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FIREFIGHTER MOTHERS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT:
FIGHTING THE FIRES AROUND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

A Project

Presented to

the Faculty of the Communication Division

Pepperdine University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Louise Ysabel Dequilla

April 2018

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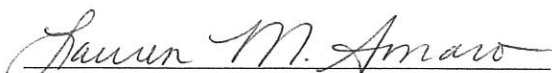
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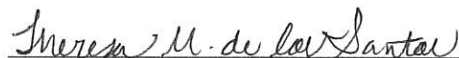
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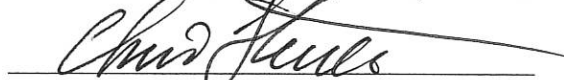
MASTER OF ARTS


April 2018

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FIREFIGHTER MOTHERS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT: FIGHTING THE FIRES AROUND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

by

Louise Ysabel Dequilla

April 2018

Dr. Lauren M. Amaro, Chairperson

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focuses on the environment of social support and challenges in seeking work-life balance for firefighters who are mothers. The goal of this research is to create a website that can provide these women with online resources and a community of support to achieve work-life balance. In-depth interviews with six firefighter mothers addressed topics such as occupational background, experiences in the field, work-life situation, and potential challenges they face as working mothers in the fire service industry. Findings revealed the exaggerated difficulties for firefighter mothers due to the physicality and intense nature of their work, as well as the island of femininity they deal with in the workplace. Coping strategies took the form of mobilizing masculinity (Martin, 2001), with firefighter mothers expressing their tendency to act like "just one of the guys." Participants gravitated towards other female firefighters who could relate to their challenges, when they did seek out community. Firefighter mothers conveyed interest in and desire to use a website that could provide them with motherhood resources and access to a community of fellow firefighter mothers to forge a network of social support.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Work-life balance is a prominent issue for employees and organizations, primarily because of shifts in the labor market. These changes include increases in female employment with children and dual-earner couples (Bach, 2005); the advancement of technology use at work; and growing research on physical, social and psychological risks to employee well-being (Akter, 2016). Work-life balance is difficult to attain as a worker in the United States, due to the scarcity of work-hour regulations. While the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) requires overtime pay for more than 40 hours of work in one week, there is no established limit on the number of hours that an individual above the age of 16 can work (Landivar, 2014). Furthermore, employees are susceptible to subcultures within their respective organizations that can dictate certain work behavior. For example, physicians, lawyers, and managers are expected to uphold a “long-hours culture” (Bacik & Drew 2006; Rutherford 2001). This long-hours culture is particularly prominent in the case of first response occupations, such as police officers, firefighters, and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) (Schafer, Sutter, & Gibbons, 2015). While police officer and paramedic careers typically warrant shifts lasting a minimum of 12 hours, firefighters face routine 24-hour shifts, which also expose workers to uncommon levels of danger and the added pressure of rescue work inherent in their job description (Soeters, 2000). Since more hours are expected at the workplace, demands from work interfere with environments outside of work including home and personal activities, resulting in work-life imbalance (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Firefighters are a particularly

understudied group in respect to work-life balance, which is the focus of the present study. Researching this audience allows for a deeper understanding of how work-life balance is affected by workplace culture, thus leading to improvements for individuals who are in similar environments.

Even further understudied is the working mother community within firefighter occupations, who face challenges that are both similar to and unique in comparison to what the larger working mother community tends to face. Existing research shows that among the greater population of working mothers, this community can either provide a means of social support among those struggling to attain this work-life balance, or these women can experience guilt and criticism for their choices for employment outside of the home (Kuperbeg & Stone, 2008). Although there is existing research that uncovers how working mothers are still facing obstacles in the workplace in terms of being able to have a balanced work-life experience, the present research could further these concepts by interviewing a group of working mothers who are firefighters, in the hopes of comprehending their experiences and seeing any similarities or contrasts to current working mother research. Presently there is very little to no existing research specifically looking at these women and the challenges they face, so the present study adds to this knowledge gap by recognizing what these women are experiencing. Upon uncovering the issues and realities for these individuals, the ultimate goal is to develop a website to provide communal space for firefighter mothers to communicate and offer social support for one another, as they navigate through similar experiences and relate in ways that others cannot. The website could incite the conversation and lead to a foundation for

campaigns that provide resources for this community as well as introduce more focused policies that directly benefit improving the firefighter mother's experience. Because such little research currently exists, the in-depth interview method is well suited to investigate this topic since it allows for opportunities to dig deeper into various aspects of firefighter mother experiences and needs that may not have been anticipated.

To illustrate the background and foundations of this proposed research, the following sections will cover relevant studies in the topics of firefighter culture and women and working mothers in male-dominated fields. The project will then transition to discussions of work-life balance and work-life conflict, women in the workplace and current statistics as a whole, mother-friendly organizations and the corresponding policies that have been adopted to support working mothers, and how social support can improve experiences within the working mother community.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Firefighter Organizational Culture

While pursuing work-life balance may be a challenge in any career, some careers have inherent and extreme physical, mental, and emotional expectations of employees. These expectations that can cause greater barriers to employee well-being, more so than a standard nine to five job. One such example, and the area of focus for this study, is firefighter careers. Firefighters are in a line of work that promotes and ensures the safety, health, and protection of individuals and communities, as are police officers, paramedics, and military service members (Schafer et al., 2015). This description demonstrates how these lines of work are quite distinct from the typical career, as being exposed to critical incidents (often involving death or life-threatening injury) is a potentially integral part of the job (Pietrantonio & Prati, 2008). Unpredictable schedules are also characteristic of these occupations due to the nature of the work, as firefighters typically work more hours per week than any other career across the board (Schafer et al., 2015), and they also face the possibility of having to cancel their leaves if they are needed to return to work in case of emergencies (Soeters, 2000).

Because of the high risk that is inherent within firefighter occupations, emergency rescue work upholds an even higher standard and expectation of collaboration and coordination as an organizational structure (Jex & Thomas, 2003). An organization's culture reveals itself in the group's internal characteristics, the system of values and beliefs a group uses to make decisions and form behavior models, and a pattern of basic

assumptions that have been developed over time in learning how to cope with problems of “external adaptation and internal integration” (Goodman, Zammuto & Gifford, 2001; Schein, 1984, p. 12). Firefighter culture involves slowly evolving traditions that are resistant to change, as case studies on firefighter resiliency revealed firefighters have a tendency of feeling ownership over their culture and will pass it down to people who they see as similar to themselves (Hulett et al., 2008; Pietrantonio & Prati, 2008). The firefighter culture also encourages long-term employment and counts on interpersonal connections.

Entry-level firefighters are often motivated to apply for promotions because they offer more responsibility, authority, and prestige (Hulett, Bendick, Thomas, & Moccio, 2008). The fire service advocates commitment to the work and high levels of pride (Lee & Olshfski, 2002). Perceptions that firefighters and the general public share are that firefighting is a dangerous and difficult occupation; the requirements to perform in this line of work are strength and courage; and only an elite batch of individuals carry out these requirements (Chetkovich, 1997). This culture is so ingrained that in some cases the methods and perspectives adopted are incorrect and harmful, but continue to withstand attempts to correct them because they are viewed as traditions (Gasaway, 2005). One such example of this is the pattern of pranks, practical jokes, and hazing of new firefighters that can occur as part of the culture of joviality and community (Hulett et al., 2008). While some characterize this behavior as traditional, harmless fun that builds teamwork, others consider these pranks and hazing as harassment and intimidation intended to exclude and test outsiders (Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996).

Effective teamwork is integral to executing job requirements in the fire service, and maintaining a strong culture and work ethic are a means of enhancing performance (Hulett et al., 2008; Chetkovich, 1997). A study testing resilience in firefighters revealed that firefighters were influenced by the expectation of group success, which directly related to the outcome of their performance, thus shaping the way that the entirety of the group can handle critical incidents (Pietrantonio & Prati, 2008). This finding affirms that community building and maintaining a strong network within and throughout fire departments is imperative for smooth handling of emergency and critical situations, making community a definitive part of the hierarchical model normally found in this field (Cowman, Ferrari, & Liao-Troth, 2004).

In addition to the organizational emphasis on the necessity of community, Pietrantonio and Prati's (2008) study found that firefighters' sense of community delves deeper than just a work task. The occupation strives to protect the local area, saving lives and assuaging the suffering of members of the communities to which the firefighters belong. The study further concluded that the deeper feeling of belonging and emotional connection within the community may be particularly important for emergency rescue personnel, specifically within firefighter populations, as a definitive sense of community was related to low levels of distress and high levels of satisfaction (Cowman et al., 2004). Community and belonging not only allow for firefighters to experience more success in their occupations, but this support is also necessary as this group is considered high risk in that they are susceptible to experiencing a wide range of physical and mental health

consequences as a result of the nature of their work (Benedek, Fullerton, & Ursano, 2007).

The fire department is distinct in that its history and tradition create an exceptionally intractable culture, which can be problematic when it comes to attempts at improving existing conditions and policies (National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, 2014). Studies have shown that when members leave the fire service, five out of seven of the major reasons for leaving relate to the organization's culture (Whitney, 2012). In addition to the stress of the culture, firefighters with high levels of work-family conflict at home often turn to emotional suppression when coping with negative emotions on the job. A recent study investigating the role of joviality and companionate love within the fire service found that the inherently masculine culture tends to result in emotional suppression, which when experienced with the stressor of high work-family conflict, could develop into greater health problems and elevated risk-taking (O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). This finding led to the conclusion that the presence of joviality and companionate love combatted the stereotypically masculine organizational culture and caused the sense of community and support that many firefighters appreciate. However, the study also posited that vulnerable and emotional behavior may only be acceptable for men in a strong culture of companionate love, but not for women – who have to continue working hard to be seen as equals in these male-dominated fields (O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). This double standard is one aspect of many experiences and challenges that female firefighters, and firefighter mothers especially, encounter which is unique and understudied. The present study seeks to investigate the possibilities for a space that

allows women in the fire industry to continue to build the type of supportive community that improves fire service culture.

Female Firefighters and Firefighter Mothers

According to the National Fire Protection Association, from 2011-2015 only 4.6% of career firefighters were women. The highest percentage of female fighters in history occurred in 2004 and 2008 at 5.2% (NFPA, 2016). However, in 2016, the number increased with 7% of the 1.1 million firefighters in the United States being female. In Los Angeles, in particular, only 38 out of the 4,000 employed by the LA County Fire Department were female in 2016 (Kavilanz, 2016).

To tangibly develop a more in-depth understanding of what firefighter mothers typically go through, particularly regarding maternity leave opportunities, the present study explored the experiences of firefighter mothers across California. The 2015-2018 Memorandum of Agreement between the Ventura County Fire Protection District and the Ventura County Professional Firefighters Association includes the maternity leave policies applicable to these individuals. The memorandum states, “an employee may work the entire time of her pregnancy provided she is able to meet the demands of her position,” and this will be determined by the employee and the employee’s physician (UFLAC, 2015). The policy then goes on to list the basis of determining when maternity leave should begin:

- The employee’s physician, in consultation with the employee, certifies that she should discontinue working because of pregnancy;

- The District physician, in consultation with the employee's physician and employee, determines the employee's continued employment causes unreasonable risks of liability to the District; or
- The employee is unable to satisfactorily perform her job duties.

