

Research Portal

Application - Insight Development Grants

Identification

Applicant

Family Name: Breitzkreuz

First Name: Rhonda

Middle Names:

Current Position: Associate professor

Primary Affiliation: University of Alberta

Department/Division: Human Ecology

Application

Application Title Are mothers opting-out? Exploring underemployment among mothers with preschool children

Committee 08 - Sociology, demography and related fields

Joint or special initiative Select

Is this a [research-creation project](#)? Yes No

Does your proposal involve [Aboriginal Research](#) as defined by SSHRC? Yes No

Scholar Type

Are you an [Emerging Scholar](#) or [Established Scholar](#)? Established

Confirmed Scholar Type Established

Established Scholars: Proposed Versus Ongoing Research

Established Scholars: Proposed Versus Ongoing Research

In my research domain, Gender, Family, and Policy Studies, I have explored the extent to which social policies support families to care for their most vulnerable family members: babies, preschool children, and children with disability. I have focused, to date, on the extent to which various social policies support the care work of families for young children (child care study), children with disability (sustainable families study), vulnerable lone-mother families (welfare reform study), the transition to parenthood (mobilizing intergenerational support study), and parenting quality (Triple P Parenting Program study).

The research outlined in this proposal focuses on a new and exciting direction in my research: the employment of mothers. I will use my established methodological expertise in critical policy analysis to examine this new topic area. My interest in this subject arose when I received media inquiries about current Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Statistics Canada reports, showing how women in Canada overall, and women in Alberta specifically, have lower employment rates than some other high-income OECD countries. I began to consider the extent to which social policy in Canada supports, or inhibits, mothers' access to employment. As a result, my new research direction will explore the underemployment of women in Canada and consider the implications of this for maternal well-being, women's economic security, and gender equality. I intend to start with coupled mothers, because two-parent families with children are the most common family type in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Furthermore, categorized as an at-risk group, low-income, lone mothers have been studied extensively in Canada and elsewhere, whereas coupled mothers' employment decisions are understudied. Furthermore, it is often assumed that coupled mothers' decision to truncate employment is an unencumbered choice rather than a decision made within a context of limited options. I would like to query this assumption, using mothers' experience to provide insight about mothers' lower employment rates.

The work detailed in this proposal launches Phase One in my research through providing an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of truncated employment for mothers of preschool children. I received one small faculty grant in 2015 (\$5,000) for a project called "Do Mothers Work as Much as we Think?" to examine data from the Canadian Labour Force Survey to query mothers' hours of work across Canada. The manuscript from this statistical analysis (Breitkreuz & Stanton, under review) will inform the in-depth qualitative research proposed in this Insight Development Grant (IDG) by providing detailed information on Canadian mothers' number of hours of employment not currently available in the scholarly or grey literature. In the IDG, I will gather in-depth information about mothers' experiences to further explain the patterns of mothers' life course decisions about employment. I will explore mothers' decisions to work part-time, or leave the workforce, when children are pre-school. These experiences will be juxtaposed with current government policies that aim to prioritize supports for mothers' labour-force attachment. In sum, I will frame mothers' employment in terms of a particular life course phase (e.g. mothers of pre-school children) and policy environment (e.g. provincial and national discussions about enhancing child care policy and proposals to increase mothers' labour force attachment).

Future research plans for this topic include expanding my inquiry to look at mothers' employment patterns with school-aged children and mothers in other provinces. In addition, in future phases of this research, I intend to spearhead a cross-national comparison of the employment of mothers, examining their experiences in Ireland, Australia and Canada. I have arranged meetings with Dr. Michael Rush at the University College Dublin in Ireland and Dr. Kay Cook at Swinburne University in Australia to explore the feasibility of a joint project.

Administering Organization

Organization University of Alberta

Department/Division Human Ecology

Invitations

Role	Last Name	First Name	Organization	Department
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Activity Details

Certification Requirements

Does the proposed research involve humans as research participants?

Yes No

Does the proposed research involve animals?

Yes No

Environmental Impact

A. Will any phase of the proposed research take place on federal lands in Canada, other than lands under the administration and control of the Commissioner of Yukon, the Northwest Territories or Nunavut, as interpreted in section 2(1) of the [Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012](#) (CEAA 2012)?

Yes No

B. Will any phase of the proposed research take place outdoors and outside of Canada?

Yes No

C. (i) Will the grant permit a designated project, as listed in the CEAA 2012 [Regulations Designating Physical Activities](#) (RDPA), to be carried out in whole or in part?

Yes No

OR (ii) Will any phase of the proposed research depend on a designated project, as listed in the RDPA, being carried out by a third party? [Regulations Designating Physical Activities](#)

Yes No

Keywords

List up to 10 keywords that best describe the proposal.

maternal employment, gender equality, women's issues, maternal well-being, family policy, work-life integration

Disciplines

Indicate and rank up to three disciplines relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant.

1. Sociology Social Relations
2. Sociology Social Institutions
3. Political Science Public Policy Studies

Areas of Research

Indicate and rank up to three areas of research relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant. If you select "Not Subject to Research Classification" in #1, the system will automatically remove any other areas of research when you save this page.

1. Gender Issues
2. Employment and labour
3. Family

Temporal Periods

Indicate up to two historical periods covered by your proposal.

