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Communication And Identity: The Paternity Leave Decision

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COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY: THE PATERNITY LEAVE DECISION

by

SCOTT SELLNOW-RICHMOND

DISSERTATION

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of Wayne State University,

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Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

For Debbie.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Regarding leave for care of young children, a great deal of work has been done across disciplines concerning the challenges surrounding working mothers and maternity leave (Clark, Hyde, Essex & Klein, 1997; Dustmann & Schönberg, 2012; Kelly & Dobbin, 1999). What has not received nearly as much attention (at least within the United States) are the challenges surrounding working fathers and paternity leave, specifically how fathers communicatively negotiate their various identities before, during and after the decision to take (or not to take) paternity leave to be with a new child. This paucity is not exclusive to paternity leave. Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) have argued that there exists far less emphasis on examining men's understanding of parental identity than that of women within most work-life contexts.

This study begins to address this by exploring a father's identities as they relate to the decision-making process regarding paternity leave. More broadly, the paternity leave decision acts as a stimulating issue to explore the identity frames (and gaps between these frames) as posited by the Hecht's (1993) Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), the role that Goffman's (1963) concept of stigmatized identity plays in the decision, and how these theoretical constructs (CTI and stigmatization) may be connected.

Literature Review

Paternity Leave Policies

The lion's share of extant literature that examines paternity leave has been conducted outside of the United States. Paternity leave has been the subject of extensive research in countries such as Norway and Sweden (e.g., Johansson & Klinth, 2008; Naz,

2010). These countries have utilized varied approaches to family leave, including parent-specific leave (maternity/paternity leave), leave to be split across parents (parental leave), or a combination of the two. For example, in Sweden all organizations are required to offer employees up to 18 months of parental leave. In Norway, 52 weeks of parental leave is permitted. In Finland, new parents are able to take up to 18 months of maternity leave, as well as 26 weeks of parental leave to be split between mother and father as they see fit (Waldfoegel, 2001). Sweden in particular has made a specific effort to encourage fathers to take a share of parental leave; in part via long-running government-sponsored ad campaigns stressing that caretaking and child rearing are masculine behaviors to be embraced (Klinth, 2008). In the North American context, Canada's parental leave policy has undergone two expansions since its inception in 1971, and currently makes 35 weeks of parental leave available to be split between the mother and father as the couple see fit, in addition to 15 weeks of maternity leave (White, 2006).

The government-mandated allotted leave for parents in these countries stand in contrast to the United States' Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), passed under President Bill Clinton in 1993. FMLA was designed to allow individuals (should both they and the organization they work for qualify) up to 12 weeks of leave for various health-related circumstances, including the birth or adoption of a new child. The fact that there is no distinct family-leave policy in the US can be seen as indicative of the lack of emphasis the United States has placed upon leave for new parents. While federally, there are no unique policies, individual organizations in the United States do provide paternity (and certainly maternity) leave. In fact, extant literature shows that organizations can (and often do) use the possibility of family leave (including, in some cases, paternity leave) as

a recruitment tool for potential employees, with the implication that they as an organization make great strides to account for work/life balance (Hochschild, 1997).

It is important to point out that even if “official” paternity leave options are not offered by organizations or in the event men do not utilize these formal options for various reasons, new fathers may still choose to take an unofficial form of paternity leave through the use of vacation and sick days. This diversity in potential options creates an opportunity to account for numerous varied and nuanced experiences.

As new fathers in the United States do not make the leave-taking decision in a context of a long-standing history of public endorsement (as is true in the Scandinavian countries), there is more potential for the leave-taking decision to set them apart from other fathers, singling out their identities in various ways. Thus, in the U.S., fathers’ decision regarding leave is a more deliberate, individual choice, rife with potential for different communicative events (key messages received, and opportunities to communicatively enact their identities), influences and impacts based upon their organization, relationship, history, and the numerous identities at play. Thus, new fathers in the United States will have specific identity concerns and values surrounding their paternity leave decision, as well as unique communicative experiences with the leave-taking process itself.

Impacts of Paternity Leave

Paternity leave has been shown to have impact on new fathers’ identities, allowing them an opportunity to communicatively enact their gendered identities in a way that makes room for nurturing, caretaking and other “non-traditional” types of masculinity. In one such study, Johansson (2011) utilized a series of in-depth interviews

and case studies in order to explore a changing, more caretaking-focused masculinity for Swedish fathers. Johansson (2011) interviewed a total of 20 men with different backgrounds (middle-class, immigrant, first-time fathers, homosexual fathers), ultimately putting together four case studies that were the focus of the overall study. One participant described the birth of his child as an important opportunity to re-evaluate his various identities. Describing his life previously as work-focused and stressful, “through his parental leave and the period he spent with his son, he discovered new values in life” (Johansson, 2011, p. 173). This sentiment was frequently described by participants and highlights what it means to be a man and masculine within the previously detailed “new masculinity,” focusing on caretaking and parenting as key aspects of one’s identity. In other words, men may feel more comfortable engaging in roles that have traditionally been primarily considered appropriate for women.

This study shows the importance of a communicative lens for the examination of identity and paternity leave. Participants were described as communicatively managing their home and parental identities with their partners, particularly for men who transition from work-focused to home-focused lifestyles. This study’s findings clearly support the notion of pursuing identities as communicative entities in the context of fatherhood.

Specifically, the results showcase that, for the study’s participants at least, fatherhood as an identity is being communicated “in different ways, (with) a certain blurring of gender distinctions and roles... taking place” (Johansson, 2011, p. 176). Fathers in this study were shown to communicatively express themselves and their fatherhood identity in personal ways, often focused on caregiving and being present with their children. This result is certainly encouraging, particularly as in the past gender role

conflict has proven to have multiple negative impacts for men (O'Neil, 1981). My study will serve as an opportunity to see whether and how, like the participants in Johansson's (2011) study, American fathers (if they take paternity leave) use their paternity leave as an opportunity to express their identities as caretakers and parents, or if participants in my study discuss a reconfiguring of work/life priorities.

Interestingly in Johansson's (2011) study, although paternity leave was included in fathers' discussion, it was one factor among many. The actual process of making the decision and the leave-taking itself were not explored. This is in contrast to Naz's (2010) study of Norwegian fathers usage of paternity leave. Utilizing information from a database on the total Norwegian population, over 14,000 Norwegian men's paternity leave usage was examined in connection with several independent variables (type of workplace, partner's salary, education, etc.). The study's participants reported they were more likely to take gender-neutral leave if they were a part of a female-dominated work environment. This is likely to be because the work environment was supportive of leave taking, and that the communicative discourse at hand was more encouraging of paternity leave, impacting the decision. Also, factors including their partners' income and number of other children in their family were shown to be important in the decision. This study did not, however, explore what aspects of the fathers' identities were important in making the decision.

My study serves as a key opportunity to examine what role identity plays in the paternity leave decision. It branches out from this existing work by accounting for the decision-making process. It could be that new fathers prioritize work-related aspects of their identities and thus choose not to take time off or limit their time off to be home with

their new child. This result would further illuminate the role that identity plays in the paternity leave decision.

Further, extant literature (e.g., Bratberg & Naz, 2014; Haas & Hwang, 2008) conducted in countries such as Norway and Sweden has shown that taking paternity leave has a substantial impact upon personal and family dynamics. For example, Kotsadam and Finseraas (2010) examined fathers' household behavior after Norway's 1993 implementation of their "daddy quota," or four weeks of parental leave that could only be utilized by fathers, as opposed to maternity or shared leave. Once again utilizing a national database, data on 984 men were used to contrast family behaviors for groups of individuals whose most recent child was born immediately prior to and after the implementation of the "daddy quota." Results showed that the additional paternity leave corresponded with more shared household activities and less conflict between parents. Thus, beyond the impact on the child and the father, the impact of paternity leave for communication between relational partners becomes an important avenue of study. What is also important and has yet to be explored is what impact the paternity leave decision may have in other contexts, such as within organizations or other key relationships. In other words, does taking paternity leave (or not taking it) result in any negative consequences, including stigmatizing communication, for new fathers? This is another question that my study aims to answer. Not only that, but the decision itself could make salient any number of aspects of one's identity. Therefore it will be important to look at many facets of identity as they relate to the paternity leave decision. With this in mind, is important to define and explore the identity concept itself.

Identity

While paternity leave acts as the stimulating issue for this study, the core remains the study of communication and identity. There are several approaches to the study of identity and I will review them here with an eye to the communicative aspects of identity.

In Identity Negotiation theory, Ting-Toomey (1999) defines identity as “the reflective self-conception or self-image that we derive from our family, gender, cultural, ethnic, and individual socialization process” (p. 212). The author states that while multiple other identity categories exist (e.g. those related to sexual orientation, age, etc.) cultural identities are the theory’s primary focus. Specifically, the theory seeks to explain how an individual obtains accurate information about the self and others in intercultural encounters. While it is possible that intercultural encounters may arise during the paternity leave decision, the theoretical framework for this study needs to be able to account for multiple identities beyond just cultural identities and different ways that they may manifest surrounding the paternity leave decision.

Tajfel and Turner (1975) also explored identity in a specific context: its relationship with intergroup behavior. The authors designed Social Identity Theory (SIT) in part to address the fact that studies of intergroup conflict and behavior did not properly account for the individual’s group identifications. In other words, the aspect of one’s identity connected to group membership. To do so, they first define social identity as a group of individuals who “identify and evaluate themselves in the same way and have the same definition for who they are, what attributes they have, and how they relate to and differ from people who are not in the group” (Hogg, 2006, p. 115). This stands in contrast with the personal identity, “a self-construal in terms of idiosyncratic personality attributes that are not shared with other people... or personal dyadic relationships with a specific

other person” (Hogg, 2006, p. 115). These identities are conceptualized on a continuum not as a fixed binary, with both identities salient to some degree in various situations. However, SIT posits that in a given situation either the social or personal identity is more salient. New fathers would certainly have both personal and social identities that become salient surrounding the paternity leave decision. For instance, one’s concept of himself as a father could be important, as well as the social identity connected to one’s workplace.

However, what does this theory have to offer regarding the identity as a couple? Social identity theorists have posited that a dyad can be considered a group if they share a social identity defined by a larger collective, such as being Americans overseas (Hogg, 2006). However, combining the partnership with all other group identifications, particularly in the context of having a baby together, does not do justice to such a rich identity. Also, SIT does not adequately account for the larger, macro-level identities that may be at play. New fathers will no doubt be aware of societal expectations connected to their various identities, and this should be accounted for as well.

Because the paternity leave decision will serve as a stimulating issue for a very nuanced exploration of communication and different identities, it was important to utilize a theoretical approach that is equally thorough across identities. Rather than a single identity, we are possessed of a set of different identities that are made salient based upon the communicative circumstances we find ourselves in (Mead, 1934). For example, the identities of father, worker, partner and man could all become salient surrounding the paternity leave decision. Participants in my study were experiencing the father identity for the first time, and thus the paternity leave decision serves as a key event in the first period of their lives where the fatherhood identity is made salient. These new fathers

were also experiencing the relationship between their identities as fathers and workers for the first time. These identities do not manifest solely within personal or group contexts, but also in dyadic relationships and on large, cultural, macro levels. In order to best explore these different identities and different contexts, CTI will be utilized as the key theoretical framework for this study.

The Theoretical Frameworks

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) served as the primary guiding force as it provided both an interpersonal communication approach to the study of identity, and the identity frames and identity frame gap concepts that lend a level of richness to this study. Specifically, CTI guided the understanding of various types of identity that could become salient during the paternity leave decision. Also, because choosing to communicatively enact various identities through the decision to take (or indeed not to take) time off of work to be with a new baby could carry with it the potential for stigmatization, Goffman's (1963) theory of stigmatization will also be utilized to explore this context. I will argue there is a connection between the CTI's concept of identity frame gaps and stigmatization of various identities.

Communication Theory of Identity (CTI)

Jung and Hecht (2004) created CTI in part as a relatively unique approach to the communicative study of identity. Whereas other approaches focused on identity negotiation (Ting-Toomey, 1999) or group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) Jung and Hecht (2004) posit "social relations and roles are internalized by individuals as identities through communication. Individuals' identities, in turn are acted out as social behavior through communication." (p. 266). Therefore an identity can be defined as a

social role or relation constructed through interpersonal communication. Not only that, but an identity exists as enacted, communicative behavior.

CTI's thoroughly communicative and interpersonal approach is important and appropriate for the study of identities in an interpersonal context such as the paternity leave decision. As will be seen, CTI's comprehensive approach allows for the exploration of how new fathers' identities, created through their understanding of their roles and relations, are made salient surrounding the paternity leave decision. CTI explores different contexts for identity through four identity frames (personal, enacted, relationship and communal), and each of these frames could play a role in the paternity leave decision. These frames, while distinct, are connected, interpenetrative, and have potential to either work in concert with one another, or create cross-frame conflict.

The **personal** identity frame is the one most in line with common conceptions of identity, consisting of an individual's feelings about himself (caring parent, hard worker, supportive relationship partner, etc.) commonly referred to as a self-concept or self-image. The **enactment** frame then emerges within communicative events through social interaction. In other words, how the self is enacted through interpersonal communication with others. Jung and Hecht (2004) root the enacted frame in their definition of identity. Specifically the fact that identities are not only created through communication about roles and relations, but that identities are "acted out as social behavior through communication" (p. 266). For example, a new father may envision himself as someone who places a high priority on family above work (personal frame) and enacts this identity by making sure to take time with his partner and child every day, regardless of workload or outside responsibilities. The enactment frame, then, places communication as the locus

of identity and its driving force. Jung and Hecht (2004) are not alone in conceptualizing identity as enactment. For example, West and Zimmerman's (1987) theory of Doing Gender also places enactment at the forefront. Specifically, in Doing Gender Theory, the act of accomplishing one's gender identity is done through communicative interaction with others, similar to CTI's concept of the enactment frame. Therefore while the enactment frame potentially stands out among the frames of identity, there is support for incorporating a communicative enactment facet of identity.

Arguing "it is impossible to consider identity as enactment without also considering identity as relationship," (p. 79), Hecht (1993) emphasizes the importance of the **relational frame**. The relational frame, by far the most nuanced of the four, is composed of four aspects. The first aspect is the internalization of how the individual is viewed by others, referred to by Jung and Hecht (2004) as *ascribed relational identity*. The relational frame goes beyond the ascribed relational identity, however, including how individuals define themselves in regards to their relationships (as a friend, marital partner, occupational acquaintance), relationships between identities, and finally the relationship itself as an entity and identity, such as that of a dyadic romantic couple. The ascribed relational identity frame in particular is of relevance for identity in the context of making the decision to take or not take paternity leave. Specifically, the paternity leave decision is likely made with input from others. The expectations of the mother of the child are likely to have an impact on the paternity leave decision. In other words, if a participant's partner has specific expectations or ideas of what type of father, man, worker or relational partner the participant should be, to the extent these expectations are internalized, i.e., the ascribed relational identity, they are likely to play a key role in the

paternity leave decision. Not only that, but other key individuals aside from a relationship partner could communicate expectations and understandings of the new fathers' identities, including parents, siblings, friends, work colleagues, and other peers, so the relational frame of CTI will not necessarily be limited to one's partner.

The **communal** frame of identity refers to something that holds a group of people together. In a way, the communal identity is very similar to the personal frame, expanded to include a group of people, rather than a single individual, such as organizational identities that promote long hours and dedication to one's career at a specific workplace (Hochschild, 1997).

The organizational-level communal identity has been shown to have an impact on Swedish fathers' decision of whether or not to take their offered paternity leave, being more likely to do so if their peers do as well, and it is endorsed by the organizational discourse. Notably, Bygren and Duvander 's (2006) study in Sweden found that fathers were more influenced by the organization and workplace peers than their wives' workplace situation in the decision whether or not to take leave, therefore making the communal frame a priority over the relationship frame. The authors do not, however, explore *why* this is, tellingly stating that more could be revealed by studying the fathers' relationships inside and outside of the workplace. Certainly key relationships in one's life inside and outside of the workplace could impact the paternity leave decision. Therefore it is important to account for the relational frame of identity and the role that it may play in the paternity leave decision.

A key weakness of CTI is the lack of elaboration on the relationship between "identity" and "identity frame." There exists little if any description of this connection

within the extant literature on CTI. Therefore one contribution that my study will make is the refinement of CTI as a theory. Jung and Hecht (2004) define an identity as both as an internalization of communication concerning social roles and relations and as a communicative expression of the self. The authors refer to identity frames as internal and external loci of identity, which does not accurately capture the relationship between identities and identity frames. I propose that the relationship should be first and foremost understood in terms of discreet identities, henceforth referred to as “identity categories,” such as “father,” “partner,” “worker,” and “man.” These identity categories manifest within Hecht’s (1993) concept of “identity frames.” In other words, the frames are the intra/interpersonal/communal context in which identity categories manifest (see figure 1).