As for the length of the maternity leave, the organization may grant a six-month leave of absence without pay, with the opportunity for an additional six months upon showing of exceptional circumstances (Memorandum of Agreement, 2015). The Los Angeles County Fire Department has similar policies in place with a strict timeline of approved unpaid leave. Aside from these generalized guidelines surrounding leaves of absences due to pregnancy, there are not many additional policies or special programs in place specifically for female firefighters who are pregnant or are mothers.

Although there are maternity leave policies in place, there are still instances where fire departments either are unaware of the existing policies or they take these guidelines as mere "suggestions" and choose to disregard the special needs that pregnant firefighters have. An example of this is a pregnant firefighter who was denied the opportunity to shift to light duty, and was told by her employers that she would need to carry out her normal duties until she gave birth, or availed herself of her leave time prematurely before giving birth (Associated Press, 2018). This incidence suggests that some fire departments might be lacking in knowledge, communication skills, and human resource training to support their employees who are experiencing pregnancy, as well as onward into motherhood.

Women Working in Male-Dominated Fields

With all of the aforementioned factors and risks that go into being a firefighter, it is critical to establish an understanding of how their experiences as lone females in a male-dominated field affect and shape their abilities to achieve work-life balance. There is currently a growing amount of research in the realm of work-life balance and working mothers, which has led to the implementation of policy changes that better support these women during their transitions into motherhood while balancing their careers in the process (Greenhaus, Ziegert, & Allen, 2012). However, there is a vast knowledge gap in relation to working mothers in the firefighter field, which demonstrates a more physically intense and exhausting work environment than many of the corporate companies where current working mother work-life balance research focuses. Pietrantonio and Prati's (2008) study looking at resilience in firefighters did find that women in general in this group tend to score lower on feeling a sense of community and belonging, which could have to do with the current organizational structure set in place within such male-dominated fields.

Women working in a predominantly male environment face certain challenges such as the risk of being ostracized from the team because of their femininity. A study based on interviewing women about their experiences in male-dominated occupations found that women have unique needs distinct from their male counterparts (Martin & Barnard, 2013). These findings concluded that women face a lack of real transformation because of male resistance and prejudices, negative work-identity perceptions, and the struggle with achieving work-life balance. Male resistance to women in the workplace

tends to reflect an emphasis on the patriarchal role, which deters female equality in male-dominated occupations (Hicks, 2012). Martin and Barnard additionally found that while the women who dealt with negative self-perceptions, which developed as a result of being in a male-dominated environment, did not intend to leave their male-dominated occupations, instead, they demonstrated reluctance to advance into more highly competitive male roles. This demonstrated low self-efficacy, which was also found to be true in a previous study of women working in the male-dominated IT field (Michie & Nelson, 2006). Finally, research has shown that the conflict of work-life balance is especially unique to women working within an organization that is culturally masculine, because of the added pressures and expectations they face in balancing being primary caregivers while still doing what it takes to live up to a standard set by their male counterparts. Women in the study acknowledged that career advancement and achieving work-life balance are “mutually exclusive” and that they “had to neglect aspects of one in order to focus on the other” (p. 10), which coincides with the notion that working mothers have to contend with the problem of time efficiency through fulfilling the stereotypical obligations as homemakers and as paid workers (Cha, 2013). Their responses also revealed working mothers in the study felt these added pressures to an intense degree because of feeling constantly watched and judged by their male counterparts to see if they could show they had “what it takes” (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

As a result of these obstacles, women – and mothers in particular – have had to identify strategies and resources in order to manage the challenges they face. One coping strategy appears to be stressing shared “masculine” interests as a way of being accepted

into the male-dominated environment, while at the same time creating distance from other women (Denissen, 2010). Denissen's (2010) research found that women who work in male-dominated fields are often faced with the bind of having to renounce their femininity in order to be taken seriously, but one means of coping with these expectations occurred in the form of adopting masculine perspectives (like being "one of the boys") to construct an occupational identity. For women in the gender minority, contact with other women can either result in a source of support or of competition (Rodriguez, 2013). Typically, women are deterred from participating in formal support networks because of negative reactions from their male counterparts (Bagilhole, 2002). The present study poses the inquiry of whether or not women in male-dominated occupations feel that they are alone and lack the resources necessary to attain social support, especially when dealing with hardships that male coworkers do not equitably encounter.

However, even when afforded the opportunity to connect with other women, studies have shown that some women still prefer working with men. These women "mobilized masculinity" by identifying with masculine interests to detach themselves from the typical confines of femininity, and therefore did not seek out interactions with their female colleagues (Martin, 2001). Additionally, these women who mobilize masculinity have also expressed feelings that other female colleagues do not understand their style of interacting with male colleagues, and they tend to position themselves as different from "ordinary" women (Hatmaker, 2013). This suggests that even if these working women were exposed to various resources and networks of social support among a community of other working women or working mothers, it still might not necessarily

be the type of support that aligns with what working women in male-dominated fields are looking for, seeing as they distinguish themselves from the typical description of femininity (Bagilhole, 2002). Similar studies have uncovered that the opportunity to seek mentorship is a legitimate means of attaining support and guidance in culturally masculine organizations and when achieving career success as a working woman, especially expressing the need for women mentors (Martin & Barnard, 2013). This emphasizes the need for a community made up of these individuals, like firefighter mothers, who can empathize and understand exactly what fellow firefighter moms are going through, both in challenges as a working mother, and as working mothers in a male-dominated field.

Work-Life Balance/Work-Life Conflict

Work-life conflict, or the absence of work-life balance, has been garnering much attention in both mainstream media and in the field of communication research due to the prominence of the issue in the lives of so many working individuals (Shen, Jiang, Jin, & Sha, 2015). Work-life conflict is the completion of workplace role demands interfering with the fulfillment of non-work-related role expectations, such as personal and home-life activities (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Work-life conflict has been divided into three distinct categories in past research: time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based. Time-based work-life conflict occurs when immoderate work hours prevent employees from completing non-work-related tasks and responsibilities (Chaudhry, Malik, & Ahmad, 2011). An example of this would be if an excessive amount of time allocated for shifts, which is typical for firefighters, hinders individuals from getting home to take care of

their children (Ramasundaram & Ramasundaram, 2011). Strain-based work-life conflict emerges when stress and pressures from the work role bleed into other areas of the employees' personal and home lives (Favero & Heath, 2012), such as when a firefighter mother is stressed from shift constraints or dealing with trauma from critical incidents, and therefore cannot give her full attention or provide the level of care she wants to give her family once she does return home (Engle & Dimitriadi, 2007). Finally, behavior-based work-life conflict develops when "certain patterns of behaviors the work role prescribes are incompatible with behavioral rules that the non-work role lays down" (Favero & Heath, 2012, p. 335). This could occur when a law enforcement style of being aggressive and authoritative out in the field contradicts the parenting style that is caring and supportive at home (Shen et al., 2015). Understanding these components of work-life conflict can allow for future research to observe each employment scenario through these corresponding lenses, thus leading to focused attempts to better provide support and solutions to work-life imbalances. This can be especially beneficial to the realm of women in the workplace and the challenges working mothers face with balancing their careers in this field with their family life.

Women in the Workplace

The labor force in general has seen an increase in working women over the past two centuries. Much of this increase can be first attributed to federal legislation (i.e. the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Pay Act of 1963), increased education and job opportunities, and a rise in feminist perspectives of women seen as being on the same playing field as men (Landivar, 2014). With the majority of women employed in the

present day, researchers Gayle Kaufman and Peter Uhlenberg found in their studies that mothers are more likely than non-mothers to leave their place of paid employment. They attributed this to the time constraints that emerged as a result of a combination of work and family responsibilities (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000), and working women who are not mothers might not have to deal with the extra time devoted to parenthood (Becker, 1991). Statistics reveal that women are increasingly returning to the workplace almost immediately after giving birth (Bai, Wunderlich, & Weinstock, 2012). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), 44% of post-partum mothers went back to their careers within three months, 57% within six months, and 64% within the first year. In 2015, 64.2% of mothers of children under the age of six were employed, and 58.1% of mothers with infants under the age of one were employed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

Not only are there disparities between working mothers and non-mothers, but there has also been a rumored feud that occurs between some working mothers and stay-at-home mothers known as the “mommy wars” (Steiner & Lachover, 2016). These “wars” were sparked by an article written about a working mother’s “lament” for quitting the career she had in a high-powered position in the U.S. Department of State, where she “emphasized how employer-imposed rigidities complicate parenting” (Slaughter, 2012). However, she quit not because of a negative workplace environment, but rather because she believed her absences from home were damaging to her two sons (Steiner & Lachover, 2016).

The mommy wars are grounded upon the ideal that the U.S. mother should devote herself to refining the household and family (Slaughter, 2012). These expectations are

also connected to the attacks on women's attempts and desires "to have it all" in terms of having both a career and being involved in familial responsibilities (Faludi, 1991). The two main camps are pitted against each other because of the divide in "devotion to work schema" and "devotion to family schema." These categories demonstrate jobs that require tremendous commitment of time, energy, and emotion on one end of the spectrum, and the other end defines women's primary vocation as marriage and motherhood (Blair-Loy, 2003). While it appears as if there is no overlap among the opposing perspectives, many working mothers in fact, face the dissonance that comes with deciding to work or being at home with their families (Steiner & Lachover, 2016). For instance, the concept of essential motherhood, or intensive mothering, is a model that advises all mothers to allot an immense amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children (Hays, 1996). This expectation becomes a dominant factor across all decisions that a mother has to make, due to an underlying assumption that every mother must fervently focus on her own children, expecting (and responsible for ensuring) superior success for her child (Peskowitz, 2005). Mothers are therefore facing parenting decisions that turn into moral dilemmas, and working mothers in particular are subject to heavy doses of judgment and criticism because of this framework of expectations (Peskowitz, 2005). These standards have created a new "momism" that is deemed as nearly impossible and contradictory at its core, seeing as it diminishes women's economic success and employment prestige as a result of the declining emphasis on domestic life (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). These parenting expectations are also distinctive from those which fathers and men face, adding to the complicated pressures, challenges, and dilemmas facing working mothers.

As these mothers are coming back to their careers during such early stages of their children's lives, many face a variety of challenges that deal with both personal dissonance that combats the concept of essential motherhood, as well as obstacles in the workplace environment (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008). Kuperberg and Stone (2008) in a content analysis of print media founds that messages were typically composed of mother talking about "longing" and "regret" in regard to missing their newborn or leaving their child in the hands of a nanny or daycare worker (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008). In media accounts, the specific reasons working moms gave for quitting work were steadily focused on motherhood, more so than constraints of the workplace (Stone, 2007). However, other existing research reveals that working mothers do still face abundant challenges in the workplace, from not receiving enough maternity leave benefits to being unable to breastfeed in a mother-friendly environment, with these issues continuing to be ignored and downplayed by employers (Suyes, Abrahams, & Labbok, 2008; Mills, 2009).