	From		To	
	Year	Period	Year	Period
1.	<input type="text"/>		2020	
2.	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	

Geographical Regions

Indicate and rank up to three geographical regions relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant.

1. Western Canada
- 2.
- 3.

Countries

Indicate and rank up to five countries relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #5 the least relevant.

1. Canada
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Revisions since previous application

Summary of Proposal

Although the Canadian employment rate for mothers has more than doubled since the 1970s, mothers continue to be underemployed in Canada. Mothers consistently have lower labour-force attachment rates than women without children, fathers, and their counterparts in other OECD countries. In addition, they comprise over three-quarters of the part-time labour pool in Canada. Among coupled mothers, well over one-third with children under 16 are employed part-time or not employed. If any other group had a nearly 40% underemployment rate, we contend that serious policy questions about systemic employment barriers would be raised.

Status of Women Canada (2017), the World Economic Forum (2017), and the International Monetary Fund (2017) all acknowledge women's economic participation as central to gender equality and good outcomes for women. Yet the underemployment of mothers in Canada remains an unaddressed societal problem. Part of the challenge in addressing mothers' employment barriers may be that there is a surprising and substantial gap in the scholarly literature on the employment realities of Canadian mothers. Employment rates in Canada are typically published as a dichotomous variable, employed or not employed. The nuanced experiences of employment, including level of labour-force attachment, job changes to accommodate unpaid work responsibilities, and experiences on the job are understudied.

Within this context, we are spearheading a new research initiative to exam the nuance of mothers' experiences of employment in Alberta, and reasons for truncated paid work hours. The knowledge gained from our proposed IDG is critical, because earned income is the key source of financial well-being for the vast majority of Canadian households, and mothers marginalization in paid work may impede mothers' economic security, family income security, and national economic growth. In-depth examination of mothers' experiences of employment, the nexus of paid and unpaid work, and the accommodations that mothers make to address child care and other family responsibilities will provide important insights that could assist Canadian policy makers in creating policies to enhance maternal employment, improve mothers' economic outcomes, and create a more gender equitable society.

To launch this study, we propose a mixed-method, qualitative critical policy analysis that examines the experiences of two categories of coupled mothers of pre-school children in Edmonton, Alberta: 1) mothers who work part-time; and, 2) women with an employment history who are currently stay-at-home mothers (i.e. those who have "opted-out" of the workforce). Our study will be guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the employment experiences of mothers, and what are the contextual factors that influence mothers' decisions to reduce/opt-out of paid work when they have pre-school children?
- 2) What do mothers' experiences of employment and unpaid care work reveal about the policy contexts that shape women's lives?

With funds from the IDG, our proposed study aims to contribute new knowledge about the experiences of mothers of pre-school children who work part time or who have left the labour force, using focus groups and individual interviews to obtain in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon of maternal underemployment. We will examine the outcomes of truncated paid work on subjective maternal well-being, mothers' economic security, and gender equality. Most importantly, we will identify and map the linkages between individual experiences and policy contexts, to explicate the policy organization of maternal employment choices. We will conduct a critical analysis of Strategic Business Plans (2017-2020) for the Government of Alberta, the Status of Women, and Children's Services, to juxtapose government policy priorities regarding maternal economic participation with the experiences of study participants. In addition, we will analyze two new policy initiatives in Alberta: 1) the \$25/day child care pilot program; and 2) the \$15/hour minimum wage (effective October, 2018) to explore the extent to which these policies will enhance maternal employment outcomes. Our study will generate recommendations that will be shared with policy makers in the Province of Alberta, including Laurel Sakaluk, Manager of Knowledge Management at the Ministry of Children's Services, and Jill Shillabeer, Director at Status of Women, AB.

Roles and Responsibilities

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The research team for this study includes three individuals: the academic Principal Applicant and Project Leader, Dr Rhonda Breitreuz; a Staff Research Assistant, Kerry Colen; and a Master's Student. Although the Staff Research Assistant and Master's Student are not traditional academic Co-Investigators or Collaborators, they are integral members of the research team and therefore included here. The Staff Research Assistant and the Master's Student will be closely mentored by Dr. Breitreuz, and considered junior colleagues. All contributions to academic and non-academic research outputs that these research team members make will be recognized with co-authorship. The order of the authors on each publication will depend on the relative contributions of each author.

1. Principal Applicant: Rhonda Breitreuz, PhD in Human Ecology. As the principal applicant, Dr. Breitreuz will be responsible for the overall coordination of the project team, the liaisons with community stakeholders, the implementation of the study protocol, and the administration of the project funding. Additionally, Dr. Breitreuz will take a lead role in the conceptualization of the theoretical approach and development of the project, as well as provide mentorship to staff and graduate student research assistants who are part of the research team. In addition to participating in all phases of the research process (data collection, analysis, and writing), she will oversee the research assistant's and graduate student's work, including organizing and conducting the data collection strategies, data analysis, and writing of the policy report, manuscripts, policy briefs, fact sheets, and animated video that will result from this project. In addition, she will serve an important role in knowledge mobilization activities through her various networks and community advisory roles (e.g., The Aligning Early Learning and Care Advisory Team, the McEwan Early Learning and Child Care Advisory Board Member, and the Ministry of Children's Services and the Status of Women connections). She will spend approximately 70% of her total research time on the proposed study in relation to other on-going studies.