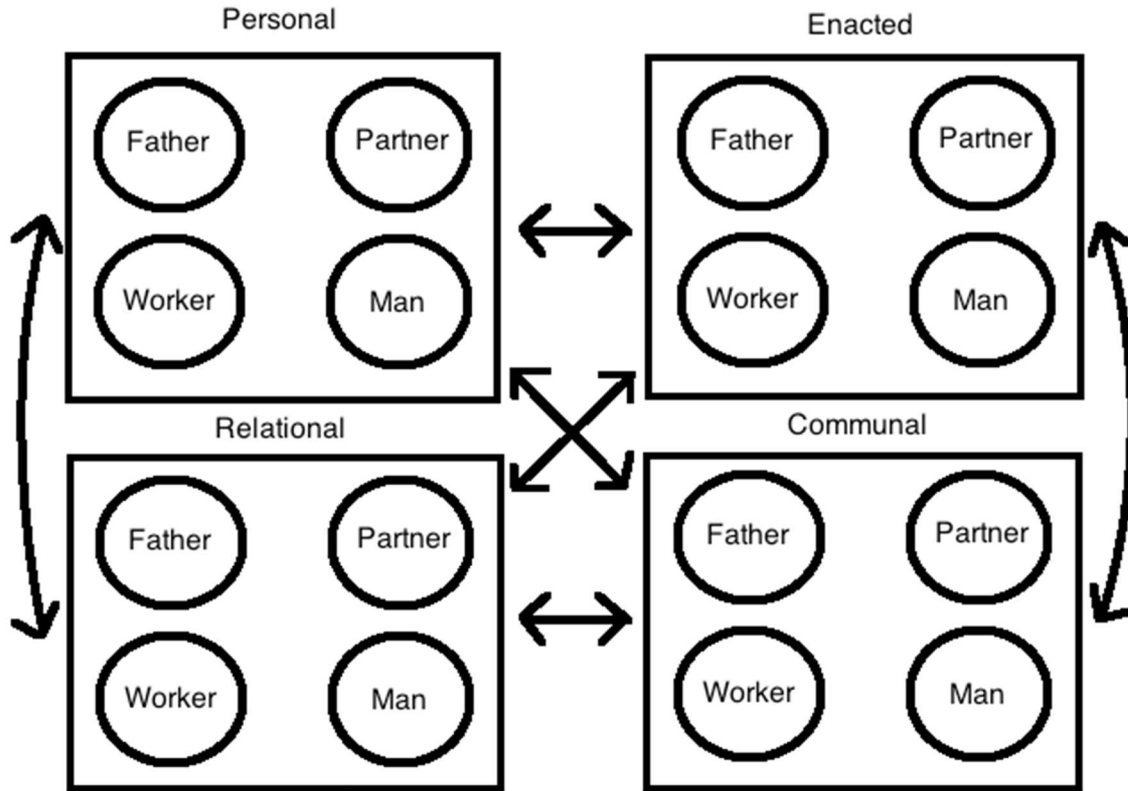


Figure 1. Identity frames and identity categories.

A single identity category can manifest within multiple frames (or indeed all of them), but does so in a manner unique to each frame. For example, in terms of identity as a father, I may perceive myself as a caring, present father (personal frame), communicatively enact that identity through my behavior with my child (enactment frame), as a part of my partner's and my belief that as a couple we are involved parents (relational frame), despite my understanding of the macro-level discourse about fathers' preferred focus on work and financial provision (communal frame). Thus the same identity category of father manifests and is congruent across some frames (personal, enacted and relational frame) but diverges with the communal frame. A specific identity category manifesting in an incongruent way across different identity frames creates an

identity frame gap. Jung and Hecht (2004) have lamented the fact that existing studies predominantly use CTI to examine the four identity frames without paying attention to the idea of gaps between them. The authors defined frame gaps as “discrepancies between or among the four frames of identity” (Jung & Hecht, 2004, 268). In other words, while the four frames of identity are conceptualized as working together and being inextricably connected, there can exist instances where they are in conflict. By placing the identity gap concept at the forefront of the theory’s application, my study will help to address this lack of application.

Jung and Hecht (2004) posit that identity gaps are “unavoidable” (p. 268) due to the complexity of identity and interpersonal communication, and that these gaps could impact numerous outcomes of communication including communication satisfaction, the feeling that one is understood, and conversational appropriateness and effectiveness. The paternity leave decision serves as an opportunity to look at gaps in how identity categories manifest across identity frames and what these gaps are like for the individual. On the other hand, as identity frames certainly can be congruent (no gap), the paternity leave decision may make these congruencies salient as well. For example, the paternity leave decision may be made in one way or another in an effort to prevent an identity gap from occurring, i.e., striving for congruency. If there does exist identity congruencies of this type, it would not only further refine CTI as a theory but also shed more light on the circumstances surrounding the paternity leave decision.

Some studies (e.g. Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Kam & Hecht, 2009) examine the identity frame gap concept. In Wadsworth, Hecht and Jung’s (2008) exploration of the educational satisfaction of international students, the authors utilized

CTI's concept of identity frame gaps to assess whether the existence of a personal-enacted or personal-relational identity frame gap correlated with lower levels of educational satisfaction. While the personal-enacted gap did show such a relationship as "personal-enacted identity gaps are created when international students are placed in classroom situations where their expectations for classroom norms and behaviors are violated" (Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008, p. 80), there was no such relationship reported between personal-relational identity frame gaps, possibly because international students expected to be confronted with inaccurate stereotypes from American peers. Thus, when participants were placed in a situation where they could not enact their identities in ways they felt were true to themselves, it diminished their comfort and enjoyment of the educational experience. This is relevant for new fathers as they may be placed in situations where they are unable to enact their personal identities via paternity leave, which could also come with significant impacts.

While studies such as these (Kam & Hecht, 2009; Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008) show the utility of the identity frame gap concept and begin to address the fact that it remains underutilized in CTI research, the focus is on the *effects* of these gaps existing, rather than *what these gaps are like* for the individual. In other words, in a situation such as the paternity leave decision, do gaps arise concerning fatherhood, work, partnership, etc.? If so, how are they experienced? A qualitative approach focusing on fathers' lived experience creates an opportunity to examine how the gaps play out for the individual. It should also be noted that Wadsworth, Hecht and Jung (2008) did not account for the communal frame of identity within their study, which could have yielded additional information regarding any relationship between educational satisfaction and a larger,

macro level discourse about being an international student. My study will differ in this regard, accounting for the communal frame of identity as well, adding another layer of nuance to the incorporation of CTI.

The subject of paternity leave serves as an opportunity to examine an intersection of the four identity frames. Certainly communal identity frames such as an organization's approach to leave-taking or even the larger societal understanding of paternity leave could impact the decision to take (or not to take) time away from work to be with a new child. One could argue that maleness, fatherhood, work, etc. are all identities that manifest in the macro-level communal frame. And the communal frame may or may not fit with personal, enacted or relationship identity frames. A new father could view himself as a caring, progressive, nurturing father (personal frame), take paternity leave (enacted frame) and while doing so in agreement with key individuals in his life (relationship frame), all while being cognizant of an organizational and/or societal idea that doing so violates accepted gender norms, failing to communicatively behave in a way that is accepted and expected (communal identity). If this (or any other) gap does occur, understanding the details of what it is like for the individual, how they make sense of it, how these expectations are communicated to them, and the impact on the paternity leave decision will all shed light on communicative discourses and their impact on various identities and communicative behaviors.

Therefore CTI was used to guide the design and analysis of this study by supplying the key components through which to explore new fathers' decision of whether or not to take paternity leave and how this decision relates to their various identities that came into play in this context. The identity frames will serve as the main constructs

through which to understand how identity and identity frame gaps become salient during the process of the paternity leave decision. By exploring communication and identity through paternity leave, this study will show what aspects of one's identity are salient in the decision, and thus how paternity leave may be successfully advocated for in the future; better encouraging men to take time off to be with their new children. By exploring gaps and the different identity frames, this study can illuminate key communicative events between the participant and key individuals (relational frame), and how larger communicative discourses are understood, internalized, and ultimately play a role in the decision (communal frame).

RQ1: What identities are salient for new fathers in the decision of whether or not to take paternity leave?

RQ2: What, if any, identity frame gaps arise for new fathers when considering the decision of whether or not to take time off to be with a new child?

These questions will help to dig deeper into identities and identity frame gaps as an experience for new fathers. There has been little attention given to what the identity frame gaps are like for individuals, which the above research questions will address. Again, one of the key aspects of the identity frame gap concept that has been accounted for in the extant literature is what effect these gaps can have on the individual who experiences them (e.g., Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008). While exploring what these identity frame gaps are like is important, there remains work to be done concerning the effects of these gaps as well. Existing research on the effect of identity frame gaps has yet to explore the fact that in certain situations, such as gaps that include the communal

identity, the gap may have consequences that could ultimately result in an identity becoming stigmatized.

Stigmatization

When identity frame gaps occur, the individual may find himself in a situation with the potential for stigmatization. Stigma as a concept, defined as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” by Goffman (1963) has a clear albeit largely unexplored connection to the identity frame gap concept of CTI. If the enacted-communal identity frame gap results from a discrepancy between how one enacts an identity through interpersonal communication and how others believe this identity should be enacted then it echoes Goffman’s conceptualization of stigma as resulting from an identity frame conflict. Hecht et al. (2002) have already emphasized the potential for conflict within CTI when “the ascribed identity from a relational partner or from the community does not match the self-selected personal identity” (p. 853). This, then, opens the individual up for the potential for stigmatization.

Specifically, an identity becomes stigmatizing when there is a gap between what Goffman (1963) referred to as the virtual identity (the qualities, characteristics, attributes etc. that it is believed an individual *should* have) and enacted identity (or the qualities, characteristics, attributes etc. that the individual *does* have and enacts). This friction, then, is the source of stigmatization, as an individual’s personal identity is seen as different from or less than what a larger communicative discourse expects them to be. So, instead of the identity frame gap being between who one believes they are and what others see them as, it is between what they are and what someone else believes they

should be. This means, then, that stigmatization can be rooted firmly within the identity frame gap concepts laid out within CTI.

In his formative work on stigmatization, Goffman (1963) distinguished between two types of stigma: discredited stigmas, or those that are either easily viewed by the public (such as those related to physical appearance) or are private but have been exposed (acknowledgement as a sex offender or drug addict) and stigmas that are discreditable, or not immediately noticeable to the public and have not yet been disclosed (e.g., being HIV positive).

The enacted-relational and enacted-communal gaps, then, could (assuming not meeting expectations of the other) potentially qualify as discredited stigmas. Including when one has decided to take paternity leave, communicated this information to others, and been stigmatized, or chosen not to take paternity leave and been stigmatized. For example, taking paternity leave and having that decision public at work could stigmatize the individual as someone who does not prioritize work enough. On the other hand, by not taking time off, it could lead to the perception that the new father is not dedicated or caring.

Conversely, the personal-relational or personal-communal identity frame gaps qualify as discreditable, should the potential for stigmatization to occur exist, but without the identity enacted through disclosure. By exploring identity in the context of the paternal leave decision making, there is another possibility: when new fathers see themselves as reliably caring and engaged fathers (personal frame) but because of fear of **potential** stigmatizing messages from others, choose to behave (enacted frame) differently than they would prefer.

Thus, as the study of paternity leave allows for any combination of the four CTI identity frames as well as potential for various identity frame gaps or congruencies to emerge it is clear from a theoretical standpoint how stigmatization could potentially occur. Further, stigmatizing communicative events, or those that single out an individual as socially different, place blame for the stigma on the individual, and link their identity to personal or social harm (Smith, 2007), could play a key role in the decision on whether or not take paternity leave. Rudman and Mescher (2013) have demonstrated that asking for family leave in the United States is potentially stigmatizing. After having 131 men review a transcript where a man either requested 12 weeks of time off from an authority figure to care for a sick child or the same amount of time to help his widowed mother, participants reported their reactions to the subject and his leave decision. Both conditions resulted in participants rating the men requesting time off as possessing stigmatizing “feminine” traits, including being weak and uncertain. While Rudman and Mescher (2013) did not include paternity leave as a reason for requesting time off, this demonstrates the potential for stigmatization if new fathers request paternity leave.

Even the potential for stigma could be enough to prevent a new father from taking time off from the workplace to be with a new child, should the potential negative effects be far-reaching or substantially impactful on his identity as a worker and as a man. Reacting to this potential stigmatization could result in an identity frame gap between the fathers’ desire to enact a parental identity through leave-taking (personal identity) but choosing not to do so due to these outside pressures (enacted identity). In essence, not only could stigmatization be seen as rooted in identity frame gaps, but also in the some cases the act of trying to avoid discredited stigma could result in a gap. This is an

important consideration, as it further illuminates the nature of communicative discourses surrounding paternity leave, and their impact. Thus, the following research questions will be explored:

RQ3a: Do new fathers describe facing potential identity stigmatization concerning the decision to take time off to be with a new child?

RQ3b: If so, what impact, if any, does identity stigmatization have on the fathers' decision of whether or not to take paternity leave?

Summary

The study of paternity leave has already been used as context for the study of fathers' identities (Johansson, 2011). The United States has a unique approach to parental leave in general, and in part because of this, paternity leave in the US has remained an under-studied concept. My study serves as an opportunity to explore various identities as they become salient surrounding the paternity leave decision, as well as studying paternity leave from an American perspective. Identity frame gaps as theorized within the Communication Theory of Identity are also accounted for, and the potential for the paternity leave decision to involve stigmatization of a father's identity is explored.

By utilizing the paternity leave decision as a stimulating issue for the study of identity, multiple practical and theoretical gains are possible. This study will illuminate what aspects of the self are important in connection to the paternity leave decision. In other words, if a new father chooses to take paternity leave (or not to do so) what aspects of who he is are relevant to do so? This information could prove useful for motivating both fathers and organizations to tailor paternity leave in ways that speak to fathers' various identities.

From a theoretical standpoint, CTI's identity frame gap concept has been comparatively under-utilized, and has certainly not been used in connection with a stimulating issue that provides the opportunity for many possible identity frame gaps. Also, by connecting stigmatization to identity frame gaps, this study stands to help to illustrate a previously unexplored connection between two existing theories.

CHAPTER II: METHOD

In order to best explore this study's research questions, a qualitative approach is logical and appropriate. Studies utilizing CTI have already demonstrated the appropriateness of coupling examination of the theory with a qualitative approach. Orbe (2004) explored the narratives of first generation college students (FGS), including how their FGS identities manifested within the four frames identified by CTI. Similarly, Hecht et al. (2002) utilized interviews in their analysis of CTI and the Jewish American identity. Stigmatization theory has also been coupled with qualitative analysis. A qualitative, interview-based method has been used to explore how individuals manage their stigmatized identities (Toyoki & Brown, 2013). With this in mind, in order to best explore the above research questions and account for the detail and nuance of the various identity considerations surrounding the paternity leave decision, a qualitative interview-based approach was utilized for this study.

Participant Selection

Participants were recruited on the basis of being the father of a child who was born no more than 12 months prior to study participation. Participants were required to have been employed prior to and after the baby was brought home, so that there was the chance for some form of leave (be it via official organization policy or unofficial leave taken through vacation and/or sick days) to be away from work to remain home with the child. Participants were also required to be first time fathers. This decision was made to preserve the uniqueness of the paternity leave decision; if they had fathered previous children they would have prior experiences and other considerations that could potentially play a role in this particular paternity leave choice. Adoptive and gay fathers

were not included in this study as accounting for such diverse experiences was beyond this study's scope. The process of adoption for gay men and the surrogacy process are incredibly nuanced and unique processes. Because of this the identities and issues at hand would have stood out significantly, complicating the analysis. Both gay fathers and men whose child was born via surrogacy have distinct identities, possible identity frame gaps and potential experiences with stigmatization that would be rich enough for the sole focus of a future study.

Design

To begin, a tentative interview protocol and coding manual were developed and tested via a pilot interview (not utilized in this study's results). Post-transcription and coding of the pilot interview, I conducted a member-check with the participant, discussing his reaction to the results. The interview protocol and codebook were revised further before settling on the versions utilized in the study proper. The codebook was further revised both during the interview process (as new codes and themes emerged) and after data collection was concluded (as codes and themes were expanded or combined as appropriate).

Recruitment materials and information focused on exploring working fathers and their experiences in general, rather than explicitly stating the importance of paternity leave (See Appendix B: Recruitment Materials). This choice was made for two reasons; to collect as much information about the working fatherhood experience and potential identity frame gaps as possible, and to avoid discouraging any potential participants who would have chosen not to take any time off from participating in the study for fear of ineligibility/judgment from the researcher.

Recruitment and Sample

Participants were recruited through a variety of methods. Upon securing IRB approval, fliers were posted on the campus of a large urban Midwestern University. Ads were also posted online via Facebook. Two participants responded to the posted fliers. Ten participants responded to a posting on Facebook, with the remaining 6 taking part as a result of snowball sampling. At the end of each interview the participant was asked to refer any friends or family who qualified for the study.

A total of 18 new, first time fathers took part in this study. While it was not a requirement for participation, each participant in this study chose to take paternity leave. Participants ranged in age from early 20's to mid 40's, and reported diverse professions. While the recruitment materials contained no specific job requirements beyond holding a job for a timeframe where leave (official or unofficial) would be possible, the positions held struck a desired balance between blue and white-collar positions (see Appendix A: Participant Occupations). The diversity of these careers allowed for a level of richness to the results in diversity of experience and in regard to the paternity leave options available. All participants reported being in a relationship with the mother of their new child at the time of study participation, which while not a requirement for participant, added context for the results.

Procedures

After briefing and giving informed consent, participants took part in open, semi-structured interviews with the researcher (see Appendix C: Interview Protocol). No participants declined participation after the informed consent process was completed. Participants were asked to define, to the best of their abilities, the essence or key

characteristics of being a father and a man. They were also asked about their work identities, including their organization's approach to work/life balance. These questions were used as context and to construct probes for when the subject of paternity leave was addressed during the interview. For example, if a participant emphasized the importance of fathers providing financially for their families, this was brought up in the context of the paternity leave decision to see how this key aspect of the father identity may have impacted the decision. If content that emerged from the preliminary questions regarding the key identity categories was not echoed or described as relevant by participants when discussing the paternity leave decision, it was not included in the analysis. It is because of this need for flexibility in interview content that the semi-structured format was of such importance. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes and resulted in 250 pages of single-spaced transcripts. Each participant was given a \$40 gift card for his time and participation. I took extensive personal notes throughout the interview process, documenting my reaction to emergent data, as well as the process in general to remain reflexive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Sampling sufficiency (Morse et al., 2002) was attended to, with data collection continuing until theoretical saturation has been reached. I chose to transcribe and code interview data concurrently with the recruitment and interviewing process in order to assess when theoretical saturation occurred.

While I chose to code all data myself, in order to account for confirmability of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), upon completion of the 14th interview, I paused further data collection to finish transcription and coding of these interviews. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) have emphasized the utility of breaking up the data collection process in this way,

creating “a rhythm of work that keeps the growth of data under control and keeps the analyst alert to the conceptual trajectory of the study” (p. 214). Upon completion of this process it was determined that theoretical saturation had not yet been reached. At this time I also reached out to all participants to date for member-checks in effort to ensure credibility from a qualitative standpoint (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Only four participants chose to do so. Four more interviews were then conducted, transcribed and coded. Upon reviewing the data in total, I decided that no further themes or relevant information was being revealed.