With these combined hardships, there is evidence of women who are "opting out" and quitting their careers due to "an unsuccessful attempt at combining demanding careers with parenthood" (Stone, 2007, p. 222). Several studies found a common base in that career women with children find work-life balance elusive because of a lack of flexibility among employers, long-hour demands, the absence of work-family policies, and the stigma of using available resources and benefits when they do exist (Landivar, 2014). Landivar's study found that mothers' odds of exiting the labor force were 2.4 times higher than non-mothers', with 87 out of 92 mothers in the occupations analyzed leaving their careers to return home. Additionally, Douglas and Michaels (2004) argued

in their media content analysis research that American culture praises working fathers for taking on any parental duties, while simultaneously scolding and criticizing mothers for attempting to do anything outside of an exclusive parental focus and involvement. These findings aid in the foundational purpose behind this proposed study, as there is an evident need for improved policies and work environments for working mothers so that any pressure to choose between their career and their children can diminish.

This is an especially pertinent topic because of data that reveals children of working mothers are not damaged by a mother's career, although contradictory to previous research. A recent working study conducted through the Harvard Business School has uncovered that "daughters of working mothers enjoy better careers, higher pay, and more equal relationships than those raised by stay-at-home mothers" (HBS Newsroom, 2015). The research also showed that daughters of working mothers were paid 4% more than their peers and were more susceptible to being promoted into managerial and higher title positions (HBS Newsroom, 2015). Contrary to the belief that there are negative effects on children with working moms (Adams, 2015), this new study revealed that "the children of working mothers have more liberal attitudes towards women in the workplace, and that sons of working mothers take a greater share of parenting and other household care roles" (HBS Newsroom, 2015). Therefore, having mothers in the workforce could actually lay the groundwork for a more accepting and well-balanced society, starting with their children, which provides reason enough for work environments to improve and provide support for working moms.

Mother-Friendly Organizations

Employers have caught on to the idea that people perform better at work when they are not facing worries about home-life, and employers have thus been placing more importance on recognizing that negative work environments can lead to high levels of work-life conflict (Greenhaus et al., 2012). Over the last several decades, family-supportive organizations perceptions (FSOP) embedded in the structure of the workplace aim to distinguish companies as a “supportive environment rather than merely a particular supportive supervisor and/or a specific family friendly policy” (Greenhaus, et al., 2012, p. 268). Greenhaus et al. (2012) conducted a survey study confirming that negative organizational environments contribute to an increase in work-life conflict, which demonstrates the importance of integrating between employee work and life and allowing for proactive coping support (Greenhaus et al., 2012). This is true for working mothers and their experiences in the office, as employers themselves held positive attitudes toward providing a mother-friendly environment in the workplace (McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005). Research indicates that mother-friendly environments enhance employee satisfaction and reduce employee absenteeism, which leads to increased productivity in the long run (Ball & Bennett, 2001).

According to a list of the 100 Best Companies to work for as a working mother, the companies who are catching on to these mutual benefits offer paid maternity leave, paid time off for adoption, and provide paid leave for new fathers. Additionally, among the ten best companies, the average paid leave time for new moms increased to 11 weeks this year. Many of the companies at the top of this list are in the professional services

industry (such as consulting and accounting firms), and they offer new mothers the most amount of full-paid time off (Working Mother, 2016). Technology companies are also well-known for providing lofty family benefits, with companies like Amazon and Microsoft allowing high-paid family leave rates at 20 weeks, Adobe at 28 weeks, and Netflix leading the pack at one year of paid family leave (Jobvite. 2016). Employers at companies varying in size from less than 50 employees to 100+ employees report either seeing no noticeable effect or seeing a positive effect on productivity (88.5%), profitability/performance (91%), turnover (92.8%), and morale (98.6%) with parental leave benefits and policies (Jobvite, 2016), which suggests that adopting these FSOP-friendly environments, and the resulting positive effects, is on the increase.

However, even when these policies are in place, studies demonstrate that employees generally tend to not use the benefits if what is available contradicts the culture of the organization (Leonard, 2015). Individuals experience conflict with the understanding that taking advantage of these benefits will improve their overall well-being, but they may have to face impending stress of catching up on missed work when they eventually return, as well as negative reactions from other employees for defying the office culture and choosing to take time off (Suyes et al., 2008). While some studies have touched on the subject of how work expectations can be influenced by fellow employees and peers, little research exists on the impact that social media use might have on setting these expectations, particularly in the area of assessing personal work-life balance in addition to working mother role.

Social Support from Social Networks

As established, firefighter mothers face challenges inherent to their field that warrant improvement in how these individuals are currently being supported personally and institutionally. From the combination of unpredictable and long hours (Schafer et al., 2015), to being exposed to potentially traumatic events as part of their duty (Pietrantonio & Prati, 2008), and the absence of incorporating the limited policies that are offered to firefighter mothers (Fire Service Women of New Jersey, 2012), these women deal with added hurdles to achieving work-life balance, and they may be in need of social support to cope with these difficulties. Social support, which refers to the emotional and instrumental assistance that individuals receive from others (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988), has been attributed to decreasing the stress that firefighters develop from their line of work, and therefore resulted in increased well-being and decision making on the job (Cowman et al., 2004). Findings regarding social support theory have revealed that “the presence of social support is associated with healthy and stable functioning, and positive methods of coping with stress, and its absence with poor psycho-social adjustment and diminished physical, mental, and emotional health (Albrecht, Burleson, & Sarason, 1992; Albrecht, Burleson, & Goldsmith, 1994). Social support is not limited to face-to-face interactions. Rather, a study involving women from rural areas in Spain showcased the presence and benefits of social support via digital inclusion and social media platforms (Rebollo & Vico, 2014). The findings revealed three prominent groups of women with varying degrees of perceived social support: the women with the most online social network support were women under 25; students, single and without

children; the group which perceived the least online support were married women with children who were also employed (Robollo & Vico, 2014).

Many feminist media studies have revealed that mothers who desire social support in trying to balance work, family, and other obligations are doing so by becoming “one of the most prevalent groups online” (Morrison, 2012, p. 12). Contrary to the aforementioned mommy wars, sympathetic and collaborative online environments do exist that allow mothers the chance to identify with a larger community, and engage with others who are in similar situations and are also seeking support (Anderson & Grace, 2015). For example, mommy blogs, forums, and Facebook groups have become a breeding ground where individuals can contribute their expertise and advice, or provide connection and encouragement for those who are looking to be understood and supported (Grace, 2010; Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004).

These online resources have provided both working mothers and stay-at-home mothers with a space to gain validation and support, which is the case in particular in the critical discourse analysis conducted by Anderson and Grace (2015). Upon creating a Facebook group specifically for mothers to engage in promoting a feminist agenda and social support for one another, their key findings portrayed many examples of women expressing “comfort, commonality, and unity” within the group (Anderson & Grace, 2015, p. 957). Two significant findings from this study show that in various situations women are more than willing to support one another, and when a mother’s role is questioned, it becomes easier to recognize just how idealized and unattainable motherhood expectations are. This “Taking Mama Steps” Facebook group exemplifies

the possibilities working mothers have to fulfill needs of social support and community when facing challenges of work-life conflict and juggling innate motherhood expectations.

Existing Sites for Female Firefighters

There are online sites that seem to have the purpose of providing additional resources and information for female firefighters. The International Association of Women in Fire Services, the United Women Firefighters – New York, and the United Fire Service Women – San Francisco, are all websites that have stayed true to the idea of a minimalistic and clean design layout for efficient communicators (see Appendix A). iWomen is a non-profit network providing education, support and advocacy for fire service women (International Association of Women in Fire Services, 2017). The United Women Firefighters and United Fire Service Women websites are similar resources for their respective cities. What these sites have in common is that they provide current or aspiring female firefighters with valuable resources in one place, from training manuals and relevant articles, to job listings and additional recruitment opportunities. These sites also emphasize the feature of becoming a member of the website and thus being plugged into any updates and relevant news. The New York and San Francisco sites include more community-specific information and ways for female firefighters to get involved. What these sites do not seem to have is a component where members or interested parties can communicate with one another and develop a legitimate network of support (aside from a general FAQ page). This network could be achieved via social media platforms (like Facebook groups), however, there does not appear to be a full group made up of members

who are firefighter mothers themselves – only a few groups tailored for loved ones of firefighters. The existing sites are limited in that they do not provide direct access to a community of fellow firefighter mothers, which this present study determines is integral to developing social support and healthy work-life balance.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Questions

Workplace environments are shifting toward recognizing the importance of providing family-friendly benefits that create a positive and supportive work domain, since there has been evidence that adopting and implementing these policies actually yields more successful company performance in the long run (Bai et al., 2012). However, there are still many improvements that can be made to these policies, especially within firefighter career fields that are overwhelmingly male-dominated and might not cater to the working mother (Schafer, et al., 2015). There is also the underlying obstacle that working mothers face regarding potential judgment they may receive from working non-mothers who expect more from them at work, or from nonworking mothers who criticize their decision to continue with their careers (Kuperberg & Stone, 2007). This present study allowed firefighter mothers to provide direct input on the exact challenges that they experience in and out of their work environment. Identifying these specific difficulties supports the creation of focused and well-informed campaigns that can help combat these hindrances and led to the first research question:

RQ1: What are the main challenges firefighter mothers currently face?

First responders, such as firefighters, are often involved in high-stress, life-threatening situations, thus putting them at an elevated risk for becoming traumatized or experiencing PTSD (Duarte et al., 2006). Individuals typically utilize emotional suppression as a coping strategy in this field of work, demonstrated by firefighters choosing to not discuss details of their shift with their families when they get home

(Firefighter Nation, 2013). The present study explored the relationship between high-risk work and parenting practices and emotions through the second research question:

RQ2: Does witnessing violent and dangerous situations on the job affect the experience of motherhood for firefighter mothers?

There is very little published research that explores the work-life imbalances that firefighter mothers face. The present study helps to fill this knowledge gap by determining the types of challenges these working mothers deal with, and thus could lead to a guide for first response organizations to implement policy changes in favor of this population, as well as potential resources for firefighter mothers to connect with one another and gain support from this community. The goals of this project were supported by the third research question:

RQ3: How can these firefighter mothers be better supported socially and institutionally?

CHAPTER FOUR

Method

To delve deeper into the work-life experiences and circumstances of social support for these women, six female firefighters with children were interviewed in a qualitative study. This section delineates participant demographic information and interview procedures and protocol. All methods were reviewed and compliant with the principal investigator's Institutional Review Board.

Participants

To recruit participants, the researcher solicited personal contacts to spread the word to any of their potential contacts who might know firefighter mothers who were located in California, had been in the fire service for at least six months, and had at least one child under the age of 18 by the time of the interview. The main form of recruitment was through email, which provided a short summary of the research topic and the end goal of the project. Interested participants contacted the researcher directly and set up a phone interview time. Participants were not offered any incentives.

The participants were all firefighter mothers, ranging in age from 45 to 54 years, and an average age of 48.3 years. Three of the women were fire captains, one engineer, one battalion chief, and one was entry-level. Five of the six participants were married (one of them in her second marriage), and one participant was recently separated. The youngest age of the participants' children was 15, and the oldest was 20; in the latter case this participant had another child who was 17. The average age of the participants' children was 15.1 with a mode of 16. Four of the participants had at least two children.

The firefighter mothers all serve in counties across California, including Sacramento, Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange County. All participants had been in the fire service for at least 20 years by the time of the interview.