2. Staff Research Assistant

Kerry Colen will work 10 hours/week in the role of Research Assistant. An experienced Research Assistant, she will: a) complete the ethics application; b) assist in the day-to-day supervision of graduate student responsibilities as they pertain to this project; c) coordinate recruitment, data collection, and transcription of focus group and interview data; d) assist with data cleaning, preparation, and analysis of secondary data; e) organize research group meetings; f) coordinate knowledge mobilization activities; and g) assist with budget management.

Kerry Colen will spend 60% of her time on the proposed study in relation to other on-going research projects and programs.

3. Master's Student (Graduate Research Assistant)

Roles and responsibilities of the GRA are outlined in student section of this proposal.

Roles and Training of Students

Graduate Student

The graduate student for this project will participate in the research team as a junior colleague, therefore learning about all aspects of the research process. Under the supervision of Dr. Breitreuz, the student will be involved in conducting literature reviews, participant recruitment, data collection, in-depth interviewing, focus group facilitation, data analysis, conference presentations, and writing (including journal articles, policy briefs, and professional fact sheets). If the graduate student has an original idea that could be pursued using project data, they will be mentored in the development of that idea. The graduate student for this project will be encouraged to apply for scholarships offered through the University of Alberta, SSHRC, PolicyWise, and other eligible funding bodies.

For this new project, the graduate student will have dedicated space in Dr. Breitreuz's research office, as well as access to computers, printers, stationery, all Microsoft software packages, NVivo software, and storage space to assist with the project. In addition, the Department of Human Ecology offers a supportive environment for graduate students, including a regular professional development seminar series for the graduate student and bi-monthly research seminars in which the graduate student has an opportunity to present her work or hear about the work of other graduate students or faculty members. Graduate students at the University of Alberta are offered numerous professional development workshops at no or

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low cost, including workshops to enhance their skills in grant writing, publication, and presentation development.

Dr. Breitzkreuz will closely supervise the graduate student's responsibilities, and meet with him or her on a bi-weekly basis to engage in a dialogical process about the developing work. The graduate student will be invited to co-author academic conference presentations, scholarly articles, and community presentations as appropriate. Dr. Breitzkreuz has a proven track record effective student training. To illustrate, Dr. Breitzkreuz has mentored a number of students who have taken the lead, or been co-authors on various journal articles (Breitzkreuz & Stanton, under review; Breitzkreuz, Colen, and Horne, under review; Breitzkreuz & Colen, forthcoming; Horne & Breitzkreuz, in press; Breitzkreuz, Stanton, Brady, Pattison & Swallow, 2017; Breitzkreuz, Wunderli, Savage & McConnell, 2014; Breitzkreuz & Stanton, in preparation). In addition, PhD candidate Laurel Sakaluk was lead author, and MSc student Iryna Hurava as a co-author, on a refereed conference paper that presented the findings of the pilot study at the IVth International Community, Work and Family Conference July 2013 in Sydney, Australia. Numerous students Dr Breitzkreuz has worked with have received substantial awards. Two of her Master's students have received SSHRC awards (Rebecca Horne and Vanessa Green), one PhD student has received a SSHRC award (Laurel Sakaluk), and one undergraduate student has received a Rhodes Scholarship at the University of Oxford (Carley-Jane Stanton). She has also had a number of students who have received substantial departmental and university level awards (Horne, Rebecca, Roger S. Smith Award \$5,000; Laura Wunderli, Undergraduate Research Initiative Award, \$5,000; Roy, Julia, Louise Davies Memorial Graduate Scholarship; Julie Stirling, Roger S. Smith Award, \$5,000).

Staff Research Assistant

Please see section on Roles and Responsibilities for a thorough description of the role of the staff research assistant.

Knowledge Mobilization Plan

For academic audiences, Knowledge Mobilization (KM) will include three peer-reviewed journal articles (submitted to journals such as Social Forces) and three scholarly conference presentations (at conferences such as the Work-Family Research Network Conference). For non-academic audiences, we will implement KM activities toward the end of year 2 of the study, to maximize the impact of this research on policy development:

1. Half-Day Stakeholder Forums: We will invite key stakeholders (e.g., policy makers from Status of Women and Children's Services) to participate in one of two forums to discuss the study findings. Drawing on best practice methods of knowledge translation for policy development (Carden, 2009), we will engage stakeholders to reflect on the findings; explore the implications of these findings within their policy context; and develop empirically and theoretically informed policy recommendations. We will translate forum outcomes into Policy Briefing Notes, detailing a suite of recommendations.
2. Explainer Video: We will work with a professional filmmaker to produce a short, animated video. Presenting the research outcomes visually, the animated video will professionally showcase the research results and applications and be shareable across multiple platforms, including social media.
3. Existing Professional Networks: Through Dr. Breitzkreuz's established networks within the Alberta government, she will distribute Policy Briefs created from this study, and participate in KM seminars within relevant government departments. Dr. Breitzkreuz has a proven record of sharing her work with government personnel through presenting at Policywise for Children and Families' Research Showcase, and the Ministry of Human Services Knowledge Seminar Series.
4. Plain-language Publications: Factsheets will be developed and distributed to mothers throughout the province through relevant networks such as the Parent Link Centre Electronic Distribution List.