Analytic Approach

In order to process the data, a combination of inductive and deductive coding was undertaken (Lindlof, 2002). For RQ1 a combination of deductive and inductive coding process was used, with categories emerging that corresponded with four key identities for the new fathers: father, man, worker and partner. Within these categories, codes emerged (father – involved, partner – teamwork, etc.) that added further detail regarding which identities and aspects of identities became salient in the paternity leave decision. For example, if a participant described paternity leave as important as a father, specifically because he wished to be on-hand and active in raising the child, it was coded as “Father – being involved.” Units of analysis were statements or collections of statements that corresponded with a coded theme. That is to say that a coded unit of analysis could span multiple statements provided the interviewee was continuously discussing the same coded theme.

For RQ2, RQ3a, and RQ3b, a deductive coding process was utilized based upon concepts from the Communication Theory of Identity and Stigmatization Theory. For

RQ2, the concept of identity frame and frame gaps from CTI were used to guide the coding of interview data where participants described disconnects across identity frames. For example if a participant described feeling a conflict between his decision to take paternity leave and the expectations of a friend or family member, it was coded as “Enacted-Relational Gap.” For RQ3a and 3b, talk of stigma was coded from Smith’s (2007) exploration of stigmatization as a communicative concept, specifically when participants mentioned the possibility of being singled out in some way, and connecting this difference to some degree of social peril either enacted “I was treated poorly at work when I returned” or potential “I was definitely aware of the possibility of taking too much time off for it to be acceptable”. RQ3b accounted for what impact, if any, the participants described (potential) stigmatization having upon the paternity leave decision. (See Appendix D: Coding Manual).

CHAPTER III: RESULTS

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

The first research question inquired as to which identities became salient for new fathers in relation to the decision of whether or not to take paternity leave. Four key identities emerged: father, partner, worker and man. Each of these categories was further delineated with multiple aspects of these identities (e.g., father – caretaker, man – leader). These four identity categories often manifested within the four identity frames posited by CTI: personal, enacted, relational and communal.

The Father Identity

Not surprisingly, the most commonly (13) invoked identity in connection with the paternity leave decision was that of being a father. Three themes emerged regarding the key aspects of being a father that participants felt were important in making the paternity leave decision: being involved, putting family first, and developing a relationship with their child.

Being involved.

The most commonly reported identity concern, discussed by 11 participants, was the importance of taking leave as fathers to be involved with their new children. These participants described the desire to enact their father identity by taking part in the day-to-day activities with their new child. Participants described a desire to get their “hands dirty” (literally and figuratively) with all that being a parent entailed. As Participant 1 discussed:

I mean I don't want my wife to be the only one who (pause) rocks the baby and feeds the baby. She does most of that? But I wanna be the one to do it too. Um,

and the only reason she does most of it is because she's home with the baby. Um. And also it's just a little bit more natural. So I watch my wife feed her food and then I will do it. So i'm rarely the one to first break new ground in terms of what the baby needs. Um, But once I know how to do it I really do want to do it.

Participant 1 emphasizes that taking paternity leave allows him to get in on the “ground floor” as far as taking care of the child, even if he defaults to his wife at first to learn how to do so properly. Similarly, Participant 17 emphasized being able to establish that he is the type of father who will be involved with his child from the very start: “as a father I always want to be there for my, my child and I think that was- I wanted to make sure that that precedent was set early on.”

When asked if taking time off to be with his new baby was in line with his identity as a father, Participant 4 replied that

I think it's right in line with it. I think it's uh; i'm also a firm believer that a father needs to have a presence in a baby's life. Um, and, you know, I believe that a father's presence is ah, extremely important in a baby's life. I think that it would be nice, even though you don't necessarily need the couple weeks off (pause) I think you should take the full couple weeks.

Participant 4 recounted stories and advice he had received from family and friends that his presence at home after the birth of his daughter would be largely unnecessary, particularly a memorable message wherein his friend stated he would be “just a crane,” or a prop used largely for basic activities. This could have influenced his statement that one might “not necessarily need” the time off. Even so, he still emphasizes the need to

communicatively enact the father identity through being present in the home when the baby is very young.

These sentiments were echoed in many fathers' descriptions of why they decided to take paternity leave. Participants described spending time with their newborn as "a huge priority." In one case, when contemplating the idea of not being able to take the time off, participant 8 stated he would have been "grief stricken" without the opportunity to be present at home with his new son for at least a short time before returning to work. In other words, not being able to communicatively enact their new fatherhood identity by being involved and present would be a difficult situation. This will be explored in greater detail when discussing RQ2 and identity frame gaps.

Putting family first.

Similarly, four participants mentioned the importance of taking paternity leave as an opportunity to enact their fatherhood identities as ones that take precedence over other aspects, particularly work. Participant 15 emphasized this in his interview

See, my, honestly, my priority list is family first. I don't care what my job was; I don't care if I was a-a-a executive at a big company. So, job, if they wanted to let me go, well first of all I don't think they could legally (laughs). Um, but (laughs) but I-you know, if I were to lose my job over that, over spending that first week with my family? Then fine. See ya. See ya later.

Participant 18 similarly noted the importance of enacting his fatherhood identity by communicating that work must come second to his focus on family:

I think it's important to model and to show, you know, your family at certain times that hey, work is important. But work is not- it's not the end all. It-it-it's not

the end game. The reason that I work is for you. The reason that I work is to, is to fulfill this role of pro-providing for you (pause) and if there's ever something that comes up that's, that supersedes work, even if it's just temporarily like a birth of kids. I think it's important to say hey, gonna step aside here for these two weeks.

As Participant 18 discusses it is important to enact his identity as a father by placing family above work, at least in part because it allows him to communicatively “model” this behavior for the rest of his family, including his infant child.

Developing relationship with child.

A theme that emerged for three participants was taking paternity leave to specifically cultivate a healthy relationship with their new baby. Participant 3 briefly touched upon this concept, discussing the importance of leave so that his new baby wouldn't ultimately “look at him as if he was a stranger.” Participant 5 discusses society's communal expectations of fathers and how paternity leave can help to build a necessary relationship:

I think its-it-it, the thing society cries out about, are all-can, uh, can largely be addressed by having the father in the home more often. You see what I mean? It (pause) girls won't grow up with so many problems like they, you know, as-what do they call, daddy issues. You know? If he's around more.

Participant 18 went into even more detail about enacting the fatherhood identity and creating the unique relationship with a child through paternity leave:

You know, now, start now being a part of their lives in that way, be interested in what they're doing, want to know what's going on with them. Uh, don't just be about your work and your responsibility. Put that aside sometimes and say, “lets

play dolls.” Or (laughs) whatever! And then you become a part of their world in a way that when they are 13 or 14 or later on, they do, they trust you. They can confide in you and so starting now taking this time off i-is kind of like the first baby step towards that, I guess. So I-that's part of why I view it as so important.

This quote is of particular importance because it showcases the difference between participants discussing enacting the father identity through being present and the importance of *building a long-term relationship* starting with paternity leave.

Overall, the category of the father identity showcased several aspects that became salient for participants in relation to the paternity leave decision. Taking paternity leave ultimately provided multiple participants with an opportunity to enact their new father identities in key ways.

The Partner Identity

As salient as the father identity was in the paternity leave decision, it certainly was not the only identity category to be discussed. A total of 9 participants referenced the identity category of partner as being salient regarding their paternity leave decision. Three themes emerged related to the partner identity: caretaker, teamwork, and the paternity leave decision itself.

Caretaker.

Acting as a caretaker for one’s wife/partner due to the difficulties of adjusting to a new baby was the most common theme, discussed by five of the study participants. This facet of their partner identity was often brought up in connection with the importance of being present with their new children. Participant 1 demonstrated this combination of identity enactments:

You know, I have this baby, um, who I wanna get to know and learn how to raise. I wanna help my wife, you know, pregnancy, giving birth is, it's tough! You know, there are certain things that happen that she wasn't as mobile (pause) there's a lot of recovery, there's, beyond even just normally. So she needed help too. And I wanted to be here to help, so I mean I wanted to be here.

This passage illustrates the thought of wanting to be present for the new child but also that the participant placed an emphasis on acting as a caretaker as his wife was recovering from birth in the coming weeks. This was echoed by Participant 9:

I mean spending time with (my daughter) is a huge priority of mine. Um, and so I think s-and, and supporting (my wife)! I think taking time after (my daughter) was born was (pause) equally if not more for (my wife) as it was for (my daughter). Um, and so I think that's definitely in line with abilities that I have or I want to have as a-a husband and a father.

Participant 9 once again couples the enactment of a father and partner identity together in similar ways, wanting to spend time and be present with his new daughter, and also that paternity leave was just as much, if not more focused on being on hand for his wife. Other participants who stressed the importance of the caretaking aspect of their partner identity commonly described being surprised at the toll that the birth of their child took on their wives, placing importance on being able to care for her in her time of need.

Teamwork.

Similarly to caretaking, three participants made statements corresponding with the idea that taking paternity leave was an important part of their relational identity, viewing their relationship as one where teamwork and balance is the norm, such as Participant 3's

statement that compared to how he and his wife approach all aspects of life together, paternity leave was

No different. I mean, it, you know, she's gonna fill in the roles that I'm deficient in as a parent. I'm going to do the same for her, we make up for each other's weaknesses and we make each other stronger. Then, it's no different than a marriage. So you-you just keep going with the same roles that you have been in your marriage into parenthood.

Participant 3 emphasized that paternity leave was a valuable opportunity to maintain his and his wife's relational identity as a couple who shore up each other's weaknesses, transferring that outlook and approach from marriage to parenthood as well. Participant 2 also discussed the emphasis of approaching partnership with teamwork when it came to adjusting to life with their new baby

I can't picture a situation where I wouldn't take at least a week (off from work). Um, you know, it's no- it's-especially in hindsight, knowing the kind of stress and, and just the absurdity of being home with a newborn, and, there's no sleep. There's no schedule. There- time just bleeds into itself. Um. Yeah. The ah-the idea of not having at least a week just to be home and help, that'd be impossible.

Participant 2 emphasized that due to the "stress and absurdity" of caring for a newborn, he could not imagine not being on hand to help his wife and split the duties as much as possible. These fathers felt it was particularly important to continue to keep continuity with the teamwork aspect of their relational identity and their existing approach to partnership with their wives.

Paternity leave decision.

The final aspect of the parental identity that became salient for participants was their approach to the decision itself. Two participants specifically brought up how they chose to handle the decision of whether they would take time off and how much. Participant 10 made a point of stating that it was a decision made together:

So (I was off of work) for a week and then the following weekend I kind of talked to my wife and said “okay, are you ready for me to go back to work? Do you need me to stay home?” And we kind of both came to the (pause) all I-I should go back to work on Monday. I think, um, we made it together.

This is noteworthy because the participant, unlike those above, is not describing a teamwork approach to caring for the new child, but rather making the decision of when to end his paternity leave together with his partner. This stands somewhat in contrast to Participant 14, who placed the decision entirely on his wife:

Yeah, I mean, it was (pause) I-honestly, like, I wanted t-to me it was like whatever (my wife) wanted, was (pause) 'Cause I was okay with being there until sh-until we left the hospital. And if she wanted me to stay longer I could have.

While participant 14 ultimately did take a week off from work, previously in the interview he stated that he originally had no intention of taking any time off whatsoever. It was his wife’s desire for him to remain home, an aspect of his relational identity that ultimately was the deciding factor in his paternity leave decision.

The Work Identity

The third key identity category that became salient while discussing the paternity leave decision was related to work. All of the participants in this study ultimately did take

time off from work in some manner, but six of these individuals described an awareness of their connection to work as well as the responsibility to be home. Two themes emerged: enjoying/taking pride in one's work and having a sense of loyalty/responsibility. Also, one participant described wanting to set an example as a worker for his new child.

Pride in one's work.

While in many new fathers' interviews paternity leave was discussed as an opportunity to put family above work, four participants discussed how much they enjoy/take pride in their jobs when asked how their work identities fit with the decision to take time away to be with their new children. This typically manifested when participants described a desire to return to work, such as Participant 8:

You know, (I) loved getting to hang out with (my son) and getting that time, but (I) also felt kind of ready to return to work. So, I-I love being-and I love, I enjoy working and especially when it's like my dream job. I really, really love it.

Participant 9 described the decision to take time off from work to be with his new daughter to be an easy one, but also described work as

the biggest, the biggest reason for me not to take time off. It was my own, you know, workaholic kind of tendencies, you know? That I would want to keep going and that kind of thing.

Once again, the enjoyment of work is brought up as a key way that the participant typically enacts his identity, which became salient when taking time off from work to be at home.

Loyalty/responsibility.

Three participants brought up loyalty or responsibility involving work when discussing the paternity leave decision. This was disclosed by discussing not wanting co-workers to have to go too far out of their way to cover, and concern that workload could pile up while the individual was gone. Once again, Participant 17 stated that:

I would have taken, you know a month and a half if didn't have the responsibility to get back and make sure that I was there and people knew I was around, and so on and so forth. You know, and I mean especially when you're a small business owner. It's so important for visibility. It's so important for morale of your employees that they see you there and working as hard as they are.

This quote is particularly interesting as the participant, as a small-business owner, is a key contributor to the communal identity at his workplace. In other words, it is his responsibility to maintain and cultivate the communal identity of working hard for all of his employees, while still taking time off to be with his wife and new child.

Setting an example.

The third and final aspect of identity that emerged within the work identity was the idea that a new father should return to work relatively promptly in order to continue to set an example for his family, emphasizing the importance of hard work. Participant 13 (the only participant to discuss this) directly brought up his own paternity leave decision and how it may ultimately impact his son, wanting to make sure his son grows up to

be a-a man who, um, isn't lazy. And doesn't take advantage of, um, of situations to be lazy. It-he-he, he's punctual. He's at work, um, knows that you, if you don't work you don't eat. Um, you earn your wages by the sweat of your brow. So I

want him to be that kind of man. And so, I was-ah, in hindsight um, looking back and thinking about, you know, how much time I took off, I want to be sure that when my son's older and he's having kids of his own, that he doesn't look back and me and go “dad, you took off for like, for like a month!”

As this quote demonstrates, it was important for this participant to enact his work identities in such a way that it would set a desired example for his child, even though he also emphasized the importance of being present at home as it related to his identity as a father.

The Male Identity

Finally, the fourth identity category that was remarked as salient during the paternity leave decision was that of being a man. Interestingly, this identity was explicitly remarked upon the least, by four of the new fathers interviewed, and some participants mentioned their difficulty in separating the idea of being a man from being a father. Still, the idea of aspects of the male identity being important in the paternity leave decision was discussed in several interviews. Interestingly, two of the three identity aspects that emerged, being involved and developing a relationship with a child, were also connected to discussion of the father identity. The third, being a leader, however, was discussed solely in relation to being a man.

Being involved.

Similar to being involved connecting to the father identity, two participants specifically rooted the desire to be at home and engaging in activities with their children during paternity leave as a key part of their male identity, such as Participant 17 who when asked if taking time off was important to him in any key way, stated

For me as a man, definitely. I mean, more time with your child or children. And so there are things that, in keeping in line with my view of what masculinity should be, it should be, you know, spending time-taking time with your family.

Participant 7 also connected being involved with his child to his male identity:

Initially taking that time off, um, you know, you asked about my definition of masculinity and, and what I saw as masculine male and that's, I mean, to a large degree, the role of taking care of people and nurturing is resigned to women. Um, but I think when it comes to your spouse and your children, I think that there is absolutely a component of that for fathers too.

These quotes show that the idea of being involved was important to these participants and rooted in several aspects of their identities, including that of being a man.

Establishing a relationship with child.

Like being involved, establishing a relationship with the new child was described by one participant as a key aspect of being a man as it related to the paternity leave decision. Participant 16 frequently discussed how his non-traditional upbringing had instilled in him equally non-traditional views on fatherhood and masculinity. He also emphasized that cultivating a strong relationship was a key part of his masculine identity:

I think that all men should be given the opportunity to spend as much time as possible with their newborns. Um, I think that too few fathers develop the relationships that they should with their children? Um, and that I think-a lot of that starts so early.

Being a leader.

Finally, when discussing ideas of masculinity, Participant 11 frequently described the importance of being a leader for his household. This ultimately surfaced when discussing paternity leave specifically

I have no qualms about (taking paternity leave). I actually see that as another example of how I can prove or show my masculinity and leadership as a man to say “listen, I’m gonna take this time off. Because I want to show (my family) that i’m leading (them) well.”

For this participant, the personal identity of being a leader was relevant throughout his interview. This relevance was also emphasized as taking paternity leave ultimately allowed for another opportunity to lead his family.

Summary

Multiple identity categories ultimately were described as being salient surrounding the paternity leave decision. Participants at times described being a father, partner, worker and man as relevant, with each of these categories carrying with it multiple sub-themes, denoting what aspect(s) of the identity were particularly important. With the discussion of these identity categories and their connection to the four frames of identity posited by CTI, there also emerged gaps and congruencies across frames.

Research Question 2 (RQ2)**Identity Frame Gaps**

Research question 2 was concerned with what identity frame gaps emerged as participants discussed the paternity leave decision. Eleven of eighteen participants discussed some type of identity frame gap in relation to taking time off to be with their

new children. The following identity frame gaps emerged in the interview data: enacted/communal, enacted/relational, enacted/personal, and personal/communal.

Enacted/Communal Identity Frame Gaps

Four participants discussed enacted/communal gaps, or discrepancies between how they communicatively enacted their identities and a larger discourse. Two interviewees tied it specifically to work. Participant 12 reported such a gap when describing how he went about negotiating for more time off due to the impending birth of his child

Yeah, i'd say I, um, I'm a little still-medical students, medical personnel tend to be kind of very, i'd say, by the book people? And so when they're told you get three days time off, that's what they stick with? And um, I tend to be a little bit more willing to ask for exceptions? 'Cause i'm like "hey I'm having a baby, I'd like more than three days off."

This is very similar to Participant 11, who also discussed an enacted/communal gap related to his paternity leave decision, as he was the first male graduate student/instructor in his department to utilize the existing option for paid leave upon the birth of a child.