Interview Procedures and Protocol

All six interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks and interview times ranged from 35 minutes to 65 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded with the informed consent of the participant and followed a discussion guide (see Appendix B). All interviews began with the same demographic questions (asking for information such as age, marital status, and number of children and their ages) and then moved to a series of open-ended questions in hopes of discussing topics like backgrounds of their occupation, experiences in the field, how they would explain their current work-life situation, potential challenges they face as working mothers in their occupations, as well as possible suggestions they might have that would provide them with more social and institutional support as part of this working mother community.

Recordings were transcribed verbatim and participants were assigned a pseudonym upon completion of the transcription. Recorded responses to the interview questions were compiled based on relevance to the corresponding research questions and were separated into umbrella topics, themes, and sub-themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results

Three themes emerged from the mothers' narratives: work-life balance (which had three sub-themes), firefighter mother challenges (which had five sub-themes), and community of support (which had three sub-themes). The analysis of the responses revealed that firefighter mothers, at the core of a culmination of their experiences and challenges, are, in fact, mothers, and they deal with situations that are similar to what other working mothers face. It is typical for most working mothers to come across issues such as negotiating maternity leave, handling breastfeeding while at work, or coping with mother-child separation when transitioning back to the workforce (Kuperberg & Stone, 2008; Steiner & Lachover, 2016). However, while these common threads existed in each theme, the vast distinction is seen when recognizing how some of these struggles and hardships are vastly exaggerated in the case of the firefighter mothers. These experiences are particularly exacerbated by two characteristics: 1) the structure and physicality of firefighter shift work, and 2) the island of femininity that female firefighters experience, as they are often the only or one of very few women on their engines. These factors make the transition back to work and quest for advocacy more challenging.

Work-Life Balance

The interviews revealed a general consensus that work-life balance was attainable, but in unconventional ways, typically with nuances that depend on the acceptance of placing either job life or family life as more of a priority at an individual time. The mommy wars and corresponding expectations that attacked a mother's attempt

to “have it all” in relation to caring for her family and her career are examples that working mothers across the spectrum are challenged by the elusiveness of work-life balance (Slaughter, 2012; Faludi, 1991). Firefighter mothers are no exception, as the following three sub-themes revealed the state of work-life balance (or lack thereof) for the participants: pinpointing what the transition from work to home is like for firefighter mothers and how job fear affects family life, how family life affects job performance, and ultimately, how the participants assess work-life balance.

Transition from Work to Home

Mothers in other occupations deal with separating work life and home life, having to leave work stress at the door before they return home to their families (Favero & Heath, 2012). However, firefighters work with a minimum 24-hour shift (if not 48-hour shifts) so they often live where they work, which can blur these boundary lines and make transitioning from work to home more difficult. Additionally, firefighters are a few of the first ones to arrive during an emergency and dive into the thick of a rescue mission (Firefighter Nation, 2013), so when they are able to return home, the difficulty in transitioning from work mode to their motherhood role can occur after witnessing an emotionally draining emergency call.

With the stringent training and discipline that firefighters undergo throughout the entirety of their career, typically, the response from the participants was that job performance is never affected by any outside influences. Professionalism on the job always came first. Angela, aged 45 with three daughters, a 14-year-old and 10-year-old twins, described:

Always feeling the adrenaline, the excitement that's going to the call. Doing your job has always kind of superseded thinking about my family. I do always think about them, but when I'm on a call or at work, I'm present in that moment."

But, it can be difficult to shut down. Angela discussed the difficult calls and how these images and experiences remained in her mind, particularly if the call was followed by a shift change, and she was immediately going home:

There have been some days where I've come home, not just from exhaustion, but having a really bad call, like a woman who was trapped in her vehicle that was burning and she didn't make it [...] You don't want your kids to be worried about you, but you try to hold that kind of stuff in, to try to be that good parent, but still trying to process those images and that situation, it can be super challenging.

Meredith, aged 45, with one daughter aged 17, shared what was most difficult for her, saying that:

The things [I] saw affected what I wanted to tell her [daughter] in terms of her safety. You see people not wearing their seat belts or people texting and driving or drinking and driving or so many other scenarios where you just go home to your kid and you're like 'geez Louise, don't do this for god's sake,' because you've seen one of the worst calls of your life.

Four out of six firefighter mothers also relayed the increased intensity of bringing home fear and worry due to a heightened emotional attachment when on a call that involved children (particularly if they were the same age as their own). 48-year-old Pam, with two sons aged 12 and 16, explained "thinking about [her] own kids, and thinking

about the things that [she] doesn't want them to experience." She, along with a couple of the other moms, added how strenuous it could be at times, trying to process those work situations, and coming home to be a parent that her kids don't need to worry about.

Phyllis, aged 51, with a daughter aged 16, and a son aged 19, expanded upon the idea of bringing her work home in the form of life lessons and how she chose to raise her kids. She stated:

I do bring a lot of my stories home and share it with them [...]. A lot of times people don't see the effects of a lot of the things that people do. And so a lot of my actions as the kids were growing up were sort of guided by things that I saw.

Family Life Affecting Job Performance

Collectively there was a consistent pattern behind the discipline in not allowing family life to affect or have an impact on job performance. 54-year-old Kelly, with a daughter aged 17, and a son aged 20, expressed her love for her job, so much so that she could have retired four years ago, but she chose to stay, saying "I still have love for the job and helping people, so that sometimes I enjoy my work more than I enjoy the chores at home."

A particularly interesting example that reappeared throughout the interviews was that of the process of promotion. Erin, aged 47, with a son aged 15, described how meticulous she had to be with her time, in order to devote what she needed to, in order to be promoted, while still being available for her child. She did this by doing "most of my studying at work, or when he was in school. I did not study and take time away from him." Pam reiterated this by explaining that after all of the years she has spent in the fire

service industry, she is still a firefighter (the entry level position) in rank because she did not see herself wanting to pursue the path of prioritizing promotion, which requires many hours of additional trainings, shifts, and focused achievement that detracts from family life.

Other participants, however, revealed that while their job performance was never affected, there were still times when they experienced extreme longing to be home with their children and family. Meredith recalled:

...Times when I definitely just really wanted to be home with my daughter. For example, when she was having a really tough day, like only mom could give her that hug, give her that kind of advice or provide that kind of motherly comfort. And when I couldn't do that for her it was hard.

Working mothers in any career path may resonate with the experience of yearning to be with their child (Slaughter, 2012). But because of the rigidity in scheduling and the added pressures to perform at peak emotional, mental, and physical states at all times in case of emergency, firefighter mothers are faced with the added difficulty of being expected to suppress this longing because it may get in the way of the job. Phyllis expressed feeling as if she was on autopilot prior to having kids, and while there would be calls that had more of a personal impact, a shift occurred as soon as she had her own children. She explained:

Any call that is that child's [age], or around that child's, age is much more difficult and I remember when the kids were young there was several calls that I would almost well up on and I would have to, like, really subdue my emotions to

maintain my professionalism because, um, it would hit me so hard [...] even like I would go on a call and it wouldn't even be that big of a deal, but it would be a baby crying and hearing the baby cry like that would really affect me differently than it had prior to having kids, and now that my children are older it doesn't affect me like it did.

This anecdote demonstrates how thinking about the family one has at home can cause a major shift in the ability to perform on the job. Firefighter mothers, in particular, need to navigate the extremes of keeping family life from influencing how they do their job out in the field.

An added pressure that is certainly heightened for female firefighters is battling the natural instinct of showing emotion or vulnerability, which are characteristics that can make them appear weak and incapable of being seen as tough enough to keep up with their male counterparts (Martin, 2001). For example, Erin found it difficult to deal with an emotional response to certain calls that triggered her motherly instinct and made it challenging to cope while trying to complete her work duties:

At the time I was going through it, I was able to be detached and do my job, and do what I needed to do. Um, and unfortunately I didn't want to be one of those emotional people, "Oh look, that girl's crying." So I kept it away and didn't talk about it to people. But I have been through too many traumatic things - the one that's affected me the most, that I've done the most work around because I didn't talk about it, and it's now part of my PTSD, is we had a mobile home fire that, there were two kids, the younger of the two started the fire. It was a little boy

around 4 and he had an older sister who was 6. And my son was 5 [at the time]. And um, both died in the fire. The little boy was at the front part of the mobile home and his body wasn't salvageable, which is an awful thing to say. I was working on the truck, and on that day my job was to go in and search, rescue whoever was inside. And I never found the little girl, nobody found the little girl until the fire was out, it was just a situation where she would've never been found. And I carried that with me for a long time; I still am working through it. She died of smoke inhalation as opposed to the fire, whereas the little boy died from the fire. But yeah, my son was right in the middle of those two. And I still hear the mom scream, you know, I just [pause], sorry [sniffles], so, yeah um, there are ones that become very personal and the age definitely stamps certain things.

Although many of the participants shared similar stories of difficult calls, ultimately all of the firefighter moms noted their job performance was not impacted by their family, rather they took home with them an increase in awareness and caution.

Phyllis shared:

I was never fearful, but I was more aware. It kind of shifts your mortality rate. I wasn't worried about it, but once you have children you think, "I need to be more conscious and careful and really think and just really be more aware."

Participant responses revealed a pattern of mothers who recognized that they had a family who relied on them to come home safe and sound, while still having to face the daily high-risk situations inherent in their job environments.

Work-Life Balance Questioned

Participants shared a variety of answers to the direct question whether or not they felt they had achieved work-life balance. On one end of the spectrum, Kelly felt as if she was able to separate her role as a firefighter and her role as a mother. “I can do one without the other, I could’ve just been a firefighter, or they’re not dependent on one another. They’re just two different roles that I have.”

On the other hand, two participants discussed feeling like they had never truly achieved work-life balance, particularly because of their emphasis on getting promoted and thinking about how to advance in their career. There are other careers in which working mothers may be on a path that is similar to the level of acceleration found in promoting in the fire service industry, such as accountants who are striving for their CPA license or university professors on tenure-track, but the experience of firefighter mothers reveals an underlying masculine tone of “just do it” which is reflective of the characteristics that permeate in the firefighter culture (Hulett et al., 2008). Meredith explained:

I think that for most of my career, it’s either been I’ve focused on my family and not promoting, or I focused on promoting and not my family. Because when you’re trying to promote, that’s all there is. When you’re trying to get promoted, it’s all in. There’s kind of no excuses, so I’ve either been trying to get promoted or I’ve just completely disengaged from the department and been a mom. There’s kind of for me, no good way for balance.

Pam also understood that putting her family first and thinking about the potential repercussions of putting in the time for advancement training to promote, as well as dialing back on the perception of “no fear” caused a shift in her career path, and for her, work-life balance looks like maintaining her entry-level firefighter rank and being able to be home with the kids and share that experience with her husband.

Angela echoed this sentiment when she expressed the advice she wished she would have taken when she was first starting her family, which was to accept the realization that she needed help, and asking for it when work and home life became too difficult to balance with the added pressures that come from being a lone female in a male-dominated field:

I had this very “I can handle it, I can do it all, I don’t need anybody’s help.” I didn’t want to be a burden on anyone, and I wish now that I would’ve pulled a ticket and said, “You know what, I need help, can you come over and watch the kids so I can nap,” or “I’m having a really hard time today because it was a horrible call that I went on, can you come over and just be with me and the kids.” That would’ve really helped [...] As parents, as a mom, as a woman, you want to make sure that everyone is being taken care of and everything is just right, and so I tend to not take care of myself. I take care of everyone else first, and then at the end of the day or week or month I’m like, “Ah, what have I done, I haven’t done anything for myself.”