Expected Outcomes

Scholarly Benefits

Indicate up to three scholarly benefits of the proposed project. (required)

1. Knowledge creation/intellectual outcomes
2. Enhanced theory
3. Student training/skill development

Summary of Expected Scholarly Outcomes

Intellectual outcomes: This project is a new initiative on the employment of mothers in Alberta. This study will help to fill a substantial knowledge gap in the Canadian literature on mothers' employment. While the extant literature shows that mothers' employment has increased substantially since the 1970s, it also shows that mothers' employment rates are low than fathers, childless women, and mothers in other OECD countries.

Enhanced Theory: The knowledge created in this project will create new empirical knowledge that will add insight to long-standing feminist conversations about the interplay of individual agency and choice versus structural constraints, including economic constraints, gendered norms, and policy environments that enhance or deter women's access to employment.

Personnel: This project will lead to meaningful skill development for one Master's student, and one Research Assistant. See roles and responsibilities section for further information.

Societal Benefits

Indicate up to three societal benefits of the proposed project.

1. Enhanced policy
2. Enriched public discourse
3. Critical knowledge

Summary of Expected Societal Outcomes

Public policy plays an important role in enabling women to balance their caring and employment commitments. The 2017-2020 Business Plan for Alberta's Ministry for the Status of Women has two key policy goals relevant to our study: 1) "women's economic security, including child care; " and, 2) "increasing women's leadership and democratic participation" (Status of Women, 2017). The Alberta government currently has two new policy initiatives that may help to realize these policy goals: a child care pilot project to improve affordability and accessibility of child care, and a graduated increase in minimum wage to \$15/hour in 2018. This IDG project will provide in-depth knowledge that will give recommendations to governments about how to enhance women's economic participation through employment. Juxtaposing current provincial policies with the employment experiences of mothers, we will propose evidence-based policy recommendations.

Audiences

Indicate up to five potential target audiences for the proposed project.

1. Canadian government
Provincial/territorial government
2. General public
3. Media
- 4.
- 5.

Summary of Benefits to Potential Target Audiences

In addition to contributing toward the body of scholarly literature on mothers' employment, and informing public policy, we hope to also influence the messaging of the media on this topic, thereby better informing the public.

Currently, the media oversimplifies reporting about mothers' employment. The messages framed by the media influence public discourse on mothers' employment, suggesting that mothers' choose to work part-time or be stay-at-home mothers. We have questions about this taken-for-granted understanding about mothers' employment, and would like to provide a detailed and contextualized examination of how women make employment decisions. Dr. Breitzkreuz has experience speaking with the media. She has done live and taped interviews for television and radio, and provided expert opinion for newspaper journalists as well. Through dialogue with the media, Dr. Breitzkreuz hopes to contribute to a better informed public discourse on this issue.

Funds Requested from SSHRC

Year 1

Personnel costs			
Student salaries and benefits/Stipends	Number	Amount	Justification
Undergraduate			
Masters	1	\$6,624.00	One masters student for six hours/week. 6 hours/week for 3 terms (full year) @ \$1003.71/month + 10% benefits = \$13,249. Of this amount, \$6,624 is requested from SSHRC. The Department of Human Ecology policy is that it will cover 50% of the RA costs, so the remainder of the student costs will come from the department.
Doctoral			
Subtotal		\$6,624.00	
Non student salaries	Number	Amount	Justification
Postdoctoral			
Professional/Technical Services	1	\$1,200.00	Transcriptionist services (year 1) estimated at \$1,500, assuming 8 focus groups @ \$150/focus group.
Other	1	\$13,209.00	Research assistant @ 10 hours/week (\$23.09/hour * 10 hours * 52 weeks + 10% vacation pay)
Subtotal		\$14,409.00	
Travel and Subsistence Costs for Research	Number	Amount	Justification

Applicant/Team Member(s)			
Student(s)	1	\$80.00	Mileage for data collection (budget assumes 8 focus groups * \$0.50/km * average 20km/focus group)
Subtotal		\$80.00	

Travel and Subsistence Costs for Dissemination	Number	Amount	Justification
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Applicant/Team Member(s)			
Student(s)			
Subtotal		\$0.00	

Other Expenses	Amount	Justification
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Supplies	\$500.00	Office supplies and photocopying costs
Non-disposable equipment	\$2,000.00	Computer (capable of handling large data files and N'Vivo software) budgeted @ \$2000. Computers will be used by research assistant and student for word processing (i.e. literature review, creating project documents), data coding, and data analysis.
Participant recognition	\$1,600.00	Participant recognition for focus groups: gift cards budgeted at \$25/participant * 8 focus groups * 8 participants/focus group.
Catering	\$1,200.00	Catering for focus groups: catering budgeted at \$150/focus group * 8 focus groups.
Software	\$500.00	N'Vivo qualitative analysis software licenses: 2 * \$250/license = \$500
Subtotal	\$5,800.00	
Grand total year 1	\$26,913.00	

Year 2

Personnel costs

Student salaries and benefits/Stipends	Number	Amount	Justification
Undergraduate			
Masters	1	\$6,823.00	Refer to year 1 justifications + 3% cost of living increase
Doctoral			
Subtotal		\$6,823.00	