I mean, I didn't get it. I don't understand why more people don't check the handbooks. Yeah, well, I dunno. Or, or maybe they didn't wanna take the two weeks off? Or didn't, didn't think it was an option? Um, I feel, I feel like a lot of times guys assume that, you know, you're gonna get one, two days and then you're back to work. Um, so maybe that's the mentality? That, that it's just, "it's not even an option for me, so why would I go searching for, for that answer?"

This quote is particularly noteworthy as it demonstrates that Participant 11's enacted behavior was all but unprecedented in the larger, communal sense at his place of employment.

Participant 16 discussed an enacted-communal gap related to paternity leave and maleness. When asked if he felt his decision to take time off to be with his new child was in line with how society as a whole approaches such situations, he replied with an emphatic

No! Um, I think that generally society expects you to be there when they're born and that's it. I think that society says you know, you need to get back to work and you need to be providing. You don't need to be spending time at home with the family. Because that's, that's the woman's role, that's the wife's role. And you need to be at work making money. Or, you need to be doing what you need to be doing as a man rather than, you know, spending time at home, being a father.

Interestingly, not every reported enacted/communal gap discussed was in reference to taking time off or asking for more time off than was standard. When Participant 13 was asked if his paternity leave decision, taking less than a week off from work in total, was in line with society's expectations, he expressed that if anything, society would expect him to take more:

I think you-society, um, uh, we see an opportunity to, to be off work? An excused opportunity we like to run at it. And I think sometimes, um, men are, are lazier in that. That's society, society says "hey you know, that's okay for you to take this amount of time, for six or, you know, maybe up to six weeks sometimes." I've heard of cases like that. Um, and-and-I think that's (pause) if you're getting paid

for it and you're getting covered to go do this, then great. But I think most of the time they're just being lazy.

In other words, this participant felt that it is common to the communal identity surrounding paternity leave for fathers to take as much time off as possible (“being lazy”), whereas he chose to enact his identity through only taking as much time off as strictly necessary. The communal identity that he identifies is that of laziness or taking as much time off as possible, whereas he himself chose to enact a different identity by only taking as much as he felt was necessary

Enacted/Relational Identity Frame Gaps

Three study participants discussed enacted/relational identity frame gaps during their interviews, bringing up instances where their enacted communicative behavior surrounding paternity leave differed from what was expected or desired of them from key individuals in their lives. While one new father interviewed did describe a gap of this sort in relation to his wife wanting him to take a bit more time to be home than he ultimately did, interestingly, the other two men who described this type of gap related it to expectations that they would take less. Participant 13 described how taking time off resulted in an enacted/relational gap with his father:

I talked to my dad who is my boss (about leave). And um, (he) asked me what I was thinking and pushing-because he's my dad he gives me a hard time, you know. He's like, “I didn't take any time off. I barely made it to the hospital in time for you to be born.” And he's like, I don't know, like, “well, I was working. You've gotta pay the bills” and so, um, that's kind of how my, my family's mentality is.

Participant 5 discussed a similar situation with his friends when the subject of his decision to take time off from work to be with his new daughter arose:

So, and I think that's maybe where I differ from what they think. I think the two weeks i'm gonna spend with her is important. They say well, you know, you'll be fine, it's not (pause) that it's necessary, but. I dunno. I-I don't say, I won't do what I do in direct defiance of them, let's put it that way. You know, my opinion of staying home with her I think is just personal.

It is, of course, noteworthy that despite the relational identity ascribed to them by key figures in their lives, these men still did take at least some time off from work. Even though the gap between the enacted and relational identity frames occurred, it did not prevent Participant 5 from taking time away from work to be with his new daughter.

Enacted/Personal Identity Frame Gaps

For three participants, gaps emerged surrounding the paternity leave decision where their enacted behavior was out of sync with some key aspect of their sense of self. These gaps were often connected to having to take time off from work, and work being a valued and important part of their identities, such as Participant 8:

That's something that I want to get-get over and feel better about, because I recognize that's not exactly healthy. But um, but, so yeah. So that's always a consideration in my life, you know, if I, if i'm not accomplishing something, if i'm not working, if i'm not (pause) getting up early to, to do something that i'm gonna start to feel depressed about, um, about that.

This participant emphasizes that he wishes to change this aspect of his personal identity, the one that places so much emphasis on staying busy and working, but in the meantime

while taking time off to be with his new son, it resulted in an identity frame gap. He also touched upon the effect of this identity frame gap, specifically feeling depressed due to not being able to enact a key aspect of his identity through working and being productive.

On the other hand, for Participant 16, being able to take paternity leave in essence helped temporarily relieve him of an identity frame gap:

Again, I think that if given the possibility I would have loved to have just quit my job and be a stay at home father. I would love to be able to stay with him and teach him and sort of just experience him every day. Um (pause) but generally, yeah. Um, with the limitations that are provided, uh, being able to take a month off was generally in line with what I would want.

For this new father, having to *return* to work was the cause of the personal/enacted identity frame gap, but nonetheless, the gap emerged surrounding the issue of his paternity leave decision. On the other hand, taking time off allowed for a temporary lack of gap, or congruence across his personal and enacted identity frames, which will be discussed in greater detail later.

Personal/Communal Identity Frame Gaps

The final type of identity frame gaps to emerge within the interviews was that of personal/communal, or gaps between the individual's sense of self and the larger, macro-level societal expectation. For example, Participant 1 noted on several occasions during his interview that his perception of the importance of paternity leave was not shared by his organization as a whole, and that "I think the organizations, they haven't come to terms with the need for it." Throughout his interview, Participant 5 repeatedly stressed an

identity frame gap between his view of fatherhood and what society expects from fathers.

This was brought up when he discussed his paternity leave decision as well:

I'll tell you right now, uh, (state) law. If that's any reflection on how, the, uh, society or, or even a legal system for that matter considers a father? I think it expects that we should, we, we, don't-we aren't necessary. I think that's terrible. I, uh, the, I don't even intend to live up to that expectation. Um, and uh, I will say that, I-I think that there's some sort of tension in society about whether or not fathers are fit to even be around their children. If they even know how to handle children. We're normally depicted as clumsy around them. You know, awkward and- "oh babies just aren't a guy thing." Um. So, yeah, "go back to work, who cares."

Participant 5 describes a personal-communal gap, noting a "tension" regarding the importance of fathers for the care and development of children. He tied this into the paternity leave decision specifically, expressing that unlike him, the communal discourse stresses that fathers returning to work after the birth would make little difference.

Lack of Gaps (aka Identity Congruencies)

Interestingly enough, while many participants did describe various identity frame gaps surrounding their paternity leave decision, many participants also described a *lack* of gap concerning the identity frames within CTI. In other words, these participants' interviews contained mention of an existence of identity frame *congruence*. This finding is certainly noteworthy as it illuminates another aspect of the identity frame gap concept, that is to say that identity frame congruencies could play a key role in or at least surround the paternity leave decision.

Enacted/Communal Congruencies

Tellingly, the most common theme (7) of this type that emerged was new fathers describing the importance of a lack of enacted/communal gap, or congruence between their behavior and what is commonly accepted societally, surrounding the paternity leave decision. This emerged when individuals stated that the time they took off was “normal” compared to what was expected, including participant 2, who stated “I think people are more-I think more and more people assume that there is a-will be or maybe should be paternity leave.” Participant 10 also brought up that compared to other fathers he had heard of, the amount of time he took

seemed comparable. I mean it ranged from all the people that I asked either before or after it seemed comparable that it was either one to two weeks depending on, on their situation at-at what they had for vacation or whatever. Um, time they had available to take.

Participant 18 also stressed congruence between his decision to take time off and an even broader, societal communal identity:

I think it's gone, gone that direction, you know. I think society, um, maybe before thought that the mom should take her, her maternity leave, but paternity leave wasn't really a-a-a thing. And, um, yeah, I mean, now it's at least in (my state) I believe it's state law that they have to give you paternity leave. So I would say indicative of laws changing. Yes, society believes that it's important for the father to be home to, to be with their child in the first couple of weeks.

These quotes illustrate that for some participants their enacted behavior and the communal identity of what is normal regarding paternity leave was in sync, causing a lack of gap in this regard and was supportive of their decision to take leave.

Personal/Enacted Congruencies

Similar to their discussion of a lack of enacted/communal identity frame gaps, five participants described a personal/enacted congruence, or that the decision they made regarding their paternity leave was in line with their self-concept, or the personal characteristics that they value in themselves. Participant 17, when asked if taking time off was in line with the type of person he sees himself as, responded, “Yes, that was the right thing to do. Taking time off and making sure my son knew I was there for him was the right thing to do. So it was in line with being a good person and being a good man.”

He was not alone in mentioning multiple identity categories when discussing an identity frame congruence surrounding the paternity leave decision. Participant 4 emphasized this congruence for not only his identity as a father, but wanting to be present as a husband:

I haven't gone through nine months of pregnancy and then delivered a baby, you know. And so, I-I feel like it's my, my duty as a-as a father and a husband to-to be there to take care of both of them.

Participant 9 also described enacting his identity through taking leave as in line with his identity as both husband and father:

I mean spending time (pause) with (my son) is a huge priority of mine. Um, and so I think s-and, and supporting (my wife). I think taking time after (my son) was born was equally if not more for (my wife) as it was for (my son). Um, and so I

think that's definitely in line with abilities that I have or I want to have as a, a husband and a father.

Participant 9 clearly discusses the paternity leave decision that he made in reference to a lack of gap between “his abilities” (enacted frame) that he has or wants to have (personal frame), demonstrating the concept of congruence across frames.

Research Questions 3a and 3b (RQ3a, RQ3b)

Stigmatization

Research questions 3a and 3b were concerned with the existence and effect of (enacted or potential) stigmatization, and what identity impacts that stigmatization could have had on the paternity leave decision. Eight participants explicitly discussed the concept of stigmatization surrounding their paternity leave decision. Interestingly, the concept of stigmatization was only discussed within the context of the workplace. No concerns were discussed about being viewed poorly by friends, family, or other individuals outside of work. In the work context, participants did not describe facing any *communicated* stigmatization about their decision, but rather they were aware of the *potential* for stigmatization if they enacted their identities through taking too much time from work.

The most commonly (7) reported result was that potential stigmatization acted as a tempering or constraining factor for the enactment of their key identities surrounding the paternity leave decision. For example, Participant 10 expressed concern that if he would have taken too much time off from work to be at home with his family he would no longer be a valued employee, while Participant 11 emphasized that his “biggest fear in the workplace is to be viewed as apathetic,” in other words, to be branded with a

stigmatized identity, one who does not place the proper emphasis on the importance of work.

Early on when discussing his decision to take a week and a half off from work, Participant 1 stated “if I could have taken two weeks or a month off I certainly would have, but I didn’t feel it was appropriate,” and that had he done so the organizational culture would not have “accepted that very well.” Participant 2 echoed this sentiment when discussing the potential for his wife to have six months of maternity leave from her former position with an accounting firm:

I could never take that much time off. There's no way. I think-I think if I had said even three months people would have thought that's weird. “Why are you taking that much time off? That is really strange.” Um, and I (laughs) I think (laughs) I don't think I would have had, uh, departmental support to stay away that long either. Um, (laughs) you know? Two weeks was generous, right?

Both of the above participants stressed that their organizational culture restricted the amount of time they felt they could take, as taking more could potentially open them up to a discredited stigmatized identity, specifically facing a lack of support or being seen as “weird.” Participant 3 makes this connection even more explicit:

I was expected to only take that much time off too because others did. And I didn't want to be (pause) perceived as not valuing my job as much as others, you know, because there were days that (pause) they couldn't get covered for me. And they had to clear the patients off of the schedule. And, in a corporation, in a company, that's money. That's everything. With, you know, so, um, I-I didn't, you know, I knew that my job would be protected by the FMLA a-you know, that act,

but (pause) (sigh) you know, just, within the company I didn't want anybody in charge of my job, you know, I didn't want to be losing favor with them.

Again, this participant makes the connection with potential stigmatization very clear as he felt if he did not enact his identity similar to the communal identity/expectation (i.e. creating an enacted/communal gap), he would lose money for his company, and thus “lose favor” (have his work identity stigmatized) with his superiors.

Participant 4 discussed another identity frame gap connected to potential stigmatization, this time a personal/enacted gap, as he felt unable to take as much time off as he would have liked:

I think for me if I took three months off, I'd feel like that would really-would really feel- looked down upon. I would love to take there months off when we have a kid n-I would love to take as much time as my wife and that amount of time.

Once again, Participant 4 felt that if he took more time off the decision would be “looked down upon,” within his organization, regardless of whether or not it would feel more in line with the type of father he would like to be, also qualifying as an enacted/communal gap. Participant 8 also discussed potential stigmatization, and how the endorsement of taking time off would have been both welcome and important for him:

I mean I would never want, um, you know, I never want people, like, in my office to be thinking like, “man he's really taking every day off it, isn't he?” Um, something like that. Like, I would rather be erring on the side of people saying “hey, you should go home, you know?” Which, that would be-happy to reluctantly say “okay.”

Participant 8 describes feeling comfortable taking additional time if it was specifically endorsed for him to do so, rather than risking being perceived as someone who takes too much time off from work.

Not every participant who discussed the potential for stigmatization surrounding taking “too much” time off of work to be at home after the birth of a baby described it as having a tempering and constraining effect on the paternity leave decision. Participant 16 also discussed the fact that he could potentially be stigmatized in the workplace for taking as much time off as he did (one month total), but when asked how he felt about the potential for negative repercussions he stated that

You know, I didn't really care either way. I knew that I was going to take this time regardless of how anyone felt about it. Um, you know, I could-I could really, and i'm sorry if you have to edit my language, I could give two shits what people care or think about? Um, you know, it's my child and it's my ability to be a father. And no one's going to interact with that other than me. And so I really don't care what people think or have to say about it? Um, I know what the company allows? And I took full advantage of that.

Participant 16 was unique among the new fathers interviewed for this study who discussed stigmatization in that he was unafraid of the potential consequences, emphasizing that his identity as a father was his own business and prioritized over negative perceptions of his leave-taking decision. This could be attributed at least in part to this participant's confidence in being able to find comparable work elsewhere if need be:

I know that I can go to almost any other retailer at the same level? And either get better pay or better benefits. Um, and really have to deal with the same stuff on a day-to-day basis. So I'm not that concerned with (being viewed negatively).

This demonstrates that this participant's belief that he could easily find another position comparable to his current job (retail manager) and thus the potential for stigmatization did not concern him when compared to other participants who discussed it.

Summary

The threat of stigmatization was discussed as part of the paternity leave decision in some form for eight participants. For most, it acted as a tempering factor, creating a concern of taking "too much" time off and thus having their work identity stigmatized. For one participant, however, the threat of stigmatization was not enough to impact his decision, as he felt that due to both his desire to be with his child and his ability to find similar work with relative ease, the threat of stigmatization was not enough to prevent him from taking off as much time as possible.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This study's results shed light on how identity arises in the paternity leave decision, specifically how multiple facets of identity (salient identities, identity frame gaps, the threat of identity stigmatization) manifest and interact surrounding the decision.

Concept Explication

To make the distinction between identities and identity frames clear, the four key identities that interviewees invoked (father, man, partner, and worker) were described in this study as identity *categories*, in contrast to CTI's concept of identity *frames*. As previously discussed, identity frames refer to the intra/interpersonal/communal contexts in which identity categories manifest (for an explanation of how this played out in this study's results, see figure 2). A single identity category, e.g., being a father, could manifest in any combination of the personal (what type of father I see myself as), enacted (how I parent my child), relational (what type of father my partner or friends sees me as), and communal (what society dictates a father should be) frames.

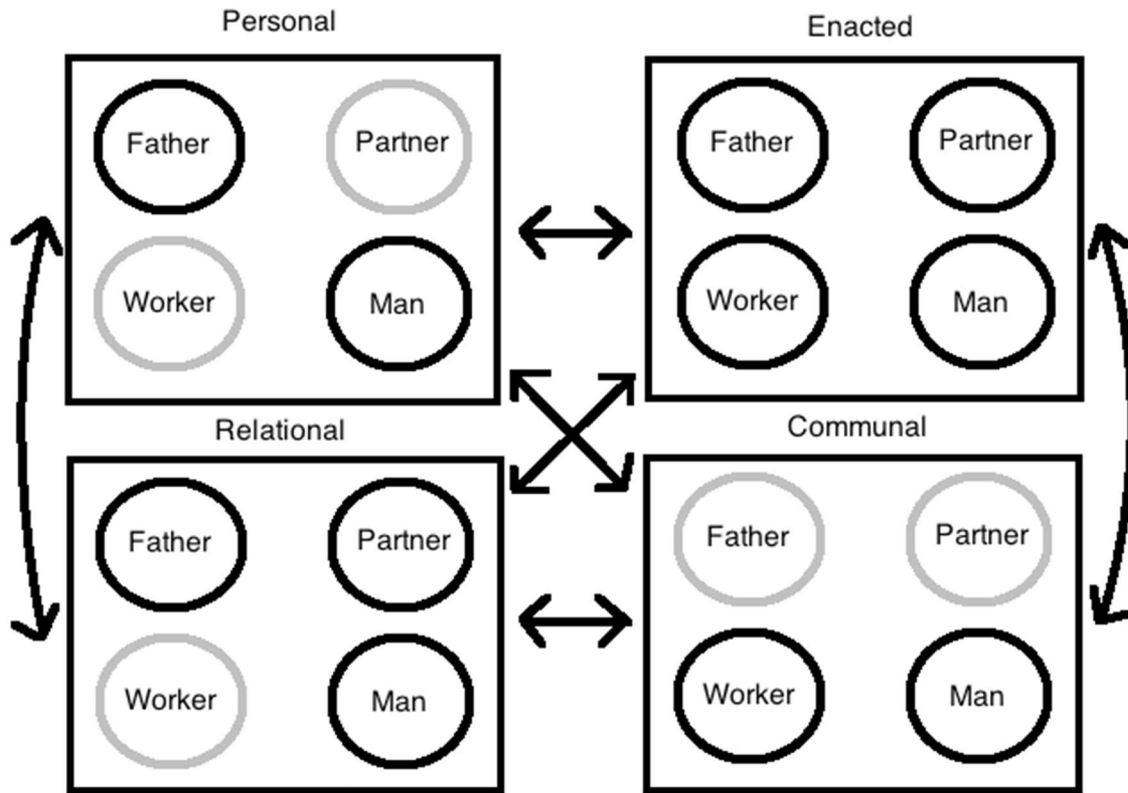


Figure 2. Identity categories as they manifested in this study.