Mother Firefighter Challenges

The interviews revealed a consistent pattern in that all of the firefighter mothers faced particular challenges with their unique situations to varying degrees. Some of these challenges included being separated from their children for long periods of time, breastfeeding in a heavily male-dominated organizational culture, shifting to light duty when they announced their pregnancies, getting back in shape after giving birth, and juggling shift schedules to watch the children for those with firefighter husbands.

Extended Mother-Child Separation

Five out of six women had a similar story where they felt the burden and pain of being away from their children to answer their work duties for anywhere from 24-72 hours at a time. The first time that Meredith was away from her daughter, she had an extremely tough time being away for 24 hours right away and she “thought she was gonna die.”

Pam reflected on the hardship of seeing her child so upset when she would head out the door to begin her shift:

My worst memories were when she would cry because I was leaving. And I would want to cry too, because I wasn't sure if it was going to be 24 hours or 72 or what. So it was just really hard. It was very challenging.

Two moms in particular shared a similar story where they truly wanted to make up for being away for so long, but the exhaustion prevented them from being able to spend this time with their children. Meredith and Angela both recalled getting home so

tired and unable to engage with their children that they would put up the baby gates and lay on the floor with their children. Meredith described:

I can't tell you how many times I was up all night running calls, thinking about [daughter] and I would get home at 8 o'clock in the morning or whenever I got home, and I was so tired that I could not even hang out with my daughter, and I would just put baby doors up everywhere, put a cartoon on, and lay on the floor and let her crawl on me. It's horrible. This was after 24 or 72 hour shifts.

Angela similarly narrated:

And there are days, especially after my twin pregnancy, I was at a very busy firehouse where we didn't get a lot of sleep for 48 hours, and there would be days that I would drive home and think, 'I can't do it, I can't do it.' Of course, I got home and I did it. And there were days where I would put a baby gate and just lay on the floor with them and just be wiped out from work, but we made it through that.

Breastfeeding in Male-Dominated Culture

For the participants, the experience of breastfeeding had its familiar-to-working-mothers challenges, such as not having a lactation room or their own office to utilize, but they were determined to do this for their children and chose to deal with any hurdles and instances of negative backlash from male counterparts. In all interviews, firefighter mothers explained having to just go to the bathroom to pump breastmilk, but for some it was more difficult due to specific work-related circumstances. For Meredith, she had the experience of being on the truck company, and for her pumping was "a nightmare":

I was trying to express milk in the bathroom and then put it in the fridge so I can take it home - it was a complete nightmare. I didn't end up breastfeeding for very long after that [...] although my plan was to continue to breastfeed for a little bit longer but it just didn't quite work out with the work stuff.

Other participants, like Kelly and Phyllis, discussed dealing with the same process of pumping in the bathroom, or in another room in the station, and just focusing on what they needed to do. Phyllis shared that one particular male partner she had would give her a hard time, and they both still talk about it to this day:

...how in the back of the ambulance, we would be going to a call, and he would look back and I'd be in the back pumping, and it's kind of a joke, but I just made it work, so you just do what you have to do.

If there were additional challenges that arose (like receiving unwanted attention) most women shared feeling comfortable enough to discuss issues with their Fire Captain, but ultimately the goal was to pump and be as discreet as possible. Pam even described being able to talk to the captain about her concerns if they were driving around and she needed to get back to pump.

Angela encapsulated what going through an unprecedented challenge of balancing the needs of her children through breastfeeding, and avoiding drawing too much attention to herself was like:

It was definitely challenging, with all three of my kids, I breastfed, and so being in the firehouse with usually mostly all other male counterparts, it was challenging to not necessarily bring attention to it [...] then also fulfilling my

desire to do that for my children. Making sure that I had ice packs and ice chests and pump, and there's no place in the firehouse really to breastfeed like you would maybe at an office place where they have a quiet room or something like that. So, it was typically in the bathroom, and I would find a space and totally disinfect it and make it, you know, suitable for what I felt like was space. And just doing that was very challenging.

Shifting to Light Duty

When it comes to maternity leave policies, many occupations, such as public school teachers, have to combine multiple categories of leave (paid, vacation, sick, leave without pay, etc.) because the existing maternity plan (if any) might not be enough for the new moms. For all of the participants in the study, their pregnancy experiences also involved them having to get creative with taking their leave, since there was no workable maternity plan in place in any of their departments. Meredith described, "It was a huge fight when the first female got pregnant; it became this huge political battle among firefighters [...]. That was in '97, so thirty years later and there's still no maternity plan." Every participant explained that they took a combination of their accrued sick leave, vacation time, and ultimately, leave without pay, in order to take anywhere from 5-8 months off. Because there were no policies in place that the firefighters were aware of, and because firefighter mothers were forced to take unpaid time off, some participants described the stress of not having an income during leave, which influenced when they returned to work (primarily because they could no longer afford to stay on leave).

Because of the inherent physicality of the nature of work for a firefighter, a big challenge that all of the participants faced was having to move to modified or light duty. This occurred once they revealed they were pregnant, and they were transferred to an office job in administration, which is a significant functional shift from the typical job of a firefighter. Phyllis shared that she had a particularly challenging time with this change:

That was probably the hardest part is being in the office and going from our job, to a day job and to an office job, because you're there Monday through Friday, and you're just not used to that schedule and you're not used to that environment, and being in an office, or being behind a desk.

Because firefighters had the ability to choose when to announce their pregnancy, some participants recalled having to face an emergency call or scenario that shook their perspective and made them decide to go on light duty. Kelly shared, "I think I was crawling through a garage fire and I thought 'This is kind of silly, I'm in a fire and I'm pregnant five months, maybe it's time.'"

Getting Back in Shape

Another challenge that some of the firefighter mothers related to, was the process of getting back in shape post-pregnancy and the transition of returning back to work. While most other working mothers go through a transition period when re-acclimating to the daily work grind after giving birth, the fire service industry is set apart in that when these women go back to work, they are expected to be battle-ready, and therefore much of their time off is spent bonding with their children, but also having to prioritize exercising and meeting the physical requirements to return to work.

Some of the participants were able to get back in shape without much difficulty, and they were back at work in the field after anywhere from one and a half to five months. However, some had experienced the challenge of difficult pregnancies making it that much harder to get back into shape. Angela relayed that “for the first [child], it was more of a priority for me, and the wanting to feel like I can handle anything and do it all. But I was a lot less fit with the twins because I was on modified bedrest for so long, where with my first pregnancy, I was able to work out all the way up until I had her, so it was a lot more challenging [to get back in shape] for sure.”

For Meredith, it was the specific duties that her job called for which made her want to get back in shape a top priority, so much so that she decided to not have any more children after her first, because she was unsure if after having another child, she would be physically fit again. Meredith expressed:

I wanted to be really fit when I got back and I didn't want my fitness, my strength, my endurance to be an issue, so I really worked hard to get back in shape and I think that that kind of pressure prevented me from having any additional children.

Shift Schedules with Partner

All but two of the firefighter moms were married to firefighters and discussed how beneficial it was to be able to utilize the opportunity for an opposite shift schedule to watch their children. However, for the firefighter mothers who did have this experience, they explained that the difficulty came during the actual point of switching off with their

partner, in between shifts. Kelly referred to it as, “the changing of the guard,” and expressed how the stress occurred each day:

So he would be at work, I would be at home. I’d wake up the kids, put them in the car seat, drive to work, and then I’d call him, “Okay, has your relief gotten there, so you’re off duty yet?” and the person I was relieving was waiting for me to get there. But I can’t go to work until his relief relieved him so he could take the kids. So, it was the behind the station waiting time and praying that nobody would call in sick, that he’d get forced. That was the hardest part, some people cared, some people didn’t. Sometimes we’d both just get to work a little bit later than normal and then people would get mad at that. We made it through, but that was probably the biggest stress, was the switching with the kids and making sure that, “Okay, hi kids, how was your night, great, I’ll see you tomorrow at the back of the station.”

Pam described “passing the baby off in the back of the station, and that’s when the stress started happening, because we had the baby to take care of, and making sure we didn’t get forced to work and all that.”

In addition to dealing with the concern of getting to their shifts on time and switching off watching the children, participants indicated that it was also difficult being at home when by themselves while their partner was at work. Angela talked about getting home after a 48-hour shift, and her husband, also a firefighter, would start his 48 hours, and she “wouldn’t really have a lot of backup” at home. Phyllis reiterated these feelings of desiring extra help, when realizing how stressful it was to watch a child by herself for 24-48 hours straight.

Meredith was one of the two participants not married to a firefighter. She was divorced and remarried, and her daughter was from her first marriage, so at times co-parenting took the form of her daughter staying with her father, or her daughter would be home with her current husband, if Meredith was ever on a shift that was a long period of time. Erin was single, and discussed having to rely on her mother and sister, who lived nearby, when it came to helping take care of her son during her 24-48 hour shift schedules. She explained:

I live in the city where I live, because my mother and my sister both live here, and they did a lot of child care for me when [my son] was younger. Because for me that was a huge deal, was who's going to watch my kid for 24, 48 hours. I'm not going to trust somebody to stay with my kid for that period of time. If I didn't have my mom or my sister I don't know what I would've done.

Community of Support

Besides uncovering the challenges that these firefighter mothers faced, it was critical to also assess what their community looked like at the current time, particularly with other female firefighters, as well as with females outside of work. Many of the fire moms revealed their desire to seek out fellow female firefighters to connect with, while some explained that they did not necessarily need support specifically from other females, as they found it easy to get that support from their male coworkers. Only two women brought up any details regarding a community of females outside of work.

Support from Female Firefighters

Almost all of the women expressed how important it was for them to have opportunities to connect with other female firefighters and firefighter mothers specifically, to relate with one another in their shared experiences. Angela explained at the time she was having kids, she was not alone in dealing with the transition, and how to balance the two roles:

It was kind of like a little cluster of us that were having kids at the same time, so we had each other all trying to figure things out, and there weren't a lot of women that preceded us. So we were brainstorming with each other what worked and what didn't work, how many ice packs do I bring [for breastfeeding], that kind of thing.

Phyllis shared a similar experience with another female firefighter in her department who was “off on maternity and pregnant both times at the same time... so that was nice and we would gripe together and our kids hung out when they were little.” Another mom, Erin, talked about how there were three women in her department who all had children six months apart from each other:

It's funny because there were three of us that were pregnant at the same time. It was like a six month thing between each of us. We were like this little group; we hung out together and we had mommy-and-me days, commiserated over issues, because we all ended up having complications with our births.

These firefighter moms opened up to one another, and Angela, in particular, described talking about their experiences, difficulties, and asking questions like, “Who do I talk to?” and “How did you manage that, and how did you manage the time off?” as a group.