Non student salaries	Number	Amount	Justification
Postdoctoral			
Professional/Technical Services	1	\$4,500.00	Transcriptionist services (year 1) estimated at \$1,500, assuming 30 interviews @ \$150/interview.
Other	1	\$13,446.00	Research assistant @ 10 hours/week (\$23.52/hour * 10 hours * 52 weeks + 10% vacation pay)
Subtotal		\$17,946.00	
Travel and Subsistence Costs for Research	Number	Amount	Justification
Applicant/Team Member(s)			
Student(s)	1	\$300.00	Mileage for data collection (budget assumes 30 interviews * \$0.50/km * average 20km/interview)
Subtotal		\$300.00	
Travel and Subsistence Costs for Dissemination	Number	Amount	Justification
Applicant/Team Member(s)	1	\$6,200.00	Applicant travel budgeted for three conference presentations: two in Canada @ \$1,600 each + one international @ \$3,000. Domestic conference budgeted for flight (\$700), per diem x3 days (\$60x3=\$180), hotel for 3 nights (\$200x3=\$600), ground transportation (\$60x2 ways=\$120). International conference budgeted as per U of A guidelines.
Student(s)	1	\$4,600.00	Student travel budgeted for two conference presentations: one in Canada @ \$1,600 + one international @ \$3,000
Subtotal		\$10,800.00	
Other Expenses		Amount	Justification
Supplies		\$500.00	Office supplies, including paper, photocopying costs, printer cartridges, file folders, field note booklets, name tags, highlighters, post-it notes, etc.
Non-disposable equipment			
Participant recognition		\$750.00	Participant recognition for interviews: gift cards budgeted at \$25/participant * 30 interviews.
Knowledge mobilization		\$10,450.00	Knowledge mobilization budgeted at \$10,450 to cover: open access journal publication* (\$2,900); two workshops** (@ \$900/workshop = \$1,800); one explainer video*** (@ \$5,500 for production

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costs); other materials (\$250). *Cost for open access based on price list for Taylor&Francis Publishing Group; **workshops costs per workshop @\$20/person x20 = \$400 catering, \$300 professional printing of policy briefs, \$100 misc; ***Cost for video as per consultation with VividOptions Film company.

Software	\$500.00	N'Vivo qualitative analysis software licenses: 2 * \$250/license = \$500
Subtotal	\$12,200.00	
Grand total year 2	\$48,069.00	
Grand total	\$74,982.00	

Funds from Other Sources

You must include all contributors (e.g., individuals, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, private sector organizations) that are providing contributions for the project. Indicate whether or not these contributions have been confirmed.

If a funding source is not listed, you must:

- (a) type the source name in Funding Source
- (b) identify the contribution type
- (c) enter an amount.

If you have received, from a single funding source, more than one contribution of the same type (e.g., cash) and confirmation status, you must combine these into one entry (e.g., two \$20,000 confirmed cash contributions from a university become one \$40,000 confirmed cash contribution).

For examples of Canadian and international sources of eligible cash and/or in-kind support, see [SSHRC's Guidelines for Cash and In-Kind Contributions](#).

Note: All contributions must be indicated in Canadian currency.

Funding Source	Contribution Type	Confirmed	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta	Staff	Yes	\$6,624.00	\$6,823.00	\$13,447.00
Details	The Department of Human Ecology policy is that it will cover 50% of the RA costs to a max of 12 h/week (per year). Because we are hiring a GRA for a total of 18 h/week for the full year (6 h/week x 3 terms), the department will cover 9 h/week (3 h/week x 3 terms = \$501.87x 12 = \$6022.44 x 10% vacation pay = \$6,624 for year 1 and \$6,823 for year 2.				
					\$0.00
Details					
					\$0.00
Details					
Grand total					\$13,447.00

Reviewer Exclusion

Excluded Reviewers

Exclusion Type	Family Name / Collaboration	First Name	Initials	Organization	Department	Email
No records to display.						

I. SIGNIFICANCE & OBJECTIVES

Anne-Marie Slaughter's 2012 article in *The Atlantic*, 'Why women still can't have it all', received international attention in a firestorm of analysis and critique. In this article, Slaughter hit a nerve: can mothers in high-income, developed countries successfully integrate employment and motherhood, or does this social goal still elude women? Why is it that mothers, but not fathers, continue to experience limited upward mobility, the glass ceiling, and a substantial wage gap? (Budig & England, 2001; CCPA, 2016; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009). If mothers cannot successfully integrate paid and unpaid work, what are the implications for maternal economic security, maternal well-being, and gender equality?

Although the Canadian employment rate for mothers of children under 16 has more than doubled since the 1970s (38% in 1976 compared to 76% in 2015, Moyser, 2017), mothers continue to be underemployed in Canada. Mothers consistently have lower labour-force attachment rates than women without children, fathers, and their counterparts in other OECD countries (Beeston, 2016; Moyser, 2017; OECD, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2016). In addition, they comprise over three-quarters of the part-time labour pool in Canada (Status of Women, 2015). Among coupled mothers, well over one-third with children under 16 are employed part-time or not employed (Uppal, 2015). In short, we contend that mothers are a high-risk group of underemployed persons in Canada. If any other group had a nearly 40% underemployment rate, serious policy questions about systemic employment barriers would be raised.

One possible reason for the lack of recognition of mothers' underemployment is that there is a surprising and substantial gap in the scholarly literature on the employment realities of Canadian mothers. Employment rates in Canada are typically published as a dichotomous variable, employed or not employed. The nuanced experiences of employment, including level of labour-force attachment, job changes to accommodate unpaid work responsibilities, and experiences on the job are understudied. Status of Women Alberta (2017), Status of Women Canada (2017), the World Economic Forum (2017), and the International Monetary Fund (2017) have all highlighted women's economic participation as central to gender equality and good outcomes for women. Yet the underemployment of mothers in Canada remains a largely overlooked societal problem.