Salient Identity Categories

A number of identity categories were salient to new fathers and these categories manifested within the frames articulated by the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI). The frames of personal (one's concept of himself, such as caring father, hard worker, etc.), enacted (choosing to take time off to be with wife and child/children and the behaviors and activities undertaken during the time off), relational (how one is perceived by key individuals, such as a partner or family member) and communal (larger, macro-level group expectations; Hecht, 1993) acted as contextualization for the identity categories that fathers discussed as important surrounding the paternity leave decision. Often multiple identity frames were involved in the identities invoked and described by

participants, which is consistent with Hecht's (1993) argument that "identity frames are not isolated from each other. Instead they may be examined two at a time, three at a time, or all four at a time" (p. 80). The identity categories (father, man, worker, partner) often overlap and are interconnected, as do the frames of identity. In other words: identity is a rich, complicated concept.

A key advantage to this study was the opportunity to utilize a stimulating issue that could (in theory) allow for any relevant identity category to manifest within all of CTI's identity frames. This ultimately was not the case, as while identity categories manifested across the various identity frames, only the enacted frame had each category manifest. However, at least two identity categories manifested in each frame. As will be shown, these results demonstrate that crafting a study that accounts for each frame of identity and multiple identity categories allows for a new level of richness in the study's application and how various identity frames and categories relate. Thus the results for RQ1 will be discussed in terms of the frames that make up CTI's foundation, as well as the key identity categories made salient by the stimulating issue of the paternity leave decision.

Fatherhood

The most commonly invoked of the four identity categories that emerged was the one connected to fatherhood. In fact, as each participant had recently become a parent for the first time, the paternity leave decision acted as a key stimulating issue for what was a relatively new identity. Unlike the other identity categories of man, partner and worker, the participants were experiencing themselves as fathers for the first time in their lives. This newness makes the paternity leave decision an engaging context for the study of

communication and identity. Within the overall identity category of fatherhood, subthemes of being involved, putting family first, and developing a relationship with their child emerged.

Being involved.

The most commonly discussed subtheme was the desire to be involved. Fathers discussed wishing to be present at home from the beginning of their children's lives, and to take part in the day-to-day raising of their children. This has been echoed within extant literature concerning paternity leave.

For example, in Johansson and Klinth's (2008) study of Swedish men's concept of fatherhood. After conducting focus groups on the subject, the results showed that "today, the notion that fathers should get involved with their children, stay at home, and help care for infants seems to be met with complete acceptance, and is almost the predominant figure of thought" and that "most of the men... interviewed also had a positive view and showed relatively great involvement in these issues" (Johansson & Klinth, 2008, p. 58). The fact that staying home and helping to care for new children was similarly found within my study's results suggests a tendency for American fathers to share this focus.

In other words, for the new fathers who participated in this study, the paternity leave decision provided for the first time the opportunity to communicatively enact this identity, specifically through being present and involved. It is logical that new fathers would prepare an idea of the type of father they want to be (personal frame), and by choosing to place a focus on being involved and present upon their new child/children's

arrival at home, they are able to demonstrate this identity within the enactment frame of identity.

Hass and Hwang's (2008) study of parental leave's impact on fathers' participation in childcare also emphasized the connection between taking paternity leave and father involvement, "when fathers took more days of paternity leave, they were significantly more likely to report they sometimes had solo responsibility for children... and were more engaged with childcare tasks" (p. 97). This result emphasizes that new fathers' decision to take time at home away from work to be with their children provides an opportunity to communicatively enact their fatherhood identity through being involved, responsible parents who engage in the day-to-day tasks of parenting. While Haas and Hwang's (2008) study focuses on fathers outside of the United States, paternity leave has shown similar connections to engagement in childcare tasks in other parts of the world, including the United Kingdom (Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007) and with the current study, now in the United States.

Putting family first.

Discussion of the paternity leave decision also emphasized taking time off as an opportunity to enact their identities as fathers who place family above work. In other words, these fathers could communicate to their families that they are the most important part of their lives. These participants emphasized that while work is important to provide for and take care of their families, family must come first for them. In essence, paternity leave once again functioned as an opportunity to communicatively enact this personal identity. Also similar to the importance of being an involved father, paternity leave

functions as the first opportunity to prioritize their newly expanded family; the first chance to enact their fatherhood identity as more important than the work identity.

Duckworth and Buzzanell's (2009) work on how fathers construct the meanings behind work and family, particularly in efforts to balance the two, echoes this result. In their interview data, every participant stated that commitment to the family is the most important part of the interaction between work and family (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009), though the way they did so varied from person to person. The current study differs in this regard as the means of placing family above work was at least in part executed through the decision to take time off from work once the baby was brought home from the hospital. Again, as with the identity frames of CTI, the identity categories described by participants are often interconnected, as this theme demonstrates a connection between the work and father identity categories. The desire to prioritize family over work is then a consistent theme in literature examining how fathers enact the fatherhood identity. So much so that in the case of Participant 15, there was expressed a willingness to quit (say "see ya") one's job if the organization communicated to him that taking time off was unacceptable.

Developing a relationship with child.

The third theme was taking paternity leave as an opportunity to begin building a relationship with their children. These participants emphasized that they wished to not only be on hand from the beginning as involved fathers, but specifically doing so in order to cultivate an important relationship, one that is key not just for them as fathers, but for the long-term development of their children. This was shown in participant 4's interview when he emphasized his presence as a way to avoid his daughter having "daddy issues"

later in life, wanting instead for his daughter to be able to talk to him openly. This idea is not unfounded, as existing research has certainly backed up the importance of fathers' involvement for their children's well being (e.g. Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Williamson, 2004).

These fathers utilized paternity leave as a chance to cultivate an aspect of the relational frame of their identity. Hecht (1993) when detailing the layers of the relational frame described one key aspect manifesting due to the fact that "relationships themselves take on identities and the dyad becomes an entity" (p. 80). While Hecht describes this in regard to a romantic relationship, it relates to the father/child dyad as well. Fathers capitalized upon the option to take time off in order to begin building this relationship, and thus create the father/child identity as it manifests within the relational frame. As studies that incorporate CTI often focus on the ascribed portion of the relational frame, i.e., how the individual is perceived by others (e.g. Urban & Orbe, 2010; Wadsworth, et al., 2007), this is noteworthy. This specific result showcases how other aspects of CTI's relational frame, specifically the identity connected to the relationship itself, become important and salient in connection with the fatherhood identity and the paternity leave decision. This finding will be revisited when I discuss what this study's results mean for CTI.

Partner

The identity category of being a husband or partner was also salient surrounding the paternity leave decision. When discussing the decision to take time off from work, participants not only framed its importance in relation to their new children, but also relating to their partners and their relationships. Participant 9 in particular stated that

taking paternity leave was “equally if not more” for his wife’s benefit than that of his newborn daughter. As with fatherhood, this identity category was nuanced regarding what aspects were relevant: including themes of caretaker, teamwork, and the paternity leave decision.

Caretaker.

The most common partner identity-related category to arise described paternity leave as important in order for them to act as caretakers for their partners. Participants described the toll that giving birth had taken on their wives, and also a desire to be on-hand at home to help their wives to recover not only physically but in every aspect of life after the birth of a child. Once again this “taking leave” serves as an opportunity to communicatively enact a key part of their identity as a partner: someone who supports and takes care of his wife when she is in pain or needs support.

Husbands wishing to act as caretakers for their wives could be seen as standing in contrast to what would be expected or perhaps gender-role reversal, subverting the “traditional” expectation that women should be the caretakers in a heterosexual relationship. However, existing research does support the idea that men may not look at supporting their wives in gendered terms. Specifically, a study by Baker, Robertson and Connelly (2010) showcased that husbands who find themselves in a caretaker role for their wives later in life do not report their gender identities as being particularly relevant regarding this role. In other words, this is a facet of partnership, not manhood, supporting the decision to code this important part of the paternity leave decision in regards to participants’ relationships and the identity category that comes with it.

Certainly acting as a caretaker when one's wife returns home from the hospital with a new baby and during post-birth recovery is a different situation than a prolonged role as caretaker for, say, an elderly wife suffering from dementia (Baker, Robertson, & Connelly, 2010). Nevertheless, it reinforces the idea that these men see caretaking of their partners as an important facet of their identities. This is a key finding regarding how identity played a role in the paternity leave decision. While intuitively it makes sense to frame the decision in regards to parenting and taking care of a new child, this study revealed that similar desires are connected to participants' wives, and taking time off facilitates them enacting their identity as a good partner.

Teamwork.

Another aspect of their partner identity category was the importance of teamwork. These new fathers emphasized that taking paternity leave allowed them to continue an aspect of their partnership as it has typically manifested within this relational frame of identity. Participant 3, for example, stated that paternity leave was "no different" from how he and his wife approach life together in general, but rather another opportunity to enact their existing relational identity, that of a couple communicates openly and collaboratively regarding how to handle their life together.

These participants are not unique in this approach. Extant literature has demonstrated an increasingly common tendency for men and women to approach partnership this way. In their study of work/family roles among men and women, Perrone, Wright and Jackson (2009), found that it is common in the United States for men and women to share tasks related to work and family. In other words, there exists a

larger communal pattern of approaching partnership with an emphasis on teamwork and sharing of various responsibilities.

For the individuals who emphasized the importance of the teamwork aspect of their partner identity category, enacting this identity through being at home after the birth of their children allowed them to continue to approach partnership as teamwork. Participants once again emphasized the amount of work and adjustment that accompanied their new baby, so it became all the more important for these fathers to continue to utilize teamwork and collaboration to help their lives and their wives adjust to the new status quo. Certainly a new child can be an overwhelming proposition and working together with a spouse could serve as an important way to approach a significant change.

Making the paternity leave decision.

The final aspect of the larger partnership theme that emerged connected to the partnership identity category was how the participant described making the paternity leave decision. Some participants discussed how they enacted the decision, one as a joint decision with his wife, the other stating that he stayed home from work until his wife clearly communicated to him she was comfortable with his return to work. Participant 10's discussion of the leave decision being made as a team connects to the similar theme of partnership as teamwork. Participant 14's description of the leave decision being up to his wife entirely sets him apart in interesting ways.

Specifically, participant 14 stands out for placing the paternity leave decision solely within his wife's control, particularly as earlier in his interview he, like many participants, stressed the importance of him being an involved father. When he did so, however, he characterized this more as being mentally present during his time with his

child than putting home life above work as a rule. Therefore it could be that, his work identity category was more impactful in the paternity leave decision than other participants. Even so he did take time off from work to be with his wife and child, so it is not to say that leave was not important to him at all, merely that the differential influence of various identities stands out in his specific case. The importance of communication is once again emphasized here; as his wife's message that she felt comfortable with his return to work allowed him to feel enacting his identity in this way was acceptable and appropriate.

It is noteworthy that only two individuals explicitly brought up how the decision was made specifically as it related to their relationship. It could be that for most individuals the decision-making process on the relational level was an easy one to make. This is supported by how many participants stressed the importance of taking time off for multiple reasons and connected to multiple identity categories. It could also be that the important ways they were able to communicatively enact their partner identities while the leave was ongoing (caretaking, sharing in the work and care of the newborn) were more relevant when discussing this aspect of the self as it related to the paternity leave decision.

Worker

Work-related aspects of the self were manifest in addition to fatherhood and partnership identity categories. Several participants described the importance of communicating that fatherhood was prioritized above work in the hierarchy of their lives. However, this does not mean that work did not play a key role in some men's decisions, nor that the decision was a universally easy one to make. Three aspects of the work

identity category were discussed, pride in one's work, loyalty/responsibility, and setting an example all manifested to some degree across the interview data.

Pride in one's work.

Level of enjoyment and/or pride in the work they do was a facet of the work identity category related to the paternity leave decision. This was manifested by new fathers expressing eagerness or a readiness to return to their jobs. In essence, enacting various aspects of their work identity was important for them personally, and while taking the time off from work to be with their wives and children was valuable, being unable to work at times took a toll beyond potential financial effects. This could be because, as Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) have pointed out, when it comes to balancing work and home life, "most still privileged work... aspects of their identities and identifications while also engaged in 'family work'" (p. 564).

In other words, for these participants, family and taking time off was absolutely yet *temporarily* prioritized. However, it was done in a way that still privileged the work-related aspect of their personal identities. Paternity leave for them could have acted as a temporary re-prioritization of family over work, one that by the end of their time off had caused some friction from being unable to enact their work-related identities (in other words an identity frame gap, which will be discussed shortly). In their study of the prioritization of work and family for men and women, Cinamon and Rich (2002) indicated that men were more likely than women to correspond with a "work" profile, or as an individual that prioritizes their work "role."

This result for these fathers does not, however, necessarily mean that they will consistently prioritize work in this way. These men are dealing with the identity

categories of father and worker together for the first time and thus are discovering how to best communicatively enact both of those identities within their lives. These men may not have taken prolonged time off, if at all, prior to their child's birth. Certainly the relationship between worker and father will continue to evolve as they and their child continue to grow, and their relationship with one another evolves.

Loyalty/responsibility.

The second worker identity-related theme to emerge was that of feelings of loyalty or responsibility to the workplace. This was exemplified by Participant 17 who, as a small business owner, felt the need to work hard and be present in the workplace because of his responsibility to his employees. It is not uncommon for individuals to feel a responsibility or loyalty to their places of employment, particularly if such feelings have been an established part of the organizational culture (Hochschild, 1997). In fact, working men often report increasing feelings of loyalty toward their workplaces upon starting families, more so than they did prior to having children, at least in part due to the additional pressure of financially supporting an increasingly large family (Roehling, Roehling & Moen, 2001).

Financial provision is not necessarily the only reason for feeling loyalty and responsibility as facets of one's work identity, however. Participant 13 also discussed the importance of returning to work due to his responsibility to his coworkers, specifically as many of them were family members. Because of this, it could be inferred that not only is the personal identity as a worker important for these participants, but the presence of family members for Participant 13 and the role as a leader and "father figure" as a small business owner for Participant 17 acted, to various degrees, as additional forms of

familial responsibility in the relational frame. For these participants, then, perhaps the family and work related identity categories were blended (similarly to how identity frames are already understood to be connected and interpenetrative) to a greater degree than other participants, which could have created a stronger feeling of responsibility and loyalty towards the work aspect of their identities.

Setting an example.

For Participant 13, the family and work identity categories were also blended via his desire to return to work early to set an example. While he was the only participant to discuss this aspect of the worker identity, it is still worthy of inclusion. He explained that returning to work relatively quickly was his first real chance to demonstrate the behavior of making work a priority. In doing so, his identity categories of father and worker were once again blended, but with the work aspect prioritized. It was prioritized in a way, however, that was designed to have a positive impact on his son in the long run. Participant 13 did not want his son to grow up to be “lazy,” and wished for him to be someone who understands the value of work. This idea of communicating such a message in order to set an example is not unfounded. Extant literature has shown that parents’ behavior, both direct and indirect, can have an impact on children’s occupational aspirations (Jodl, Michael, Malanchuk, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2001).

Man

The identity as a man was remarked upon in discussions of the paternity leave decision. It may seem strange that concepts of masculinity, maleness or expectations surrounding their identities, as men would not be more explicitly articulated in the interview data, but it actually is quite logical. It stands to reason that for many fathers

when discussing maleness and what it means to be a man in connection with paternity leave, they would be unable to or at least have some difficulty separating this concept from being a father, as fatherhood is inherently gendered. Participant 3 touched upon this when asked about his identity as a man. He said while he would do so, it was “still relating to fatherhood.”

Again, these participants were experiencing fatherhood for the first time, making it a new identity category. Their connection to their partners and their identities relating to work, while pre-existing, were made specifically salient in the decision, as their partner and work considerations were very visible and integral parts of paternity leave. Maleness, in contrast, is a concept that is less distinctive. It is implicit in fatherhood role and therefore less present in participants’ minds concerning their paternity leave decision. Participants often had difficulty defining what it meant to be a man, as opposed to defining, for example, fatherhood.

Being involved.

There were, however, aspects of being a man that were discussed within the interview data. A key aspect of maleness related to being involved and present when their child was brought home and in the early days afterward. This of course was also discussed in connection to fatherhood, but as with Participant 7, this desire to be present and involved was noted as a key aspect of the male identity. Participant 6 also invoked being present as an important aspect of maleness, and previously in the interview when discussing the essence of being a man he emphasized being a provider, not only financial terms, but also the communicative aspects of a relationship that only a father (as a man)

is able to do. This emphasizes for this participant the importance of the male aspect of his identity in being present and involved with his child from the beginning.

Harkening back to Johansson and Klinth's (2008) study of men's opinions of fatherhood and paternity leave, their results also emphasized a comfort with being involved parents as an aspect of masculinity, "today, men must also show their readiness to engage in childcare, their child orientation, and their willingness to live up to the idea of gender equality" (p. 58). This is echoed within Participant 6's quote concerning his awareness that caretaking and presence in the home is typically viewed as appropriate solely for women, but that as a man he feels there should be a similar component for himself as well. For these participants at least, it was important to enact not only their fatherhood identities, but also their identities as men by being involved with their new children.

Establishing a relationship with child.

One participant discussed taking paternity leave as an opportunity to establish an important relationship with his newborn child, this time specifically as it related to being a man. For Participant 16, what he viewed as non-traditional masculinity, or a communal identity he chose to challenge, was a key part of his identity and something that came up often within his interview. This could explain why he noted the importance of, as a man, establishing a relationship with his son. He did so while noting that in his mind, too few men chose to do so. Again, discussing establishing this relationship in regards to masculinity and maleness could be because of his overall resistance to traditional discourses concerning masculinity, invoking a perceived communal identity and a gap between what he did and what is expected.

For this participant, taking paternity leave was an opportunity to enact his identity as a man by building a relationship, and, as participants did when discussing building a relationship as a part of fatherhood and taking paternity leave, cultivating a relational identity with his new son. Participant 16 disclosed that he had never had a relationship with his own biological father, and had practically raised himself from a young age. Perhaps because of this it was all the more important to cultivate this relational identity immediately upon his son being brought home.