Whether it was getting insight on how much time to take off from work and what benefits to ask for, or something as simple as being a text or phone call away, it was clear that for some of these moms, their community of fellow female firefighters made a huge difference in overcoming hurdles. Meredith especially denoted the significance of having this community:

I got a group of a couple of girls together a few years ago and we did the LA CitiBank Stair Climb and it was the first time there was ever a team of women. It was a lot of fun and we had a great time, but I think that’s pretty unique. I think most women feel very isolated [...]. Because our group was fairly small, group text was my thing. And then we did the stair climb. And then we threw a party for a female firefighter who had retired, and it was just the ladies. And it was kind of stuff like that, you know sharing podcasts about women in leadership, about women and their communication style, about women and promotability, so just kind of women’s topics, and in those scenarios, I felt that the lesson I was hearing for me personally was just sharing a woman’s perspective of her challenge. So just to provide “You’re not alone,” like that kind of feeling.

Angela agreed with the importance of there being a strong female presence in the department, in the hopes that a number of female firefighters exist, “it will just become easier for them with all of the input from others.” Meredith echoed this observation:

I think that I got really lucky and I got hired with some really fantastic ladies and we've been fairly close, but most women get hired alone. They're like the one woman in their academy. I think one of the problems is that they don't have community.

However there were participants who reported not feeling particularly inclined to look for a community of other female firefighters as they were first going through their journey into motherhood and beyond. Pam had other female firefighters in her department who became mothers before her, and she remembered thinking, "I could have asked [for advice and their experiences], but for some reason I don't think I did that."

Kelly's background as the only female firefighter in her department gave her a different perspective in terms of having a community of support:

I never really looked for other females to mentor me, I didn't want to separate myself. I didn't want to get that attention. I just surrounded myself with the guys that were very supportive, and that was enough for me. I had heard about other women in Orange County, but I didn't really reach out, I just wanted to do my career, my thing, and have the guys that were good with me, help me.

Phyllis also had the experience of being the only female firefighter in her department for a time, and while she had the opportunity to work with different females throughout her career, she personally felt sometimes it was easier to get along with the men in her department:

I've worked a lot with different females and that's been great. You know, we talk about it all. We know what's going on. We talk about our families and everything,

but, um, for the most part my career I've worked with all men and I've been the only female.

Community of Females Outside of Work

Only two participants shared having any substantial involvement with a community of females outside of work, however, it became clear through the interviews that it was not an ideal setup, or a group where they really felt a great degree of support. Angela explained that while she tried to have a community of other women who were not firefighters, "it was challenging, because as a firefighter family, you can't always be at every Tuesday mom-class because I might be working two weeks in a row on Tuesdays." She went on to describe her experience with such an erratic schedule:

It makes it a little bit challenging to always consistently be part of something.

There are people that appreciate that, and accommodate that, and there are other people I think out there that are like, "Your schedule is too much for me to keep track of." So, they don't quite understand as much.

Erin was another firefighter mom who spent time with a community of women and other moms outside of work, but her preference was clear:

I did a mommy and me group in town. I was the only firefighter in the group. I wished I was with the other firefighters. I don't know, there's just something about us that's a different breed and we look at things very differently. I did make a friend out of that mommy-and-me group that I'm still friends with today, but that's just because we're both warped and we think alike. She's a nurse, so she kind of gets it in that way. Other than that, all the other women were all just like, I

don't know worried about their nails, if their kid's outfit matched, what the nursery looked like and you're just like, "Oh my God."

Community of Male Firefighters

Another pattern that arose among a few of the participants was their experience with finding community among their male counterparts at work. Although seeking out a community of females who were going through similar issues, and might have provided a source of social support, some of the firefighter mothers still found this sense of community and camaraderie among the males in their department, primarily due to the familial aspect that is prominent within the fire service.

Angela felt at times that she had to "excuse myself from the camaraderie" whenever she had to take care of things like breastfeeding at work. She described: The firehouse was a lot like having a family where there is a lot of camaraderie, like we'd all be watching a movie [during downtime], and me just having to steal away to go pump in the other room and do my thing, but for the most part everyone was very understanding.

Erin also had a narrative to share that involved joviality among fellow firefighters, but in this case, it was because someone openly had an issue with her breastfeeding:

Ours was the only freezer that made ice, and so when the next shift came on in the mornings, there was this one guy, young guy, loud, boisterous, and he always had to have ice in his water. And he would get freaked out over these little bags of milk. And he was just like, "Oh that's just gross," blah blah. Every time he would come in, he'd just be going on and on about this. So his captain and another one

of his firefighters, we cooked up this little thing, I gave them one of my little baggies, and we filled it up with milk - regular milk. So in the morning they're like, "Hey can I have a bag of your milk? I want to try it." And so one of them dumped it in a coffee, and the other one decided to drink it straight out of the baggy. It sent this big, boisterous, large man running down the hallway throwing up. And it's so fun to remind him to this day about that, because now he has three kids of his own, so he gets it now.

Erin's prank story speaks to the significance of being able to "be one of the guys," which most women in male-dominated occupations feel is an important role (Denissen, 2010; Martin, 2001). Kelly emphasized that while it can be beneficial to have an online source of support made up of fellow female firefighters, what she did not want to see was the encouragement of isolation from the rest of the team:

I just don't want to see a website that has women separating themselves from the men in the fire department, because I think we're all one. It's like having your own women's firefighter group, or your black firefighter group, or your gay firefighter group - I just don't really like the separation between all the races and genders, because we're all firefighters. So I don't want women to be on there bashing, or that women should be treated differently, because we shouldn't. I think what it all comes down to, is we're all firefighters and that we shouldn't have any special treatment that separates us from men.

When considering the various forms of community that the firefighter mothers in this study had access to, their responses revealed that they were likely to find community and

places of support among those who foundationally understood their work constraints. The participants felt an even stronger sense of community when the individuals were also mothers, and could relate with both roles they experienced.

CHAPTER SIX

Website

Practical Implications

Upon learning what conditions are like for firefighter mothers and pinpointing where problematic conditions can be improved, these results will be used to create a multimedia campaign that introduces firefighter mothers to a community made up of other firefighter mothers, to which they can have full, private access online. The main vehicle of this campaign will be in the form of a website, which will house information such as the conclusions of the reported study, what rights these firefighters have, and what policies are in place that can benefit them, as well as offering a place of social support and networking where women can connect with others who are going through similar experiences. The website will be a resource for the firefighter mothers to increase their understanding about what they can expect from their employers in providing a healthy work-life balance environment, and to offer the opportunity for them to hear how fellow firefighter mothers are handling career and family obligations.

Target Audience

Having a successful website that reaches the desired audience requires first understanding and knowing what the particular target audience is looking for and how to best connect with them. Research indicates that market research initiatives, such as the present study, are the most effective ways of supporting a digital campaign, or online platform, with the two key focuses being “decoding your audience’s most urgent concern” and “focusing your content” (DeMers, 2014). Compared with men, women are

more likely to use websites to get support for health or personal problems and seem to value and appreciate the internet in the context of developing relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and communities (Fallows, 2005). In 2014, 75% of all parents reported turning to social media platforms for interaction on parenting-related information. Mothers used some platforms, like Facebook, quite a bit more than others, specifically to receive emotional and social support on their focused parenting issue (Duggan, Lenhart, Lempe, & Ellison, 2015). According to an eMarketer (2016) report, working mothers in the United States spent an average of one hour and 40 minutes a week on social media/social networks in 2016.

With the present study, participants were aged 45-54, and the youngest of their children was 10 years old. Because so many of the moms wished that they had access to social support and resources earlier on, and many women could benefit from the wisdom and advice that more experienced firefighter mothers have to give, the target audience is female firefighters anywhere between 28 to 55 years old. This encompasses the group of women who are reaching the same age as when the study participants started having children, as well as the age when their children are beginning to reach adolescence. The initial target audience of the beta version of the website is also located in California, because of the current focus in maternity leave legislation in multiple large California counties such as Los Angeles (Kelley, 2018), and the audience consists of female firefighters who are mothers, or are currently pregnant. The psychographic characteristics of this target audience include tendencies like being on the go; or constantly juggling work duties and parenting obligations; being physically fit and prioritizing taking care of

their health and well-being; having a clear sense of intuition, bravery and commitment; and possessing efficient communication styles (particularly when working as a team in the various contexts the job can produce) (FireRescue, 2016). This stylistic preference reflects that working mothers, and others in the fire service industry, may spend low amounts of time on social media, or may use it to seek specific information, ask specific questions, and exit the platform once the immediate need is met.

Design

Taking into consideration the taxing work shifts and limited free time that these firefighter mothers have, it is critical that the proposed website is designed and crafted in a way that would get straight to the point, and focus in on the important information that this audience is looking for. The content, rather than an over-conceptualized design, should take the spotlight. A layout that is clear of clutter will emphasize the importance of the presented information, as well as provide users with ease of use and navigation (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017; Lee & See, 2004). The major design components of the website will utilize a predominantly blue color scheme because it calls to mind feelings of calmness and security, as well as signifying stability and reliability (Adams & Osgood, 1973; Cyr, Head, & Larios, 2010). The impact of the website will be contingent upon establishing transparency and trust, therefore opting for blue hues and publishing content with easy-to-read fonts that are clean and precise will create an atmosphere of credibility and openness for the user (Bonnardel, Piolat, & Le Bigot, 2011). The website will also demonstrate a considerable amount of negative space because it declutters the page and results in a clear mode of grouping similar items and

topics together. A good use of negative or white space between content on a page can increase comprehension by 20%, as readers have an easier time focusing on, and processing content (Lin, 2004).

The content layout of the website will marry the typical layouts of a professional and personally interactive website. Because there will be several areas where visitors can find concrete resources, such as laws and legislation, there will be separate sections on the site, all of which will be accessible from a standard navigation menu that will appear on every page. This will result in ease of navigation in finding the pertinent information that the user is looking for. Additionally, the sections that allow for, and encourage community building, will be designed in a blog format, with recent or featured posts available at the top of the page, and a section of archives which will be easily accessible. This website would provide a form of centralized information and the opportunity to directly communicate with other women who are going through shared experiences, with the goal of cultivating and developing a sense of support for firefighter mothers' challenges.

Rather than populating the site's pages with photographs, the design will remain simplistic in that only text and relevant graphics, such as icons that represent topics or links, will be used throughout the site. This is to avoid publishing a design that even slightly suggests that the identities of users could be released through photo visuals, because doing so could decrease users' initial trust in contributing to the site as a whole (Lee & See, 2004). Research also shows that icon-based interfaces are perceived to be

useful and efficient, which is in alignment with characteristics that the target audience prioritizes (Saadé & Otrakji, 2007; FireRescue, 2016).

Content Planning

First Phase

The website will be launched in two phases, both of which will implement a measurement of effectiveness in order to routinely provide the optimal experience for the audience. The first phase will house immediate content and website sections will be broken up by categories that are useful to firefighter mothers and relate to their needs.

Laws and policies

One of these categories will be a section that summarizes existing maternity leave policies for the city, county, and federal levels, so visitors will be knowledgeable about what is available to them and what their rights are regarding pregnancy and motherhood policies. Because all of the participants dealt with their pregnancies with no known maternity plans in place, one resource suggestion to add to the website is access to what the laws state, so women can have an idea of what they can ask for (see Appendix F). Kelly recalled being the first female firefighter in her department, so she was on her own in trying to figure out what maternity leave might look like:

When I got pregnant, I kept it a secret because we didn't have a policy on what to do when you're pregnant, so I kept it a secret for a couple of months, and then told the Fire Chief, and he said go talk to Anaheim Fire Department because someone there had gotten pregnant. So I talked to her and she said they didn't have a policy, but she worked for as long as she could, so that's what I did.