Within this context, we are spearheading a new research initiative to exam the nuance of mothers' experiences of employment in Alberta, and reasons for truncated paid work hours. The knowledge gained from our proposed IDG is critical, because earned income is the key source of financial well-being for the vast majority of Canadian households, and mothers marginalization in paid work may impede mothers' economic security, family income security, and national economic growth. In-depth examination of mothers' experiences of employment, the nexus of paid and unpaid work, and the accommodations that mothers make to address child care and other family responsibilities will provide important insights that could assist Canadian policy makers in creating policies to enhance maternal employment, improve mothers' economic outcomes, and create a more gender equitable society.

To launch this study, we propose a qualitative mixed-method critical policy analysis that examines the experiences of two categories of mothers with pre-school children in Edmonton, Alberta: 1) mothers who work part-time; and, 2) mothers who have "opted-out" of the workforce. We chose an examination of mothers' part-time employment because previous literature suggests that this is the most common strategy used for mothers in most OECD countries to integrate employment and motherhood (Lewis, 2002; OECD, 2014). We also chose mothers with an employment history who are not currently employed, because previous research suggests that opting-out of employment may be a constrained choice within the context of undesirable options (McDonald, Bradley & Guthrie, 2006). Further, we chose to query mothers of pre-school children for two reasons: 1) the life course stage of mothers with pre-school children is arguably the most time-crunched for women, therefore a time when considerations about how to negotiate paid and unpaid work will be most deeply considered by mothers; and, 2) our recent analysis of Canadian labour force survey data suggests that mothers' long-term employment patterns are established when their children are pre-school age (Breitkreuz & Stanton, under review).

Within this context, our study has these objectives: 1) To describe mothers' decisions to work part-time/opt-out and their current/previous experiences in integrating paid and unpaid work, looking at outcomes for subjective maternal wellbeing, economic security, and gender equality; and 2) To identify and map the linkages between individual experiences and policy contexts relevant for mothers' economic participation, to explicate the policy organization of maternal employment. To meet these objectives, we will ask the following research questions: 1) What are the employment experiences of mothers, and what are the contextual factors that influence mothers' decisions to reduce/opt-out of paid work when they have pre-school children?; and, 2) What do mothers' experiences of employment and unpaid care work reveal about the policy contexts that shape women's lives?

II. CONTEXT

Women, employment, and care:

The motherhood penalty, child penalty, and mommy-track are all terms used to describe the inverse relationship between employment rates and presence of children (Budig & England, 2001; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009). Much of the literature on work-family integration focuses on the veritable barriers that mothers face in combining employment and child care responsibilities in a society that fails to recognize the "second shift" of unpaid care and household work that women perform (Hochschild, 1989). As a response to these barriers, the concept of "opting-out" of the workforce to raise children has received considerable media attention, particularly in the U.S. (Boushey, 2005). Closer to home, Alberta gained national media attention when a Statistics Canada report (2016) showed that Alberta has the lowest proportion of dual-earner couples among all of the Canadian provinces (Global News, 2016). In Alberta, 64 per cent of couples with children are dual earners compared to the national average of 69 per cent. In short, Alberta has more stay-at-home mothers than other parts of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Even though there seems to be some legitimacy to the claim that more women are "opting-out" in recent years, particularly in Alberta, Beaujour, Liu, and Ravanera (2015) found that the most common arrangement employed by Canadian couples for meeting both their families' economic and household labour needs is the "complementary traditional model" whereby men do more paid work than women, and women do more unpaid household and child care work than men. The complementary traditional model is not unique to Canada. Part-time employment for mothers is normative in most OECD countries (Lewis, 2002; OECD, 2014). In Canada, nearly 70% of part-time workers in 2013 were women and this percentage has been consistent for over three decades (Status of Women, 2015).

There are competing views on why women are disproportionately represented in part-time work. One view cites women's lower commitment to work (Fortin, 2005; Hakim, 2002). According to this view, mothers have less interest in employment than their male counterparts. Another view on the high incidence of women's part-time work cites structural impediments to their participation (Ginn, et al., 1996; McRae, 2003). Importantly, the perception that part-time work is a choice for women is not supported by current data in Canada. Statistics Canada (2015) data show, for instance, that only 16% of Canadian women work part-time due to personal preference. In 2014, 32% of female part-time workers aged 25–44 worked part-time (primary age group for raising children) because they were caring for children, and another 4.4% worked part-time due to other personal/family responsibilities. In comparison, only 3% of men worked part-time to care for children. In Alberta, 49% of women cite child care constraints as the main reason they work part-time (Macdonald & Friendly, 2014). Multiple studies point to the employment sacrifices mothers make in order to integrate paid work and unpaid care work (Burchell et al., 1997; Horne & Breitkreuz, in press; Wattis, Standing, & Yerkes, 2011). A study of part-time workers in Denmark, France, and the United Kingdom shows that "countries with reduced access to childcare are likely to have a greater proportion of constrained part-time workers" (Gash, 2008, p. 659).