Being a leader.

The final aspect of the male identity that was discussed was that of being a leader. Often during his interview, Participant 11 discussed the importance of, as a man, communicating that he is the leader of his family unit, including leading his family by the example of his enacted behavior. Being a leader, thus, was described as a key facet of his personal frame of identity, one that he enacted whenever possible, including through paternity leave. He specifically discussed how taking the time off to be with his family served as an opportunity to demonstrate (enact) his idea of leadership and masculinity, and to show to his family that he is leading them well.

This is noteworthy, as it shows not only that the participant believes that he should serve in a somewhat patriarchal role as the leader of his family, but that he is demonstrating it by putting his family first in regards to his family and work related identities. In doing so, he identifies this as an opportunity to demonstrate his own idea of proper masculinity. In other words, he holds somewhat traditional ideas of what his role is within his family, but demonstrates them in a potentially non-traditional way; prioritizing them over work.

Summary

When discussing the paternity leave decision, new fathers described the four key identity categories of father, partner, worker and man as being salient in various ways and to varying degrees. Nuanced aspects of these identity categories such as being involved, being a caretaker, loyalty and leadership arose in different ways. Overall the paternity leave decision has proven to be a stimulating issue that demonstrates the richness of different identity categories as they relate to an important event and decision in one's life.

Conceptually, identity categories described by participants manifested within various identity frames as posited by CTI. This study's results help to elaborate a previously under-explained relationship between identity categories and identity frames. These identity categories proved to be key aspects of the self that then manifested within one or more "frames" of identity, all connected to the paternity leave decision. I will discuss this contribution in a later section.

As with the identity frames proposed by CTI the identity categories of father, partner, worker and man were shown to be interconnected and overlapping, such as when individuals prioritized enacting one identity category (father) over another (worker). This study's results also made space for an under-utilized aspect of CTI's relational frame. Previous studies have leaned on the ascribed portion of the relational frame of identity, whereas fathers in this study were shown to discuss the identity of their relationship as a whole, another aspect of the relational frame posited by Hecht (1993), but that has yet to be discussed in the extant literature. In addition, participants were shown to prioritize and account for multiple relationships in connection with the paternity leave decision. Participants described the importance of relationships with their children and partners

regarding the paternity leave decision, as these relationships formed key aspects of their various identity categories.

Identity Frame Gaps

A unique contribution of CTI is the idea of identity frame gaps and these gaps were salient for many participants. In a situation such as making the decision concerning paternity leave, where multiple identities can become salient, there is potential for any number of identity frame gaps posited by CTI. Interestingly, the results also reveal examples of a lack of gap, or more accurately congruence across frames. While Jung and Hecht (2004) had previously lamented that too little research utilizing CTI accounted for the identity frame gap concept, even fewer have contrasted reported identity frame gaps with their opposite: identity frames working together, or identity frame congruence. This study's results did show a number of identity frame gaps: enacted/communal, enacted/relational, enacted/personal and personal/communal gaps and also congruencies.

Enacted/Communal Identity Frame Gaps

Participants described facing gaps between their enacted and communal frames of identity concerning the paternity leave decision, i.e., their behavior did not match broader discourses and messages concerning how they should conduct themselves. Before discussing the study results, it is important to consider how communal identity is considered in CTI, specifically how it is assessed.

Extant literature utilizing the identity frame gap concept of CTI, for the most part, does not account for the communal frame of identity. Instead studies tend to focus on the personal, enacted and relational identity frames, and the gaps between them (Jung & Hecht, 2004; 2008; Kam & Hecht, 2009). This could theoretically be, at least in part, due

to Kam and Hecht's (2009) assertion that the communal frame "does not reflect individuals' own perceptions of identities such as group memberships" (p. 458). If this is true, it begs the question of exactly how the communal frame of identity is to be explored at all, let alone in the context of contrasting it with, for example, one's personal frame or internalized sense of self. Without accounting for an individual's perception of group membership or other aspects of the communal frame of identity, there would be no way to qualitatively explore identity frame gaps that incorporate the communal frame, and therefore, no way to thoroughly apply the identity frame gap concept to its fullest potential.

A study by Urban and Orbe (2010), however, does account for enacted/communal identity frame gaps. Specifically in the context of US immigrants, with results indicating that "immigrants do not have a single communal identity. Instead, this frame of their identity is clearly multiple, and it manifests itself differently in various contexts and situations" (p. 314). The authors explain that immigrants' identity connected to bridging their country of origin with their lives in the United States makes for a communal identity that is communicated in many different ways depending on context. The study is noteworthy as one of the few that accounts for the communal frame in relation to identity frame gaps. Urban and Orbe (2010) still focus on a single communal identity: that of an immigrant. My study differs as gaps are examined in relation to multiple identity categories.

The enacted/communal gap manifested itself in a number of ways. For some participants choosing to take time off to be home with their new child clashed with the broader practices of professional group identification, such as being a med student or

being a graduate instructor. These men described enacting their identities through either asking for more leave than was normal, or for being the first man in a department to inquire about taking parental leave at all. By communicating about paternity leave in this way (or in some cases at all), the gap manifests between the enacted behavior and the organizational/communal frame that dictates that this is not how things are “typically” done.

For others, gaps also arose between the enacted behavior and an even broader, societal communal frame. Specifically when Participant 13 discussed his belief that, in contrast to his decision to only take a few days off of work after the birth of his child, it was typical for most individuals to take as much time off as possible, regardless of circumstances. Thus, in this study communal identity was manifested as organizationally or occupationally specific and also as societally constituted.

It is noteworthy that gaps between the enacted and communal frames of identity existed at all. These participants were certainly aware of the communal discourses and norms for behavior surrounding paternity leave, and yet they chose to communicatively enact their identities in different ways counter to the communal expectations. For these participants, the communal frame and its expectations (and the gap between the enacted and communal frames) were not enough to impact their enacted behavior to be more in line with what is expected. It could be that there was no fear of repercussions for this behavior, and that potential negative effects could have impacted this decision. This will be explored in greater detail when I discuss stigmatization.

Enacted/Relational Identity Frame Gaps

Gaps between the enacted and relational frames were also present. Enacted/relational gaps were coded when participants discussed a discrepancy between how they chose to enact their behavior concerning paternity leave and the messages from key individuals in their lives regarding what they expected of them. Two participants dealt with this type of gap with friends and family members who were not supportive of their decision to take time off. Participant 13's father chided him, explaining that he (his father) had not taken any time off of work when in the same situation. These messages from his father communicated that this participant had behaved differently than his father would have either expected or endorsed.

Participant 5 also described his friends communicating the idea that paternity leave was unnecessary, but that he disagreed. This makes sense as Participant 5 often throughout his interview expressed how important he felt it was for him to be at home with his new daughter, even if others in his life told him that they did not feel the same way. This could be seen then as not only an enacted-relational gap, but also a gap between different relational identities. That is to say the relational expectation or identity with his friends were not compatible with the relational identity of his connection to his new daughter.

In other words, gaps may not only be between different frames of identity, but within different aspects of the frames themselves. To date existing research utilizing CTI has focused on the frames, gaps between the frames or both, but situations like the paternity leave decision illuminate that gaps can occur within the frames themselves.

While Kam and Hecht (2009) have, pointed out that within-frame gaps could occur, particularly in the relational frame, my study demonstrates how this could occur.

Enacted/Personal Identity Frame Gaps

Participants also described enacted/personal identity frame gaps concerning their paternity leave decision. This stands in contrast to the fact that all participants in some manner stressed that taking paternity leave was an important thing for them to do, be it as a father, partner, man, or a combination of the three. Nevertheless for Participant 8, taking the time off was difficult in that being able to work and feel a sense of accomplishment in that aspect of his life had consistently been an important part of his personal frame of identity.

Tellingly he discusses the difficulty in not “accomplishing something,” in regards to being out of work temporarily due to his new child. This seems to imply on some level that being present, communicating with and engaging in activities with his child and wife does not register as an accomplishment. However within his interview he also states he would have been “grief stricken” had he not been able to take the time away from work to be with his wife and son. This gap begins to illustrate the complexity of the identities made salient by the paternity leave decision. Once again communicatively enacting certain identity categories (such as that of a father) was completely in line with Participant 8’s paternity leave decision, while at the same time it created an identity frame gap connected to his identity as a worker.

On the other hand, for Participant 16 taking time off in essence acted as a temporary relief to an enacted/personal gap. This participant stressed throughout his interview that he would like nothing more than to be able to cease working and care for

his son at home full-time, though due to finances this was not possible. Therefore it was working full-time that caused the identity frame gap, not allowing him to enact the personal identity of the stay at home father that he would envision himself to be. Time off allowed for a temporary end to this gap, which was further emphasized by his assertion that unlike many other participants, he took as much time off from work as was possible. Existing research utilizing the identity frame gap aspect of CTI has typically focused on the effects of the identity frame gaps, and has not previously accounted for what effect *eliminating a gap* may have on an individual. This result shows that even a temporary ceasing of an identity frame gap can be both desired and rewarding for an individual. This concept of identity frame congruence will be discussed in greater detail later.

Personal/Communal Identity Frame Gaps

The final gap that emerged within the interview data was the personal/communal identity frame gap, or a difference between how they perceived themselves and the larger communal discourse surrounding a shared identity. As noted earlier, very little literature on identity frame gaps utilizes the communal frame of identity. Nevertheless, participants in this study did describe personal/communal gaps. Most notably, Participant 5 was adamant that he saw the communal frame of identity communicating that fathers were at best superfluous, and at times viewed as unfit to care for their own children. This certainly was a discrepancy between how he viewed himself as a father, as he was one of many participants who expressed joy and fulfillment in spending time caring for and bonding with his infant daughter.

Participant 1 also discussed a personal/communal gap, but as with other gaps that included the communal frame, it was related to a smaller, though still communal-level

identity of his specific organization. He lamented that while it was his belief that he shared a personal identity with others regarding considering themselves caring, involved fathers, the communal identity connected to his organization did not, as a whole, share this idea. This is supported in the existing literature, as often even when organizations make a point to institute parental leave policies, accessing them may prove to be either difficult or even looked down upon (Hochschild, 1997; Kirby & Krone, 2002) This will be explored in more detail in the discussion of stigmatization

These identity frame gaps, as different as they are, continue to demonstrate the importance of factoring in the individual's conceptualization of the communal identity frames. Despite Kam and Hecht's (2009) claim that an individual's understanding of the communal frame is counterproductive, these results suggest that it may be more fruitful to explore *why* the individuals perceive a gap with the communal identity frame. In other words, if individuals differ in how they perceive a communal identity (such as a disagreement across participants regarding society's messages concerning the worth of a father), then exploring why this is the case and how it impacts their various identities becomes relevant.

Lack of Gaps (aka Identity Frame Congruence)

While the interview protocol was not designed to do so, some participants discussed an important level of identity congruence surrounding their paternity leave decision. In other words, a lack of an identity frame gap across certain identity frames was reported. Specifically, participants reported both a lack of enacted/communal or enacted/personal gaps. These identity frame congruencies are themselves noteworthy identity aspects surrounding the paternity leave decision. What is also important to note,

is that some study participants actually described both enacted/personal identity frame gaps and enacted/personal identity frame congruencies.

Enacted/Communal Congruencies

Participants described a congruency between their enacted communicative behavior and the discourse surrounding the larger communal identity. These new fathers described enacting their identities through paternity leave in ways that were in line with their perception of what is “normal” for society. These congruencies were discussed in regard to both taking time off in general, and how much time off was appropriate for them to take. Participant 18 specifically discusses this, as well as the fact that in his perception of the communal frame of fatherhood, it has become more accepted and normal for paternity leave to be taken in addition to mothers taking time off to be with new children.

One participant, however, Participant 13, reported both an enacted/communal identity frame gap, and within the same interview described a lack of the same type of gap. Participant 13 described congruence with peers at his workplace, in that they took similar amounts of time off upon the birth of a child. At the same time, he described feeling a substantial enacted/communal gap with society in general, expressing that it is all-too common for individuals to take as much time off of work as possible, as opposed to his decision to take only a few days off to be home with his family. This demonstrates two key things. First, similarly to Urban and Orbe’s (2010) findings in their study of immigrants and identity frame gaps, new fathers in this study had multiple communal identities that impacted them. Second, it is possible for a stimulating issue such as paternity leave to invoke both identity frame congruence and identity frame gaps across

similar identity frames. Participant 13 had no gap between his enacted identity and the communal identity of his workplace, but at the same time felt a gap between his enacted behavior and what is to be expected on the larger, societal communal level.

Enacted/Personal Congruencies

Several participants reported a lack of a personal/enacted gap concerning their paternity leave decision. Participant 16's paternity leave acting as a temporary identity frame congruence between his enacted and personal frames has already been discussed. Participant 17 explained that enacting his identity through paternity leave was in line with how he conceives of himself as both a father and a man, while Participant 4 referred to taking time off as his "duty" as both father and husband. The discussion of two different identity categories is important. It demonstrates that multiple identity categories are made salient by the paternity leave decision. Therefore it is possible for participants to report not only identity frame gaps, but also identity frame congruence between the same identity frames.

This was the case for two participants, Participant 8 and Participant 9. Both participants described situations where they felt a gap between their personal frame of identity and how they communicatively enacted that identity. For one, the identity frame gap between his enacted identity and his personal self-image was connected to work, as he described a difficulty in temporarily giving up the work aspect of his personal identity. At the same time, when asked if taking the time off was in line with his personal identity frame as a father, he stated that it was "huge" for him to be able to enact his identity as a father through taking that time off. Participant 9 described a similar combination of identity frame gap and identity frame congruence, stating that the biggest roadblock in his

paternity leave decision was his personal identity as a worker, specifically a workaholic. Much like Participant 8, later in his interview he described taking time off as “definitely” in line with how he views himself as both a father and as a husband.

What sets these men’s responses apart from Participant 13, who described gap and congruency on different levels of the same identity category (worker), these fathers detailed gaps and congruency *across identity frames*. In other words, there was congruence between personal and enacted identity frames in regards to being a father (Participant 8) or father and husband (Participant 9), but there was an identity frame gap for both connected to their identity category of worker. This could potentially be challenging as while the paternity leave decision made by these fathers is in line with at least one key identity category, it at the same time conflicts with another. This means that they have prioritized one identity category over another. In other words, the identity frame congruence was important enough to justify the creation of an identity frame gap.

Jung and Hecht (2004) have pointed out that multiple identity frame gaps can occur for one individual. Existing CTI research tends to focus on one specific identity category (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Kam & Hecht, 2009; Urban & Orbe, 2010; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). My study shows that by incorporating a stimulating issue that makes multiple identity categories salient, even more nuanced gaps and identity frame congruence can arise. This includes the same individual simultaneously reporting a lack of gap concerning one or more relevant identity categories, and an identity frame gap with other relevant identity categories.

Overall the results of this study demonstrate that new fathers may encounter multiple types of identity frame gaps and congruencies surrounding their paternity leave

decision. While no reported identity frame gaps were enough to prevent them from taking time off altogether, there is evidence that at least some participants took off an amount of time they felt was “normal,” or in other words, that there was a lack of identity frame gap in how they enact their identities through paternity leave. The lack of identity frame gaps for certain participants is particularly interesting, as it shows that not only were these identity frame congruencies important enough for the participants to mention, but that they can exist at the same time as identity frame gaps, demonstrating the complexity of the various aspects of individuals’ identities. These results also demonstrate that the paternity leave decision is indeed a stimulating issue for both different facets of identity, but also for gaps and congruencies across identity categories and identity frames.

It should be pointed out that not all types of gaps were manifest in this study. No participant described situations that could be construed as relational/communal or relational/personal. There could be multiple reasons for this. Regarding the relational/communal gap, fathers simply did not discuss their relational identity frame, either the ascribed aspect (what key individuals in their lives thought of them) or their relationships as a whole in contrast to a larger societal discourse (the communal frame). This could be because the stimulating issue, paternity leave, did not invoke this type of discussion the way an interview centering on their relationships with their wives may have.

As for the lack of discussion of relational/personal gaps, this also could be caused at least in part by the stimulating issue and key interview aspect of the paternity leave decision. When participants discussed gaps involving the relational frame of their identities, it tended to be focused on the act of taking paternity leave itself, rather than the

internal aspects of their selves that may have driven that decision. It also could be that participants simply did not feel that there was much discrepancy between how they pictured themselves and their key relationships, particularly with their spouses.

Communication Theory of Identity – Moving Forward

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) has served as an important theoretical framework for this study. One of the key functions that this study ultimately serves, however, is to demonstrate how the theory can and should move forward. Specifically, there exist multiple ways that the theory and how it has been utilized in extant literature is currently underdeveloped.

Identity Frames vs. Identity Categories

Perhaps the most immediately vexing aspect of CTI is the lack of a clearly stated relationship between the identity frames and identities themselves (referred to as identity categories in my study). The authors who utilize CTI appear to take it for granted that this relationship is self-explanatory, but in doing so they have limited what the theory can accomplish. As outlined within this study, the frames should be conceptualized as intra/interpersonal/communal contexts in which various identity categories communicatively manifest. By accounting for this, the rich and engaging relationship between frames and categories of identity comes into play. Identity categories (such as being a father, partner, worker and man) are, much like the identity frames, interconnected and exist in relationship to one another. By clarifying the connection between identity categories and identity frames, CTI can be used in previously unexplored ways, such as intra-frame gaps and identity congruencies. Because my study focused on first-time fathers, it served as the chance to see how the father identity

category manifested in the identity frames for the first time. Future studies can gain even more information by studying new identity categories as they interact with existing ones, as well as how they manifest within the various identity frames, including potential for identity frame gaps and congruencies.