On the other hand, Erin personally did her own research and kept a personal binder of the laws and policies at the state and local level, so she could have complete security in knowing her rights. If she had the opportunity to give advice to other women in similar situations, she said she would share this lesson:

First is to know your rights, within the law, within the county, within your department. Because a lot of women get pushed over by their administration.

They don't know what they're allowed to do. Because a lot of times their administration doesn't know what they're allowed to do, especially for the smaller departments who don't have a lot of women or don't have any women at all.

Because everyone thinks they know everything [...] so it's always good to do your own research and not just go by what somebody else says.

How-to posts

Participants shared several topics that were on their minds as they were raising their children and handling the transition into motherhood, such as how to deal with a crying child who wishes mommy could be home, how to talk to your kids when they are demonstrating fears or worries that mom might not come back, breastfeeding support, and how to go about this process when at the fire station for over 24 hours at a time, and tips on how to communicate with your employer regarding particular needs.

Kelly expressed how important it was for her to “just [have] the ability to be able to manage your obligation or desire to take care of the mom side of things,” when facing any challenges. Phyllis and Pam both discussed their interest in wanting “to see how other people manage to take care of their children and do shift work,” as they dealt with

having to get creative in raising their children while their husbands, who were also firefighters, were on opposite schedules. Angela, particularly, was always on the lookout for the best way to handle breastfeeding at work:

Breastfeeding support, maybe resources to empower women to go to their employers and talk to them about what their needs are. Like, the bathroom that I used after my twins were born, it had one outlet in the entire bathroom. How can this be that this entire bathroom has only one outlet? It's ridiculous.

Erin summarized it succinctly when she said she would have “loved to know how other women were handling things and juggling between home life and firefighting life [...] I could have learned a lot early on I bet.”

These findings suggest a desire for site interactivity that allows visitors to contribute to the topics at hand by adding their own knowledge, information, or experiences. This will be in the form of a “How-To” section which will feature the main topics of issues and challenges participants described in the interviews. Snippets of their stories will be posted under main headings of topics such as, “How to Deal with Breastfeeding,” “How to Talk to Your Employer,” “How to Handle the First Goodbye: Transitioning Back to Work,” and “How to Get Back in Shape and Spend Time with Baby.” I, along with a group of trusted and knowledgeable mentors, will review all contributions to this section of the website for accuracy and clarity (see Appendix D).

Open discussion

Within each topic there will be an interactive comments section, where other firefighter moms can ask questions, offer advice, or simply join the conversation. Many

of the participants shared in their interviews the desire for community and given the chance to relay advice to women in a similar situation, they would encourage them to seek out connections. This attitude was reflected in their suggestions to have access to an open forum or even direct chat room on the website. Meredith highlighted the significance of people “communicating openly and freely in a safe environment,” and having the chance to discuss the subtleties that often go unnoticed or undisclosed due to the nature of their workplace. An open forum page on the website could allow women to post about different topics and contribute to the conversation, which could be a valuable resource to anyone who does not have a community like this offline (see Appendix E).

To take the ability for open discussion even further, Phyllis suggested the more direct approach of incorporating a chat room function.

Maybe a chat room, and that way you could get feedback right away from that person. You know, like, ‘Hey, this is going on...’ and you just get that feedback from another person that is dealing with it.

Many of the participants shared the sentiment that connecting and learning about what other women are going through, would be an important function of this online resource. This would promote the feeling that these women are not alone, and that there are others who are going through these same experiences, which, in turn would build community. As Pam expressed, “I think just stories, like weird stories might be helpful.”

Due to the collaborative environment that will be allowed and encouraged on the website, there will be introductory clauses when first visiting the site that cover website policies. These pages will detail privacy and acceptable use, the stipulation that content

contributed by users is moderated for content, reasonable accuracy, and tone, as well as a disclaimer that the website owners/users/managers make no claims as to the accuracy or completeness of any information posted.

Second Phase

The second phase of the website release will include additional information and content as the website presence and usage expands, and as more firefighter mothers get involved and choose to share their stories, or other tips and tricks they may have picked up throughout their own experiences. These might even be in the form of documentary-style videos or podcast recordings from participants who want to share their story and experiences in this new community. There could also be an organized structure for a female mentorship program, where contacts and connections can establish groups of moms across all locations that can get together and meet offline.

Accessibility

A crucial component in the foundation of the website is the matter of accessibility. While the goal and purpose of the website is generally to prioritize crafting a space of social support for the target audience, underlying benefits can exist in allowing the general public some level of access to the published content. For example, the website can be a resource to other members of the fire service industry, such as fire captains or lieutenants, who may be seeking ways to provide better support for firefighters in their own departments who are going through the shared experiences and challenges as revealed on the site. Participant responses along the theme of finding community among male firefighters, warned against the website encouraging separation from the rest of the

team. This demonstrates the acquired tendency to demonstrate more masculine traits and meet the expectations of emotional suppression in a male-dominated field (Bagilhole, 2002). Therefore, granting public access to the topical sections of the site (such as laws and legislations, and the general page highlighting main issues) could keep the male firefighters and general public in the loop, and could educate and shed light on these challenges, rather than continuing to promote negligence of work-life balance needs.

In order to access and contribute to the real-time discussion sections of the site, such as the forum functions on individual topics, users will need to create an account, which will require identity verification that they are indeed firefighters. Their identities will remain confidential and once they are verified they can create a username, which is the name that will denote any future contributions or involvement in the open discussion forums and comment sections. To access the real-time discussion sections of the site, members can click on the “Join the Conversation” button, and will be prompted with a login window. After logging in, the user will be redirected to a blog post about the selected topic, with content primarily coming from the findings of the research study.

There will be comments threads or a discussion area at the bottom of each blog post, and other firefighter moms can spark and develop the conversation through leaving comments, asking questions, and responding to other comments. This open forum style will allow for an organic community-style discussion, with the opportunity to directly message another user to continue the conversation.

The level of anonymity afforded to the site contributors allows them to be fully transparent and open in sharing their challenges, and because members are able to fully

describe in detail what they are going through, the result will be an opportunity for more meaningful feedback and sense of community (Turkle, 2012). Every participant in the present study seemed to have their fair share of experiencing severe trauma while on the job, and they all decided to leave those burdens at the door before coming home, but the website will give them a space to freely discuss those experiences with not just other firefighters who encounter the same traumas, but fellow firefighter mothers who deal with the added struggle of suppressing those details before transitioning to family mode. This will hopefully lead to group identification, which has been robustly linked to health benefits and positive well-being, particularly in effectively coping with situational stressors (Haslam & Reicher, 2006; Kraut, Kiesler, Cummings, Helgeson, & Crawford, 2002). The goal is to foster a community that is accepting and open to individuals being candid about their feelings, thoughts, and questions, which may not occur often in the workplace, since expressing vulnerability and emotion are looked down upon for women working in male-dominated fields (O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). Thus this website will hopefully create a social support network of firefighter mothers crafting connections with other firefighter mothers, and being involved in this online group can create relationships that may help compensate for the lack of existing social support resources offline (McKenna & Bargh, 1998).

Administration and Publication

The first wave of invitations will be sent to the participants in the present study, and they will have the freedom to share the link with others and invite fellow firefighter mothers or female firefighters to join. Once the site is fully developed, I will launch and

oversee the content creation and moderation. In order to uphold integrity in relevant content, I will establish a routine audit of the discussion to monitor pending posts and comments before publication. I hope to seek out guidance from trusted mentors who are knowledgeable on the subject and have some level of experience with the fire service industry to aid in structuring, producing, and regulating the flow of written content. Regarding interactivity among users, there will be a section when registering for an account that will exhibit guidelines for posting etiquette in order to promote a safe space and prevent any bullying or caustic behaviors. This section will also advise that any violators to the code of conduct will have their comment(s) removed and account terminated (see Appendix G). At the launch of the website, my immediate plan is to personally fund the website hosting and domain fees, and I will continue to provide funding for as long as the website remains active. I will utilize my existing GoDaddy account to establish the hosting site and to create the domain name for the website.

Effectiveness Assessment and Timeline

In measuring the effectiveness of the website, the first test of effectiveness would involve sending an online questionnaire to the participants of the present study to view a beta site, and obtain their feedback on categories such as the website's style, colors, and ease of use, the featured content and stories included from the interviews, as well as inquiring if the website was something they would share with other firefighter mothers they knew or if they felt that the site was a resource they would continue to visit, even if they were no longer a new mom. After the first and second phases roll out, effectiveness will also be numerically measured through the number of clicks, visits to the site (new

and returning), time spent on each section of the site, and the number of subscribers once the newsletter function is available. These measures are all inherent to the GoDaddy platform and will not create additional cost to maintain. It will be key to monitor these measurements of effectiveness in order to keep close tabs on how relevant and useful the content is to the audience, which will determine the success of the website as a true resource.

The timeline for implementation involves completion of the website design by mid-June 2018. The final pages that will need to be created by this time include the contact page, the account registration page, and the initial forum posts of topics as laid out from the interview responses. By the end of June 2018, a beta website soft launch will allow the participants of this study to view and provide feedback on the usability and available content of the website. After a final round of revisions and updates, the website public launch will occur in early July 2018. The creation and rollout of the second phase of the website, including opportunities for documentary-style videos and podcasts, will depend on initial user base interactivity, participation, willingness, and interest during the first phase public launch.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion

This research demonstrated how challenges related to being a working mother are exaggerated for firefighter mothers due to the physicality and intense nature of their work. This leads to different avenues of support for these moms. The themes of work-life balance, main challenges faced, and scope of community support align with and provide added evidence to prior research that only scratched the surface of understanding the circumstance and perspective of firefighter mothers. Participant responses revealed the path to work-life balance has been elusive and difficult to maintain, and their means of coping with challenges took the form of mobilizing masculinity through mirroring attitudes of the existing firefighter culture. Due to this strategy of wanting to avoid separating themselves from the rest of the team out of fear of not being seen as “one of the guys,” firefighter mothers lack a traditional source of social support and do not relate to the typical confines of feminine community. Understanding how work-life differs for firefighter mothers, opens up practical implications that can evolve the current organizational culture of the fire service into being a more hospitable environment for this unique group of individuals.

Work-Life Balance

According to participant responses, most of the firefighter mothers explained in their stories and retellings of challenging experiences with juggling work and home life, that their professionalism came first. For these moms, the priority was to do their job the way they were trained to do. Firefighter moms recognized threats to work-life balance

when dealing with the unique intensity of their work demands. This particularly occurred during difficult emergency calls that physically and emotionally drained them, to the point that they did not have the time and energy to have quality bonding experiences with their children. Their responses reflected Favero and Heath's (2012) findings on various types of work-life imbalances, including strain-based work-life conflict, which is when stress and pressures from the work role bleed into other areas of the employee's personal and home lives. These responses match previous research findings of first responders dealing with similar traumatic calls, who were not able to give their full attention or provide the level of care they wanted to give to their families, once their shifts were over (Engle & Dimitriadi, 2007).

