. Understanding how workers cope in the absence of flexibility they have grown accustomed to, whether policies become reinstated over time and to what effect, how the rescinding-reinstituting policy cycle affects worker morale, trust, commitment, and engagement, and how widespread rescinding is, would further develop understanding around work-family policy implementation gaps.

My research points to the importance of colleagues as possible influences on men’s caregiving. At both Manuco and Comco, colleagues held opinions of fathers’ caregiving, and corresponding absences, that workers remembered and possibly internalized. More research should explore the influence of work colleagues on fathers’ caregiving, and how colleagues may reinforce conventional time norms in a way that undermines it. Existing research has focused on the influence and control of managers/supervisors, but the ways in which fathers interact with coworkers about their caregiving can frame fathers’ sense of what is even possible in the first

place. In other words, communication with coworkers gives dads a sense of what is normative and acceptable in a given workplace and may influence dads' work-care arrangements prior to more formal conversations with supervisors.

Conclusion

This project set out to explore one of the most important barriers to fathers' involvement in child care – the workplace. By comparatively examining two radically different firms, I explored how gender and the ideal worker norm continue to shape fathers' care across contexts. Both organizations were simultaneously flexible and inflexible in relation to fathers' care, accommodating and constraining. And while some of the mechanisms differed between these two firms in terms of how they shaped and limited fathers' care, there were also remarkable similarities, pointing to the resilience and stickiness of gendered organizational logic in divergent contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix A Interview Guides

A.1 Fathers

1. So to begin, can you tell me a bit about your life as a father and as a worker?
 - What does a typical day look like for you?
 - What's it like being a working dad?

2. How do you normally manage your family responsibilities while also working at a paid job?

3. Can you tell me a bit about your job and the culture of your job?
 - What's it like to work here?
 - What are the average weekly hours you and others put in? What are the expected hours?
 - What's the general mood/ambiance here?
 - What are the strengths/weaknesses of working here?
 - How demanding is the work here?
 - Are there aspects of your job that make parenting easier or more difficult?

4. How rigid or flexible is it here?

5. In a general sense, how does your work affect your caregiving?

6. How family-friendly is it here?
 - How does this company compare to others in terms of its family-friendliness?
 - Is 'work-family balance' on the radar here? Is it important to this company?

7. Do you feel like you have 'balance' between your work and your care?

8. What happens when you have some sort of family-related emergency or unexpected event, like your kids get sick?
 - Who takes care of them?
 - Is that difficult to manage?
 - How do your managers and coworkers react?

- How is it viewed when fathers attend to family-related emergencies, versus mothers?
9. Can you describe the experience of when you first had your children? For instance, did you take parental leave?
 - If you took parental leave, can you tell me about the experience?
 - If you didn't take parental leave, can you tell me some of the reasons why not?
 10. Can you tell me about available workplace policies for managing care, or balancing your work-life responsibilities, accommodating work to family life, and so on?
 11. Can you tell me about your experience with these policies?
 - What policies have you used?
 - How easy was it to use them?
 - Are there policies that don't exist that you'd like to see?
 12. Do you think the organization is sufficiently helpful in helping workers manage their care responsibilities?
 13. How does the care and raising of your children – in terms of time spent with them, taking care of them, and so on – impact upon work?
 - Do you think you would be in a different place career-wise if you hadn't had children?
 14. Do you think there are increased expectations on fathers to be more involved in the care of their children? How involved was your father with you?
 15. Do you think there's a stigma against men participating in care?
 16. Do you think mothers and fathers are viewed differently in the workplace?
 17. How do you think people at work perceive your care responsibilities and the actions you've taken to meet them?
 - Have people ever made any comments about your caregiving?

18. Do workers talk to one another about their home life, including their children, at work?
19. How do others in your work group/on your team manage their care responsibilities?
20. Can you tell me about how you and your partner divide up the household work?
 - What percentage does each person do?
 - Who has primary responsibility for child care?
21. Do you use alternative forms of care like other family members, day care centers, or nannies to provide some of the care?
22. Has there ever been a time where you made a career choice around your family? Can you tell me a bit about that?
23. In an ideal world, what would your care and work responsibilities look like?
24. Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about your background.
 - Can you describe to me your education?
 - What is your relationship status?
 - What year were you born?
 - What is your race/ethnicity?
 - Can you tell me a bit about your children? [How many do you have? What are their ages, genders]
 - What is your partner's occupation and education? Does your partner work full-time?
 - Can you tell me your approximate income range? Can you tell me your approximate household income range?
25. Is there anything else you'd like to add to our conversation that we haven't yet touched upon?
26. How are you feeling after our interview?

Please let me know if you have any questions for me. Otherwise, thank you very much for your time.

A.2 Coworkers (no kids)

1. How do you notice others at work managing their work-family responsibilities?
2. What do you think about the general family-friendliness of Company X?
3. What is your opinion on fathers who use parental leave at Company X?
4. Do you think moms and dads are viewed differently here?
5. What do you think about parents who use flexible work arrangements or take time off to take care of children at Company X? Are dads viewed differently than moms?
6. What is your opinion when male coworkers take an active role in caregiving? For example, how is it viewed when they come in late or leave early or stay home to take care of sick kids?
7. Do people ever make comments about people's care responsibilities?
8. Can you tell me a bit about how you manage your work-family responsibilities? How do you and your partner divide the household work?
9. Now I would like to ask you a few brief demographic questions:
 - What is your relationship status?
 - Can you describe to me your education?
 - What year were you born?
 - What is your partner's occupation and education? Does your partner work full-time?
10. Is there anything you'd like to add to our conversation?

A.3 Managers/Supervisors

*Questions added on to those for fathers if managers/supervisors had kids

1. What kinds of accommodations/policies around flexible scheduling do you have for workers?
2. How do you make decisions around whether to grant flexibility or time-off requests for employees?
3. How is it viewed when parents have to take time off for caregiving? Is it viewed differently if it's a mother versus a father?
4. How is it viewed when fathers take time off, leave early or come in late because of child-care responsibilities?
5. Do fathers use parental leave and other available work-family policies?
6. What are the main issues or difficulties for the employer around workers' family responsibilities?
7. Do you think mothers and fathers are viewed differently in the workplace?
8. How much of a priority is family friendliness to this company, compared to say, other elements of your operations and HR strategies?
9. What happens to the work load of leave-using employees?