Intra-Frame Gaps

The primary benefit of making this connection clear is it opens up the opportunity to study not just gaps across frames, but gaps within frames. If we account for the fact that multiple identity categories manifest within a single frame (such as, say, how one communicatively enacts both being a father and being a worker), we make room for potential incongruences. For example, both Participants 8 and 9 described the importance of enacting their identity category as fathers through paternity leave, but a difficulty in not being able to enact their prized identity category as workers. Interestingly, Jung and Hecht (2003) do account for multiple identity categories *to a degree*, but only within the relational frame (which will be discussed next). This intra-frame gap is understudied in CTI research, largely because the theory as it exists is not conducive to looking at the concepts this way. By making the relationship between identity frames and identity categories more explicit, research of this type will be easier to conceptualize and execute. For example, parents may feel that in order to live up to the communal expectations of the worker identity category (provider, hard worker, driven) they must fail to meet the communal frame's expectations of a parent (present, involved, emotionally available). This gap within a single identity frame could drastically impact their perceived success as a parent.

The Frames Themselves

Another issue with how CTI has been presented and utilized is the tendency to prioritize the use of the ascribed portion of the relational frame of identity, or the idea of messages about the self communicated to an individual by someone else (Hecht, 1993). If the authors insist on including other aspects of the relational frame (which it seems they do; Jung & Hecht, 2003), then it makes sense to call for more explicit consideration of the other aspects of the relational frame of identity, specifically how an individual identifies him/herself through his/her relationships with others, how identities exist in relationship to other identities, and the relationship itself as an identity.

I have already pointed out that CTI does not do enough to account for multiple identity categories manifesting within a single frame, so it is encouraging that the authors make space for it in the relational frame. However, what they do not explain is either a) how this manifests in the study of identity frame gaps, or b) why it is only discussed in connection with the relational frame. In other words, do we not have multiple identities in our personal frame? In our communal frame? Do we not enact multiple identities throughout our lives (Goffman, (1959), as well as the results of my study, would certainly argue that we do!)? It is a significant oversight to tack on this important facet of the theory onto one single frame of identity with little to no explanation. This serves as further evidence that CTI overall is in need of further refinement.

This study has already discussed the confusing characterization of the communal frame in extant CTI literature, specifically Kam and Hecht's (2009) perplexing claim that the communal frame cannot be studied through an individual's concept or the macro-level identity. Once again, this leaves the question of how this frame is to be studied at

all, let alone in relation to the other frames. The communal frame is conspicuous by its absence in extant literature that utilizes CTI, and perhaps it is due to this underlying confusion about its nature. Hecht's (1993) original underpinning for the communal frame was the idea that "identities emerge out of groups and networks" (p. 80). This reasoning is as sound now as it was then, but in order to study the identity categories that emerge from these groups and networks, it must be studied through *some* sort of experience from various individuals. While not every identity category accounted for in my study manifested within the communal frame of identity, it does show the presence of the communal frame when studying identity frame gaps; and it does so by allowing for the individual's relationship with a larger, communal discourse to become a topic of discussion.

Identity Frame Gaps and Congruencies

Studies using CTI have typically focused on one type of gap at a time tied to a specific context. The stimulating issue of paternity leave created the opportunity to explore the possibility of any number of gaps posited by CTI. If identity frames are as interconnected and interpenetrative as the authors of CTI insist (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2003), then it makes sense to account for as many of the identity frames (and potential gaps and congruencies) as possible in a specific study. In other words, if the frames cannot be separated from one another, why does the vast majority of CTI research choose to separate them? It would be more beneficial to look at the identity frames as a whole and see how they interact and connect, particularly in situations where gaps and congruencies arise.

Interestingly, while Jung and Hecht (2003) have rightfully pointed out the importance of the identity frame gap concept within CTI, they themselves have not accounted for the importance of when identity frames work together. Identity frame congruence of this type has proven to be important for participants in my study, and it makes sense that when an identity frames work in harmony (again, as they are interconnected and interpenetrative) it could be just as important and worthy of study as when a gap arises. Identity frame congruence potentially works as a way to “cement” aspects of the self, and with a stimulating issue such as paternity leave, they can prove to be just as relevant as identity frame gaps. The existence of identity frame congruence is once again a logical concept that CTI has previously ignored to the theory’s detriment. Work on identity frame gaps has focused on the effects these gaps may have (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008), including educational satisfaction and depression.

My study has shown the connection between identity frame gaps and potential for stigmatization, itself a potential effect of identity frame gaps. The effect or influence of identity frame congruencies could also be explored by future research. My study has also shown that individuals often desire an identity frame congruency. In other words, the presence of an identity frame congruency could relieve an identity-related tension as much as an identity frame gap causes it. Exploring other stimulating issues beyond the paternity leave decision (marriage, retirement, divorce) could show how individuals work to create these identity frame congruencies and why they are important. For example, during a man’s divorce does he attempt to maintain congruence between how he perceives himself and how he is seen by friends and family members (maintaining

personal/relational congruencies), or seek support from communities based around recently divorced men (creating an enacted/communal congruence)?

The notion of the identity gap itself would benefit from revision. The “gap” terminology carries with it a negative connotation that may not be accurate. For example, a gap could be positive such as enacting one’s identity in a way that pleases one’s self or their loved ones, such as enacting the partner identity in a more caring, conscientious way than would be expected. What may be more appropriate would be to reconfigure the theory to account for both identity frame *differences* (instead of the negatively valenced “gaps”) and *similarities* (or congruencies). Even congruencies such as discussed in this study could ultimately have negative effects, such as “living down” to what the societal discourse expects (such as choosing not to take paternity leave, meeting a societal expectation of the absent father). CTI as a theory has much room for growth and refinement, and accounting for intra-frame “gaps,” frame congruencies, and certainly a clear relationship between identity categories and frames will be a significant step forward.

Summary

Ultimately, I come neither to praise nor to bury CTI. Rather, I wish to see the theory evolve and expand beyond the relative stasis of the 1993 conceptualization. CTI was conceptualized as a specifically interpersonal approach to the communicative study of identity. In that, it has succeeded. However, by expanding and refining its scope through accounting for the relationship between identity frames and identity categories, expansion and refinement of the identity frames themselves, accounting for each of the frames and gaps within research, accounting for identity frame congruencies, and as will

be discussed in the next section, incorporating identity frame gaps' connection to stigmatization, the theory can undergo necessary growth and change. In doing so, CTI can finally begin to reach its full potential as a theory. These changes will work to help CTI become a more comprehensive lens for the study of communication and identity.

Stigmatization

An important question stimulated by the idea of identity frame gaps is whether participants faced any stigmatizing messages concerning their paternity leave decision, and if so, what effect this stigmatization had on the decision. Several participants explicitly discussed stigmatization in relation to their identity and the paternity leave decision. While no one reported being actively communicatively stigmatized by others, they did recognize the possibility of stigmatization, i.e., stigma threat.

Stigma Threat

Stigma threat stands in contrast to both of Goffman's (1963) categories of stigmatized identities, discreditable (hidden) and discredited (public) stigmatized identities. This is because the stigmatized identity *does not exist yet*, but rather is a potential outcome based upon the individual's choices of behavior.

Tellingly, for each participant the only identity category that was tied to potential stigmatization was the one related to work. Each participant who discussed potential messages of stigmatization did so in relation to how they would be perceived in the workplace, such as Participant 11's "biggest fear in the workplace" being the possibility that taking too much time off would lead to him being viewed as apathetic, or Participant 3's fear of "losing favor" with his employers.

This was a common theme for participants, and emphasizes the relevance of the possibility of stigmatization. Specifically, as Smith (2007) outlined, stigmatizing communication separates the individual from others and attaches a degree of either physical, or in this case, social harm. To be labeled as less devoted to work than the norm could potentially set the individual apart and carry with it a negative social impact. But again, this is not a case of individuals managing an existing stigmatized identity. Instead, participants in this study described how they managed *the possibility* of being stigmatized in the future as a result of their paternity leave decision.

Any discussion of the communicative management of stigmatization requires consideration of Meisenbach's (2010) work with Stigma Management Theory (SMT). SMT does an excellent job of exploring the various ways that individuals may communicatively manage their stigmatized identities. Specifically, SMT posits that stigmatized individuals handle their stigmatized identities in one of several ways: accepting the stigma's applicability to the self, avoiding by acknowledging the stigma exists but denying that it applies to them specifically, evading responsibility for the stigma, or by denying that the identity should be stigmatized at all, thereby challenging the public discourse that attempts to create and reinforce the stigmatization.

What SMT does not account for, however, is how individuals may work to avoid stigmatization altogether. Meisenbach (2010) does explain how individuals may use avoidance in response to explicit stigmatization, specifically by "hiding the stigma attribute, *avoiding stigmatizing situations*, distancing self from the stigma, eliminating the stigma behavior or attribute, and making favorable social comparisons" (p. 280) (emphasis added). For participants' discussion of potential stigmatization, the idea of

avoiding stigmatizing situations seems relevant as they did in fact attempt to avoid a situation where they would be stigmatized. However this is a deceptively different situation from how the idea of avoiding stigmatizing situations has previously been approached.

In the past, avoidance of this type has been framed as being managed through controlling disclosure of an existing stigmatized identity. For example, convicted murderers handle disclosure of their identities to avoid being stigmatized (May, 2000), or how those with hidden illnesses such as epilepsy control information about their health to avoid stigmatization (Schneider, 1980). In other words, the identity already exists, and the stigmatization is controlled, predicted and avoided as much as possible through controlling information and disclosure (i.e., avoiding a situation where the stigmatizing identity becomes either relevant or known). In contrast, the study participants had not been stigmatized yet, as they had yet to enact their identities in a way that would result in communicated (discredited) stigmatization. The stigma was a threat, a potential outcome, not a reality.

This opens up tremendous possibilities, as stigma *threat* could impact any number of situations (divorce, crime, drug use, etc.) where an individual is cognizant of the fact that their decisions could ultimately result in a stigmatized identity. It makes sense that individuals would want to not only avoid being stigmatized for an existing identity, but also whenever possible to avoid adopting a stigmatized identity to begin with. This may not ultimately prevent individuals from engaging in a specific activity or behavior, but as with this study's participants, it could impact how and to what extent a behavior is undertaken. For example, most who discussed stigma threat in relation to paternity leave

did so in the context of the threat having a tempering or constraining effect. Stigma threat ultimately played a significant role not in whether or not to take time off at all, but *how much* time off would be permissible before the potential for stigmatization became too great.

This was not the case for one participant who discussed stigmatization surrounding paternity leave. Like the other participants, Participant 16 did acknowledge that he faced potential stigmatization at work. In contrast to the others, Participant 16 explained he did not care whether or not he was ultimately stigmatized and he refused to allow it to impact his decision regarding paternity leave. It is no coincidence then that Participant 16 took off a month for his paternity leave, the most time available to him based upon his organization's policies, and the most time taken out of any participant in this study. He stated that he knew what his company allowed and he chose to "take full advantage" of the policies in place.

While Participant 16 did not describe the potential stigma having the tempering effect, as was the case for the other participants, he nonetheless engaged in stigma management. In fact, he did so in a manner previously outlined by stigma management theory. Specifically, Meisenbach (2010) describes how "stigmatized individuals may seek to deny and challenge public perceptions of stigma by ignoring (or appearing to ignore) moments of stigma communication and continuing to display the stigma" (p. 284). Juhlia's (2004) study on how homelessness is reframed by shelter residents shows an attempt to "talk back" to the discourse that stigmatizes them by refuting that anything about them should be stigmatizing. By publically taking as much time off as possible and denying (at least in his interview) that he cared at all about any repercussions or

stigmatization at work, Participant 16 managed the potential for stigmatization by ignoring the possibility rather than letting it temper the amount of time off he took off of work to be with his wife and new son.

Extant literature indicates that stigmatized identities, be they discredited or discreditable, can have a profound impact on an individual's work experience (Brohan & Thornicroft, 2010; Stuart, 2003). It is interesting that participants did not express fear of, say, stigmatization from family members or peers outside of the workplace. Even Participant 13 who described a gap between his enacted behavior and his father's expectations did not discuss any fear of repercussions or stigmatization based on his paternity leave decision. However this could be because Participant 13 worked for a family business, and his enacted paternity leave decision was in line with what is the expected at his workplace, illustrating a lack of an enacted/communal gap at work regarding his time off. Likewise Participant 4 described a gap between his enacted identity and his friends' belief that he would be largely useless at home after the baby's birth (or would be just a "crane"), but did not indicate any fear of the negative repercussions that characterize stigmatization.

Stigmatization and Identity Frame Gaps and Congruencies

One of the key motivations behind this study, specifically in the inclusion of Goffman's (1963) conceptualization of stigmatized identities, was to explore how stigmatization may relate to Jung and Hecht's (2004) identity frame gap concept within CTI, and thus be framed more firmly within the communication discipline. I have argued that stigmatization ultimately stems from identity frame gaps, specifically from enacted/communal or personal/communal gaps. This idea is supported in my study's

findings to a degree, though not in the manner that was originally expected. Once again, no participant in this study reported any enacted, communicated stigmatization based upon his paternity leave decision. Rather, stigma threat, for most participants, influenced their decision about how much time off they ultimately took. For the participants who reported a tempering effect on paternity leave in connection to stigma threat, the intention was to avoid standing out as less committed than the organizational norm, or to avoid being seen as someone who takes advantage of company policies for one's own gain. In taking "too much" time off, then, the individual would be creating an enacted/communal identity frame gap, or communicatively enacting the work-related identity in a way that differed (in a negative way) from the larger, macro/organizational level expectation.

Thus, their reaction to stigma threat could be seen as enacting their identities in such a way as to remove the threat of an enacted/communal gap. In other words, they avoid stigmatization by maintaining an identity frame congruency. Even when stigmatization is avoided entirely by making sure there is no identity frame gap, a revised version of CTI that accounts for identity frame congruencies could even further integrate the concept of stigmatization into its framework.

Stigmatization has been tied to identity since Goffman's (1963) seminal work, describing it as a discrepancy between the virtual identity (how an individual "should" be) and enacted identity (how an individual truly is). By tying the study of stigmatization to CTI, identity frame gaps and identity frame congruencies have further illustrated the communicative nature of stigma and how it can be rooted in existing communication theory.

Summary

This study has revealed information on how various identities and identity considerations (identity frame gaps, identity stigmatization) are communicated about and communicatively enacted surrounding the stimulating issue of paternity leave. Participants in this study reported the key identity categories of father, partner, worker and man manifesting as particularly salient, with multiple subthemes emerging in relation to each of these larger categories. These categories also related to the four identity frames of personal, enacted, relational and communal posited by the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI).

Participants also reported identity frame gaps like those described by CTI. This study is one of few that accounts for the communal frame of identity while exploring identity frame gaps, and thus fills an important role in the theory's use. In relation to the gaps themselves, participants often reported the opposite of gaps, identity frame congruence, of various identity frames fitting together. These identity frame congruencies were also described as important factors in the paternity leave decision. This study also revealed that gaps occur not only across frames, but within frames as well. The existence of intra-frame gaps is, as will be discussed, an intriguing avenue for future research.

Identity stigmatization was shown to play a role in the paternity leave decision. For many participants the potential for their work identities to become stigmatized, or stigma threat, was enough to create a tempering effect on their paternity leave decision. While the fact that they perceived the threat to their work identities was interesting in and of itself, participants who felt such a threat could be possible, consistently discussed it in relation to how their decision played out, making stigmatization, or at least stigma threat,

a factor that was inseparable for how the decision was carried out. Even for the participant who expressed the possibility of stigmatizing messages but a distinct lack of concern, stigmatization was still an active part of the discourse surrounding the decision, and a potential effect on his work-related identity.

Communication, Identity and Paternity Leave

These results demonstrate the importance of a communication-based approach to studying identity. When discussing the role of various identities in relation to the paternity leave decision, participants revealed a great deal about how they communicatively enact their identities, how their relationships are communicatively constructed, and how they understand and relate to the various discourses that connect to these identities. Also, when discussing certain frames of identity (relational, communal) participants discussed key messages they received or communicative turning points that influenced or at least contextualized their paternity leave decision. Many participants described being aware of the possibility of being subjected to stigmatizing communication, and either choosing to avoid this possibility or refusing to let it impact how they communicatively behave. In other words, communication is once again shown to be the foundational factor in how these participants' identities are created, negotiated, managed and at times, potentially threatened through stigmatization. Regarding CTI specifically, its greatest strength remains in its comprehensive approach and applicability across contexts. Other theoretical approaches such as Identity Negotiation Theory (INT; Ting-Toomey, 1999) and Social Identity Theory (SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 1975) are certainly useful for their specific contexts; INT focuses on the communicative negotiation of identity in intercultural contexts, while SIT has focused primarily on group

identification. CTI, in contrast, is able to account for both of these concepts within the various identity frames. CTI also accounts for dyadic and intrapersonal communication, making it an even more comprehensive lens. My study has shown how accounting for intra-frame gaps, identity frame congruencies, and the connection between identity gaps and stigmatization can expand the scope of CTI even further.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has explored the role that identity plays in the paternity leave decision, including the role of identity frames, identity frame gaps, identity frame congruencies and potential identity stigmatization. This study was not without limitations, and there remain several key future directions for communication research to further explore the topics within this study.

Regarding the stimulating issue of paternity leave, one of the key motivations for this study was that very little research has been done on the subject in any regard within the United States. While the study of identity remains the core of this project, future research on paternity leave in the US should branch out into multiple fruitful directions.

Design Considerations

A key limitation was this study's approach of asking new fathers to recall the entirety of their paternity leave decision retrospectively. Future studies of the paternity leave decision and the paternity leave experience overall would do well to utilize a longitudinal format. It would be illuminating to chronicle even a handful of case studies of fathers from the early stages of knowing their partner is pregnant through the birth and potential paternity leave period. While this study was designed to recruit fathers whose children were no more than a year old for this reason, a longitudinal study would allow

for a level of richness and detail regarding identity and the dynamics of influence that may have not come up in interviews conducted after the fact. For example, greater detail could be obtained on the key factors and communicative events that impacted the paternity leave decision.

In this study, I did not find evidence of stigmatizing communication. However, it may well be that the stigmatization occurs some time after the paternity leave decision. For example, a participant is not considered for promotion a year after the paternity leave because he is considered comparatively less committed to the workplace because of having taking the leave. Doing either a longer retrospective time frame or a prospective longitudinal format would provide opportunity to assess whether and how stigmatizing communication is connected to the decision to take leave.