While part-time employment may be an effective way to juggle earning and caring (Hill, Mårtinson & Ferris, 2004), provide flexibility, and contribute to lower work-family conflict (Buehler & O'Brien,

2011), there are inherent risks and disadvantages for women as well (Booth & van Ours, 2010; Hill et al., 2004; Webber & Williams, 2008). Mothers of small children who work part-time may curtail opportunities for career advancement, experience job penalties, and remain in low-prestige jobs (Booth & van Ours, 2010; Hill et al., 2004; Webber & Williams, 2008). In addition, mothers who are employed part-time report a more conventional gendered division of labour in their households than those who are employed full-time (Hill et al., 2004). Framed as a “choice” they make, most mothers assume responsibility for their employment status, decontextualizing the social, economic, and policy barriers that constrain their decision-making processes (Booth & van Ours, 2010; Webber & Williams, 2008).

Theoretical framework: Fagan (2001) argues that the language of *preference* is somewhat problematic because preferences are “expressed from the vantage point of current circumstances, needs and the range of perceived feasible alternatives, and would be expected to change in different circumstances” (p. 244). Likewise, Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen (2007) highlight the difficulty of explicating preference because of the powerful influence of the social context in which preferences are formed and expressed. Rather than *preference*, they suggest enhancing “understanding of the social *preconditions* of preferences; the circumstances shaping and changing preferences and choices” (2007, p. 656). They propose that opportunity structures—the social, economic and political context, social norms and specific choices available to persons within any given society—are a critical precondition for preferences. Research in other countries suggests that changes in norms and opportunity structures influence beliefs and preferences regarding maternal employment. For example, as maternal employment opportunities increase, so do more accepting attitudes about non-parental child care (Ellingsæter & Gulbrandsen, 2007). This nuanced understanding of preference points to the need to explore the notion of choice in the context of maternal employment. Using a critical feminist approach, we will explicate the gendered expectations of employment and unpaid work, exploring how social, economic, and policy contexts shape decisions about work-family integration and maternal employment. Such knowledge is critical to ensure that the gendered understanding of employment and care and its subsequent influence on maternal employment decisions is foregrounded in policy debates.

Originality, Significance, and Expected Contribution to Knowledge: To date, most research on maternal employment has centred on child impacts, with fewer studies examining maternal and family impacts (Buehler & O’Brien, 2011). This project will fill a substantial knowledge gap in the Canadian literature on maternal employment, contributing new knowledge that will provide nuanced understanding of the employment realities of mothers in Alberta, with a particular focus on coupled mothers with pre-school children who are employed part-time, or who have opted out of employment. The knowledge created by this project will provide insight into the extent to which Canadian policy contexts promote or preclude gender equality in employment, and has the potential to contribute to better informed policies that can enhance mothers’ employment outcomes.

This study will also make significant theoretical contributions through using a critical feminist framework to explore and problematize the notion of preference in maternal employment, particularly during the life course stage of mothering pre-school children. We will analyze the extent to which mothers’ choices about employment are made within a context of constrained options.

III. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study will be guided by a novel integration of an institutional ethnographic methodological framework and a multi-method research design. Institutional ethnography, a critical feminist methodology (Smith, 1987), allows us to examine critically the ways in which participants’ experiences intersect with the policies that shape mothers’ employment decisions in Canada. This approach involves mapping participant experiences to relevant policy initiatives, and includes in-depth empirical data collection with participants and a critical policy analysis. Although the analysis starts with participant experiences, the analytical interest focuses on what these experiences tell us about the way that power is

maintained through particular policy trajectories. This research, therefore, aims to move beyond participants' motivations, behaviours, and stories of employment to reveal the invisible "something" that generates a "set of circumstances" that shape individuals' lives (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 17). In discourse about employment for mothers, maternal choices are assumed to guide the actions of women with preschool children. In this study, we will problematize this understanding by providing an in-depth critical analysis that situates presumed choices within larger policy contexts.

Overview of research design and activities

The proposed project is the first phase of a larger research program designed to examine the experiences and outcomes of maternal employment for mothers in liberal welfare states. In this first phase, we will explore the experiences of truncated employment for coupled mothers with pre-school children across diverse socio-economic contexts within Edmonton, Alberta. Mothers from low, middle and high income households will be sought. Furthermore, we will seek foreign-born and Canadian born women from a range of ethnic backgrounds. We will conduct focus groups and in-depth interviews, using the knowledge gained in this data collection to explicate the linkages between mothers' experiences of employment and current policy contexts. To identify government priorities and policy goals relevant to mothers' employment, we will review the Strategic Plans for the Government of Alberta overall, The Alberta Status of Women, and Children's Services. In addition, we will analyze Alberta's new child care and minimum wage policies, as these policy initiatives may create new conditions that influence mothers' employment experiences and decisions.

Methods and analysis: There are four key foci of data generation/analysis that will be employed to systematically move the analysis of part-time employment for mothers, from "what" is happening for mothers to "why" particular maternal employment decisions are made, to "how" ideological and policy contexts shape mothers' lives: 1) Literature review and conceptual analysis across the bodies of literature that inform this study; 2) Focus groups with mothers opting for truncated employment in Alberta to provide insight into the factors that led to their decisions, documenting mothers' day-to-day experiences in integrating employment and unpaid care work (objectives 1); 3) Purposeful, in-depth interviews with selected mothers from focus groups to provide detailed examinations of how mothers experience paid and unpaid work in their day-to-day lives (objective 1); and 4) a critical policy analysis, allowing for an institutional ethnographic analysis of the policy frameworks that shape individual decisions and experiences (objective 2).