Each participant in this study chose to take some form of paternity leave. While this helps the study explore the paternity leave concept, it also serves as a limitation. Future work that accounts for fathers that did not take any form of paternity leave would potentially illustrate very different key identity categories and potential identity gaps, congruencies, and even potential stigma depending upon how their decision not to take leave is received. For example, someone that wishes to take paternity leave as an opportunity to enact his identity as a caring, present father (personal frame) but is unable to do so (enactment frame) due to a lack of money could have a degree of tension due to the creation of an identity gap surrounding his decision. A participant who did *not* wish to take paternity leave and thus did not do so (enacted frame) despite his partner's communicated wishes that he do so (relational frame) would also create an identity gap

worth studying, including what messages were exchanged between them about the decision, and the decision's impact upon their relationship (relational satisfaction, etc.)

Future research may benefit from exploring identity and the paternity leave decision at least in part via a focus group format. By having multiple participants describing their paternity leave experience at the same time new information and shared and divergent experiences could more easily come to light. For example one participant openly discussing stigma threat or a key communicative event could open the door for other participants to do so as well, whereas in a one-on-one interview they may not feel comfortable discussing these topics with the interviewer, or be more likely to continue to manage stigma by avoidance or denial. This would be particularly useful for studies that explore different paternity leave choices and experiences where different participants are employed by the same organization. Also, a focus group serves as a prime place for exploring the organization's relational and communal frames of identity, giving light to what others see as expectations placed on them by others within the organization and the organizational culture as a whole.

Sample Composition

Another limitation of this study was the demographic homogeneity of the sample, with each of the participants being white, straight, and married. Future work would do well to explore a more racially and ethnically diverse sample, perhaps specifically exploring how different cultural standpoints influence the paternity leave decision and the discourse surrounding it. These standpoints could also make different identity categories/different aspects of these categories relevant in the decision. For example, African-American or Latino fathers could have different culturally situated views on

masculinity and fatherhood, which could have an impact upon the paternity leave decision. If socio-economic status is considered a key part of one's identity, it too could be a significant factor for future participants as well.

While stigma threat was part of many participants' thinking, it would be important to include individuals who were actively stigmatized. Being able to account for effects of actual stigmatization would supplement this study's results by exploring, for example, if the stigmatization caused feelings of regret in the individual, or more importantly, caused any significant identity impacts on themselves as a father, worker, or the combination of the two identities.

Future research should also explore fathers' paternity leave decision for subsequent children after their first. This study chose to focus on first time fathers to lay groundwork exploring the uniqueness of the decision and thus the first time certain identities became salient in these specific combinations connected to these experiences. Several participants in this study discussed hypothetically how their paternity leave decision may differ in the future, or at least the importance of taking time off. Exploring how identities and identity frame gaps become salient and are managed in subsequent paternity leave decisions could add important context to how fathers learn from previous experiences and adapt as necessary (or remain consistent in their approach to time off in this context). It is possible, for example, that in subsequent paternity leave decisions, specific identity frame gaps lose their influence or disappear altogether.

Another important limitation of this study was the decision to interview only heterosexual fathers. Additional research should focus on more diverse experiences as they relate to identity and the paternity leave in general. Homosexual fathers, for

example, would likely have a different experience when attempting to obtain paternity leave from their organizations, the strong possibility of stigmatization, and the various identities at play could differ or at least manifest in unique ways. In addition, heterosexual and homosexual fathers whose child was born via a surrogate should also be included in further research of this type to account for their unique experiences with fatherhood. Having such a different journey to parenthood could significantly impact the various identity categories involved in this study. For example, for fathers whose child was born via a surrogate, what aspects of the partner identity are salient when one's primary partner has not birthed their child? Incorporating homosexual fathers would illuminate how both partners conceptualize their father identity category together and separately surrounding their child's adoption.

Concepts

This study is unique because of the evidence of a gap between identity frames, but also a gap **within** individual frames. As shown by this study, multiple identity categories can manifest within a single identity frame, and thus create the potential for intra-frame gaps. Future research utilizing CTI can and should explore situations where individuals must contend with gaps within a frame, such as wishing to express one's religion when it does not account for one's own sexual orientation. Enacting these identities or even the intrapersonal understanding of them within the personal frame could potentially be difficult, and instances such as this are worthy applications of CTI. Utilizing a CTI-based approach that looks at intra-frame gaps would allow for understanding what the effect of these gaps may be, and how individuals communicatively manage them.

While not included in the study proper, several participants discussed what they viewed as a sea change in the communal conceptualization of masculinity and maleness. This result was not discussed specifically in connection to paternity leave but this result alone is worthy of further study in the context of paternity leave and masculine identity. Participants in my study who described a sea change in masculinity were likely to feel more able to express themselves as caregivers and present, involved fathers. Extant literature supports the idea that millennial fathers prioritize these caretaking behaviors and feel more comfortable doing so (Johansson, 2011; Johansson & Klinth, 2008), referencing the importance of being good, caring fathers as a part of their masculine identities. Future work should explore the millennial generation's views on paternity leave, fatherhood and maleness and how this manifests within their understanding of the communal frame of identity.

Similarly, paternity leave and CTI can be studied with a greater emphasis on the enacted and relational frames of identity. Accounting for the specific communicative messages that help to enact one's identity will help to refine the understanding of how this identity frame connects to paternity leave. Also, studying the most memorable messages received concerning paternity leave by key peers can yield enough richness for a study alone. Exploring these specific messages will illustrate what some of the most important communicative events were for new fathers, and the content of these messages will act as examples of the present discourses surrounding paternity leave and the relevant identities.

While this study purposely chose to explore the paternity leave decision, communication and particularly identity, the idea of role conflict is relevant in this

discussion. Exploring how men communicatively manage (and are communicated with about) juggling their new role as a father along with work, partnership and masculinity is an important consideration going forward. It could be that role conflict ultimately results from intra-frame identity interactions, including but not limited to identity conflicts. For example, for individuals such as those in this study who prioritize family related identities over work, they may reduce their responsibilities (and thus their role conflict) at work to better allow for the expression of that identity. On the other hand, individuals who prioritize work and home life equally may be more likely to experience role conflict as they manage not only these identities but the responsibilities inherent in these competing roles. Ultimately future research could illuminate the way that role conflict and identity may be related.

Conclusion

The decision for first-time fathers of how to handle taking time off to be with a new child is a complicated one. It makes multiple different identity categories salient, including that of father, partner, worker and man. Because of this, there exists potential for identity frame gaps to arise such as those posited within the Communication Theory of Identity (Jung and Hecht, 2004). This study's results explored how the identity frame gap concept can be expanded upon, utilizing it to study multiple identity categories, including gaps between identity categories within the same identity frame and congruencies across the frames. Further in the process of making the decision, new fathers often face the threat of a stigmatized identity, and for some, this can play a key role in the decision of whether and how much time to take off, and thus how they enact these salient identity categories. There remains important work to be done on the role that

identity plays in the paternity leave decision, and even more so there is substantial gain to be had by continuing to explore the unique approach to paternity leave in the United States, and the unique experiences of American fathers in this context.

APPENDIX A: Participant Occupations

Participant #	Occupation
1	Graphic designer
2	Assistant professor
3	Optometrist
4	Pharmacist
5	Telemarketer
6	EMS educator
7	Logistics coordinator
8	University instructor
9	Non-profit area director
10	Power plant tech
11	Graduate assistant
12	Med student
13	Electrician
14	Medical sales rep
15	Personal trainer
16	Retail manager
17	Small-business owner
18	Physical education teacher/grocery clerk

APPENDIX B: Recruitment Materials

NEW FATHERS

If you have:

- Had or adopted a baby for the first time within the past year and
- Were employed before and immediately after the baby was brought home

You are wanted for participation in a study through Wayne State University's Department of Communication concerning **fatherhood, masculinity, relationships and work**

Participants will take part in 1-2 hour-long interviews with a doctoral candidate with WSU's Communication Department

All information regarding **your identity and employer** will be **kept confidential**

If you have any questions or would like to discuss participation, contact the researcher at:

Scott.richmond3@wayne.edu

Or

269.352.0874

APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

First of all, let me thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me today. Please remember that you have the right to end this interview at any time or abstain from answering any question should you wish to do so.

- So, you're a new father. Congratulations! Tell me about that first. What has it been like overall?
- Possible probes depending on what arises:
 - Tell me what your life is like now that the baby is born?
 - So what does fatherhood mean to you now that you're a new dad?
 - Describe for me what you think society's concept of fatherhood is.

Broadly speaking, what do you think the society view of fatherhood is?

- Do you think you fit the mold of this view of fatherhood?
- What do you think fatherhood means to your partner?

Thank you for sharing that with me. Your concept of fatherhood and how it relates to your life is very important for this study, but as masculinity and what it means to be a man is an important part of fatherhood I'd like to discuss that as well, both what it means to be a man in general and how it connects to fatherhood.

- Tell me about what it means to you personally to be a man; what defines being a man for you?
- Possible probes depending on what arises:
 - Does being a man or masculinity mean something different to you now that you're a father?

- What do you think society's view of being a man is? Are you in line with that view? What about how you express your masculinity as a father?
- What do you think masculinity means to your partner? Do you see you the same way?

Thank you for that. So we have discussed fatherhood, masculinity, and how they relate. I would also like to talk to you about your identity as a worker and how these concepts connect for you.

- Tell me about your job in general, what do you do, how long you've been there, etc.
- Possible probes depending on what arises:
 - o How do you think your coworkers or boss etc. view you? How would they describe you?
- Do you think the way you're perceived at work is in line with how you perceive yourself?
- Tell me about how working and fatherhood interact in your life, how do they influence each other?

Thank you. Now I'd also like to discuss with you the choice concerning whether or not to take time off when your child is brought home.

- Tell me about the decision you made regarding whether or not to take paternity leave/time off after the baby was born and brought home
- Possible probes depending on what arises:
 - Why did you make the decision that you did? What were the important factors?

- Who did you talk to about the decision before it was made? Did you talk to anyone about it afterwards?
- Do you think your decision was typical of how your coworkers and friends have approached paternity leave/time off?
- Did you have any memorable reactions from anyone in your life concerning the decision?
- Would you have approached the decision differently given any circumstances?
If so, what situation would have allowed you to behave differently?
- Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or any other insights you have concerning identity, fatherhood, masculinity, and/or paternity leave?

APPENDIX D: Coding Manual

Identity – References to expression of the self in some salient way

Identity frames – Different inter and intrapersonal contexts where identity is expressed or understood by the individual

Personal – “Ideally at the core of it I see myself as someone who wants to be an attentive father.” (RQ1a, RQ2)

Enacted – “I’m always there for my kids, I show up to all their events, I tuck them in at night, that’s what I do.” (RQ1a, RQ2)

Relational – “My partner and I discussed that my part of parenting is to be the disciplinarian.” (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2)

Communal – “There is that societal ideal of a father that I strive to live up to.” (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2)

(Subcategory of identity/frames. Note: These identity types may manifest in any above frame or multiple.)

Parent – Any reference to the self in relation to parenting – “Parenting pushes you forward as a person and is a key reason for living.” (RQ1a)

Blessing – “If you’re lucky you get to have children.”

Challenge – “Being a parent is the hardest thing I’ve ever done.”

Trial and error – “there is no universal solution in parenting, you just have to try everything and see what works.”

Problem solving – “obviously as a parent you want to stop your child from crying, fix what’s wrong.”

Time consumption – “nothing prepares you as a new parent for how much time will go to the baby.”

Father – Any reference to the self as a father/male/masculine in a parental role (RQ1a)

(Sub. of Father)

As caretaker - “It is important to me to be there for my child.” (RQ1a)

As teacher – “I need to be there to pass along certain things that a father can.” (RQ1a)

As provider – “Being a dad is about putting food on the table.” (RQ1a)

As process – “Being a father is a constantly changing process of adaptation and learning.” (RQ1a)

As an emotional connection: “Being a father is about being intimately connected to your child.” (RQ1a)

As uncertainty – “I don’t know how to be a father yet. No one tells you how to do this.” (RQ1a)

Uniqueness – “There’s nothing like being a father.” (RQ1a)

Transition life – “Fatherhood is about finding a balance between your love for your child and your old life.” (RQ1a)

Transition self – “I’m finding I have to grow as a person to be the father I want to be.”

Fluid – “Being a father is different for everyone.”

(Subcategory of identity):

Worker – Any reference to the self in relation to the workplace/employment (RQ1a, RQ1b)

(Sub. of Worker)

Pride – “I love my job, and it’s something I’m good at.”(RQ1a, RQ1b)

Providing – “Work is important, it’s what allows me to provide for my family.” (RQ1a, RQ1b)

Balance – “It is important for me to be both a good employee and a good father.” (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2)

Application of interests – “Work is great for me because I get to apply all this knowledge I have of the field.”

Skill – “I love my job because I’m skilled enough to get it done and get it done right.”

Identity – “It doesn’t define me, but work is important to who I am.”

Positive impact – “I like my job because it allows me to create positive change and have an impact.”

Lack of fulfillment- “work is something I do because I have to, it’s not what I live for.”

Stress – “work for me is a huge source of stress and a drain on me.”

(Subcategory of identity)

Partner/spouse/husband – Any reference to a relational partner/lack thereof (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2)

(Sub. of Partner/spouse/husband)

Relationship changing – “Our relationship is changing now that we’re having kids.” (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2)

Balancing parenting and relationship - “It can be difficult, but I try to find time to be together just the two of us” (RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2)

Balancing each other – “It’s more important now than ever that we balance each other out.”

Teamwork – “We both bring things to the table as new parents and work together in that way.” (RQ1a, RQ1b)

Single parenthood – “I am happy to say I don’t need a partner to raise this child.” (NOTE: Should also be coded as Identity/Father). (RQ1a)

Strength of relationship – “My wife and I have an amazing relationship.” (RQ1a)

Staying strong – “When it gets hard for me I have to make sure I don’t burden her.”

Support – “I am there for her 100% because she needs me right now.”

Compromise – “Relationships are about being willing to be wrong some times.”

Man – any reference to being a man or talking about how men are and how they are in connection to that.

Strength – “I have to be the strong one, I’m the man here.” (RQ1a)

Provider - “To me being a man is about providing for my family.” (RQ1a)

Teaching – “A boy needs a dad to show him how to be a man.” (NOTE: Can also be coded as identity/father) (RQ1a, RQ1b)

Fluid – “I think being a man is whatever anyone wants it to be.” (RQ1a)

Caretaker – “Being a man, to me, means I’m there for my child and I take care of her the same as any parent should.” (RQ1a)

Problem solver – “To me being a man means you do what needs to be done. When there’s a problem, you get it taken care of.” (RQ1a)

Emotion – “As a man, I am someone who loves my wife and my child.” (RQ1a)

Respect – “Being a man is about showing respect to those you care about and to others in general” (RQ1a)

Identity gaps – Conflicting feelings regarding their sense of self, internal, behavioral, in a relationship and on a large, societal scale

Personal – Enacted Gap – “I would love to take paternity leave because being there for my child is important to me, but there’s just no way I would be able to do it.” (RQ2)

Personal – Relational – “I see myself as a sensitive father, but no one sees me that way.” (RQ2)

Personal – Communal – “I feel like I’m out of sync with what ‘masculinity’ is supposed to be in society.” (RQ2)

Enacted-Relational – “I have to work and provide, though my partner wishes I’d be more present in the house.” (RQ2)

Enacted – Communal – “I support my children by being there and caring for them in any way possible, no matter what people think a “father’s role” is.” (RQ2)

Relational – Communal – “My partner and I do parenting our way, no matter what the rest of society would tell us.” (RQ2)

Evaluative events – Descriptions of communicative events that had an evaluation, positive or negative on the (potential or enacted) decision concerning paternity leave

Potential stigma for taking leave – “It was talked about, but I was concerned with what people would think. (RQ3a, RQ3b)

Potential stigma for not taking leave – “I worry about what people at work would think.” (RQ3a, RQ3b)

Enacted stigma for taking leave – “You wouldn’t believe the negative reactions I received for it at work. I was singled out as not as committed as the other employees.” (RQ3a, RQ3b)

Enacted stigma for not taking leave – “People don’t understand when they talk to me that I made a decision to support my family. They judge me anyway.” (RQ3a, RQ3b)

Potential positive evaluation for taking leave – “I do think if I stay home when the baby arrives maybe people will be inspired to do the same, I could set a positive example.” (RQ3a, RQ3b)

Potential positive evaluation for not taking leave – “My hope is that it will show that I am a dedicated employee. I don’t slack off, no matter what.” (RQ3a, RQ3b)

Enacted positive evaluation for taking leave – “You wouldn’t believe how many compliments I got from women, mothers especially, for being at home with the baby.” (RQ3a, RQ3b)

Enacted positive evaluation for not taking leave – “In the end I know everyone considered it the right thing to do, and saw me as a real provider.” (RQ3a, RQ3b)

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ABSTRACT**COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY: THE PATERNITY LEAVE DECISION**

by

SCOTT SELLNOW-RICHMOND**August 2015****Advisor:** Dr. Loraleigh Keashly**Major:** Communication**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

Paternity leave has remained an under-studied phenomenon in the United States. The US stands in contrast to countries such as Sweden and Norway, which have a history of government-regulated paid time off for fathers of new children. Therefore new fathers in the US face a unique situation regarding their decision of whether or not to take whatever form of paternity leave may be available to them. This study explores what aspects of new fathers' identities are salient regarding the paternity leave decision. The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) is used as a theoretical framework to explore how these identities correspond with and manifest within different identity frames. The paternity leave decision is also explored as a potential stimulating issue for stigmatization. In other words, new fathers may face being stigmatized for their decision regarding whether or not to take time off to be home with their new children. 18 new, first time fathers were interviewed regarding their identities, paternity leave, and any potential stigmatization they may have faced. Ultimately participants discussed many nuanced aspects of identity as salient surrounding the decision, as well as perceived threat

of stigmatization in many cases. Suggestions for how paternity leave can be studied, and how CTI as a theory can evolve going forward are also discussed.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Scott Sellnow-Richmond is an assistant professor of interpersonal communication at Columbus State University. Prior to earning his PhD from Wayne State, he completed Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in communication from Western Michigan University. His primary research interests are interpersonal and family communication, with an emphasis on the study of identity.