1. Literature review and conceptual analysis (year 1)

We will conduct a novel review and integration of two bodies of literature: 1) the literature that explores work-family integration for mothers of young children; and 2) the literature that examines women's employment realities in Canada overall. This review will provide analytical openings to lend further insight into the nuances of mothers' employment realities not fully examined in the literature to date.

2. Focus groups (year 1, objective 1)

Data Collection: Focus groups are an effective way to gather a significant amount of data on a particular issue for which not much is known, providing the opportunity to identify key themes on the phenomenon of interest that can then be explored in more depth through individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). We will conduct 5-8 focus groups in Edmonton with mothers of pre-school children who are employed part-time or have opted-out. Focus groups of approximately 90 minutes with approximately 6-8 participants per group will explore the following domains of knowledge: experiences of employment while raising pre-school children, reasons for choosing part-time employment/opting-out, perspectives on economic security, and perceived maternal well-being. The

focus groups will be facilitated by the study Research Assistant, Kerryn Colen, who has experience in conducting focus groups on topics related to family life. A Master's student, trained and mentored by Dr. Breitkreuz, will assist with all aspects of data collection, including focus group facilitation.

Data Analysis: The process of data analysis will begin as soon as the data from the first focus group are available. Focus groups will be transcribed, and detailed field notes will be recorded after each focus group. We will then conduct a thematic analysis to identify, code, and categorize the key themes in the qualitative data (Braun & Clark, 2006). These analyses will be discussed by the research team through a rich dialogical process, leading to a nuanced understanding of maternal employment experiences, and their impact on maternal wellbeing, economic security, and gender equality.

Participant recruitment: From previous studies, we have developed a network of agencies and participants that have a strong interest in being involved in this study. Drawing on this network will allow us to recruit a diverse sample of mothers to fulfill our sampling needs in a cost-effective manner.

3. In-depth qualitative interviews (year 2, objective 1-2)

Data collection: Qualitative interviews will be conducted with 20-30 participants drawn from focus groups to generate data on the social relations that shape participants' experiences of employment. The interview guide will be developed to go more in-depth on themes derived from the focus groups. This phase of the data collection will enable us to map the linkages between individual experiences of employment and unpaid care work and policy contexts (objective 2).

Data analysis: In institutional ethnography, data analysis involves two key phases. First, descriptive qualitative analysis is conducted to ask: 'what are these participant experiences telling us?' To achieve rigour in this stage of the analysis, we will conduct a careful and systematic review of the transcripts, extensively documenting field notes after each interview, conducting detailed memoing during the review of the transcripts, and engaging in an iterative process of coding, recoding, reviewing, organizing, and thinking through the data (Morse et al., 2002). We will analyze the data thematically, using the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through a process called axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), interrelationships between codes will be identified and merged to create comprehensive themes. The second phase of this analysis includes a critical policy analysis, detailed below.

4. Critical policy analysis (year 2; objective 2)

Because social relations are the key interest of institutional ethnography, the second level of analysis in this approach involves a process of identifying connections between individual experiences and institutional influences (McCoy, 2006). At this level of analysis, the researcher begins with participants' experiences and works backwards, recognizing that "translocal and discursively-organized relations permeate informants' understandings, talk and activities" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 90). The key question in this phase of the analysis is: what are these participant experiences telling us about the policies that shape their lives? The purpose of this phase of analysis is to make explicit the implicit connections between the daily-lived experiences of study participants and policy contexts (objective 2). To complete this analysis, participant experiences will be linked to the policy contexts in which participants live. We will conduct a critical review of the Strategic Business Plans (2017-2020) for the Government of Alberta, the Status of Women, and Children's Services, to juxtapose government policy priorities regarding maternal economic participation with the experiences of study participants. In addition, we will analyze two recent policy initiatives in Alberta: 1) the pilot \$25/day child care policy initiative (Government of Alberta, 2017a); and 2) the graduated program of increased minimum wage, in which minimum wage in Alberta will reach \$15/hour by October, 2018 (Government of Alberta, 2017b). Juxtaposing policy priorities and initiatives with current lived experience will reveal the ways in which policies shape mothers' experiences of, and decisions about, employment.

Project timelines: Do mothers work as much as we think? Mothers' underemployment in Canada
Applicant: Dr. Rhonda Breitzkreuz

Q = Quarter	Year 1				Year 2			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Manage project								
Recruit research team	■							
Coordinate research team	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Liaise with stakeholders	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Manage project budget	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Establish project								
Develop study protocol	■							
Coordinate ethics approval	■							
Coordinate research activities								
Review literature	■	■						
Recruit study participants		■	■	■				
Design research tools	■	■						
Collect data								
Conduct focus groups			■	■				
Transcribe focus groups			■	■				
Conduct interviews					■			
Transcribe interviews					■			
Analyse data								
Analyse focus group data				■	■			
Analyse interview data					■	■		
Interpret and synthesise project data				■	■	■		
Analyse policy documents	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Mobilise knowledge								
Finalise Knowledge Mobilisation plan	■							
Document findings						■	■	
Publish findings (academic audiences)							■	■
Develop Knowledge Mobilisation material						■	■	
Implement Knowledge Mobilisation plan								■

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