A majority of the participants acknowledged that they did not feel as if they had achieved a healthy level of work-life balance. Two reasons for this may be their inclination to suppress emotions on difficult, traumatic calls, and not asking for additional help or assistance to take care of their children. In cases where participants felt an overlap between work and family life (i.e., witnessing emergency calls that resulted in fatalities of victims the same age as their own children), most of the participants shared that they dealt with it, by not dealing with it. They chose to set their emotions aside and noted that their professional duties came first. O'Neill and Rothbard's (2017) found that emotional suppression is inherent in the masculine culture of the fire service, thus demonstrating firefighter mothers' propensity for mobilizing masculinity as a means of coping with work-life conflict as "one of the guys."

These tensions reflect the premises of the Relational Dialectics theory (Baxter, 1988) of autonomy and connection. The theory poses a model made up of several core tensions in any relationship. This includes the autonomy-connection dialectic, which demonstrates the goal of connecting with others, versus the need to separate and be seen as a unique individual (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The firefighter mothers in the study demonstrated a dichotomy between seeking community and support, and also wanting to maintain a tough exterior to show they could handle their challenges themselves. The constant strain on how to perform and project oneself based on internal desires for community or capability could explain the participants' work-life imbalances.

Firefighter Mother Challenges

The women in the present study revealed that the challenges they face as working mothers are compounded by having to pave their own path in a male-dominated climate, and having to figure out the logistics of working motherhood because of a lack of existing support and space of community. Many similarities arose among the challenges firefighter mothers face and the challenges any working mother may face, such as dealing with breastfeeding at work, or how to cope with being away from their children. However, a clear pattern developed in the form of a distinguishing characteristic that all of the firefighter mother participants expressed: their tendency to adapt to the cultural norm of masculinity in the workplace, which in turn set the tone for how they would handle their challenges. All of the firefighter mothers breastfed when returning to work, and they all dealt with it in the manner of ignoring any negative feedback and not letting any resistance from others stop them from doing what they wanted and needed to do for

their children, even while being the lone female (or one of the very few females) in their department. When coping with being away from their children, participants implemented the traditionally masculine characteristics of toughness and emotional detachment.

O'Neill and Rothbard's (2017) study of emotional cultures of predominantly masculine organizations found that vulnerable and emotional behavior is seen as only acceptable for men in a strong culture of companionate love, but not as acceptable for women – who had to work hard to be seen as equals in these male-dominated fields. The firefighter mothers in the present study echoed O'Neill and Rothbard's findings in that they expressed their desire to avoid drawing attention to themselves, and by not wanting to appear as if they were asking for special treatment. This was achieved by quietly excusing themselves to go to the bathroom to pump, waiting as long as possible before announcing their pregnancy, and working extremely hard to get back in shape while on maternity leave so they could be in top physical performance when returning to work. Participant responses when summarizing their challenges were often combined with the tone of “just do what you need to do,” which can be categorized as a coping strategy to reflect “masculine” interests and be accepted by their male peers (Denissen, 2010).

The manner in which the mothers reported finding their way also indicates a unique type of integration according to the Organizational Socialization Theory. The theory states that organizational cultures are so rooted in a workplace that upon membership, learned common experiences and attitudes become second nature and part of the natural response for members of the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Formal processes of socially adapting to the organization are sometimes reflected through

implicit or unintended behavior, which can be seen in the way firefighter mothers tend to mobilize masculinity when dealing with their motherhood issues, thus reflecting the male-dominated culture surrounding them at work. The theory also explains the concept of individual socialization, which is associated with hierarchical organizations. This construct reveals preparing for promotion within these hierarchies can be based on acquired skills and values, as well as earning the promotion based on specific judgments and evaluations by others in the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The firefighter mothers of the study may have chosen to handle their difficulties with a certain tone of masculinity, or attitude that reflected the workplace culture, in order to be seen as equals by their coworkers and employers.

Community for Firefighter Mothers

Prior research points to the significance of community building for emergency service organizations. The presence of social support is imperative to smooth handlings of emergency and critical situations (Cowman et al., 2004). While there is great emphasis placed on establishing a solid community, the present study revealed firefighter mothers often face challenges alone. The mothers in the study demonstrated mobilized masculinity when dealing with hurdles related to balancing motherhood and their unique position on the island of femininity, in a workplace that expected emotional suppression, and advocated brute strength and mental toughness (Whitney, 2012). They did not seek out opportunities for community because of the risk of separating themselves from the rest of their team or department. This is consistent with Bagilhole's (2002) finding that

women working in male-dominated fields are deterred from participating in networks established to provide support because of negative reactions from their male counterparts.

The inability for these firefighter mothers to openly communicate in their own place of work, and the need to seek out social support in other areas, demonstrates the principles of muted group theory, which concentrates on how marginalized groups are muted and removed because of language (Ardener, 1975). Because of the inherently masculine nature of their occupational field, these women are pressured to adapt to an organizational culture that discourages emotional communication. For these firefighter mothers to be heard, they need to maintain the dominant mode of expression over their own, which can mute perspectives and experiences in a way that prevents or hinders organizational change (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999).

This study's participants revealed through their responses that a combination of their personalities, the nature of their work, and their relationships with a team that was primarily made up of men established them as different from moms in conventional occupations and situations (Hatmaker, 2013). Many of the participants revealed that they felt more inclined to seek out connections with fellow firefighters (female or male), rather than females outside of the workplace. But, reaching out to others for a sense of community undoubtedly increased the feeling of support when facing particularly difficult experiences. Firefighter mothers found comfort and commonality among a group of fellow firefighters who were going through similar experiences. They related with each other and offered advice, much like women in social network groups made up of moms promoting a feminist agenda provided support and community with one another

(Anderson & Grace, 2015; Albrecht et al., 1994). This finding signifies the benefit of creating a space for firefighter mothers walking along a similar path to connect with each other. This outlet could supply the aspect of community that they are currently lacking.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Reflection and Future Directions

Project Reflection

I complete this project with a sense of gratitude for firefighter mothers who are dealing with very real challenges and could very much benefit from a source of social support. Because the mothers in this study shared their journeys, their stories will pave the way for a website that is directed toward the appropriate and relevant needs of firefighter mothers. A strength of this project is that it is the first resource specifically tailored to, and relevant for, firefighter mothers, as participants expressed that if a website like this did exist, they would utilize it. The website will provide information that is distinctly pertinent to firefighters who are mothers, and will cover the specific circumstances they go through, with the ultimate hope of bringing awareness to and establishing a community of firefighter mothers, while also educating employers and other officials on how to better support this group of individuals. Another strength is that this site will not only offer information like maternity leave policies in different California counties and guidelines and advocacy tips; it will also allow them the opportunity to directly connect with one another, whether that is through a simple question asked online, or by reading about others' stories and relating to them. These connections may then grow offline and allow firefighter mothers in a nearby community to meet in person, thus enhancing the opportunity for social support for fellow firefighter mothers.

The main limitation of the present study is the low number of participants and failure to reach complete data saturation. While there were some topics and anecdotes that began to overlap, new information still appeared in several interviews. In order to provide website sections that are thorough in content, there will need be many more interviews and conversations with firefighter mothers to get an accurate account of the exact content and topics that could be published. Another weakness may also be the topic itself, seeing as it was extremely difficult to collect data in the first place because of such a niche participant sample (there are very few female firefighters, let alone firefighters who are mothers, who are also willing to participate in an incentive-free interview). It is difficult for these women to open up and talk about such issues due to the culture of the workplace, thus also compromising complete transparency.

Despite these weaknesses, this website has the opportunity to offer women a space to discuss their challenges, and the realities of being a firefighter and mother. Participants in the study expressed a strong desire to improve things. There is potential for the website to grow to the point where it can change the general perception of what it means to openly seek support as a firefighter, and this could translate into a movement that empowers women to make a difference in their respective departments, even if at first only by attitude, and then later perhaps with actual policy changes. Currently the Los Angeles Fire Department is in the process of implementing a pilot program that will strive to improve maternity leave policies for female firefighters, in hopes that addressing the unique needs of this group may improve female recruitment (Kelley, 2018). This is an example of the timeliness and importance of transforming the stories of firefighter

mothers like these participants, into tangible improvements for the fire service as a whole.

A main threat to the project is the difficulty in getting women interested enough in the website to visit it, and then to contribute to the conversation. The fear of breaking out of the established organizational culture, or not wanting to appear emotional, weak, or in need of special accommodations, could prevent the website from taking off. The website itself rides on the participation and input from firefighter mothers. If they do not feel inclined to share or join in, then it will not necessarily act a source of social support, rather as just a stagnant website with some informative resources available for women in similar situations.

Future Studies

Future studies could capitalize on the success of recruiting for research participants through personal connections. Participants were more likely to respond when they heard about the study from a close friend or another female firefighter (rather than a captain). This research could also be further enhanced through holding firefighter mother focus groups, rather than individual interviews. Being in a group setting might allow for increased confidence and greater transparency in expressing challenges, once participants know that others are enduring similar experiences. This environment of candid conversation and open sharing would also be a contrast from a male-dominated environment of attitudes firefighter mothers might be used to, so the shift in atmosphere might be a freeing opportunity of honest expression. Additionally, interviewing the children of these firefighter mothers might add a dynamic perspective regarding how

their home life is affected by their experiences, which will create a more holistic understanding of recognized work-life balance. Similarly, fire department personnel or employers of firefighter mothers could also be interviewed and their input added to the research, which could shed light on specific concepts and patterns where more help and education is needed to provide better support for firefighter mothers from an institutional standpoint.

A direction for a strategic application of this research and project could be through implementing mentorship programs that allow for more experienced firefighter mothers (perhaps even those who have entered retirement) to connect with and share advice and guidance with new firefighter mothers. This program would provide opportunities to empower and strengthen community among current employees, particularly through seeing the emphasis on social support. The resulting improvements in work-life balance and overall well-being could result in better experiences handling the unique requirements of the job and motherhood simultaneously, as well as lead to less turnover, and a potential increase of females in the fire service. While this research provides insight on how to better the community for firefighter mothers, it is important to note that future studies, especially in dealing with publishing an online resource for social support and community among this group, should not be misconstrued as singling out a division of the department and encouraging isolation and inequality. Being careless with this subject could be a potential threat to the openness that firefighters would provide, as well as dampening the desire to take part in the conversation.

Personal Reflection

Conducting this study has allowed me to learn about the drive and persistence it takes when it comes to trying to fill a knowledge gap of any sort. From the very beginning, it was an uphill climb just trying to find secondary research that could develop into a foundational background for the topic at hand, and it only continued to reveal how little information there is about firefighter mothers and what they go through. While I had an idea of the type of responses I would get, it was clearly an eye-opening experience, and I was surprised by how open and transparent the participants were willing to be with me, a complete stranger who was essentially researching them because of the novelty of their situation. Of course, another major shock throughout the process was the sheer difficulty of recruiting participants. It took quite a bit of scouring through all of my personal contacts before I could find those connections that led me to individuals who did have connections with firefighters, and they were the ones who finally got my requests for participants into the hands of my interviewees. When conducting the interview portion of this study, I soon realized I had underestimated the emotional toll and even physical exhaustion I would feel after the interviews, particularly when discussing heavy topics. These experiences tested my ability to remain a professional and unbiased researcher, especially since I did not want to influence their responses in any way. I also had to be flexible throughout each interview in different ways, as at times the conversation would move away from the discussion guide.

Overall, I feel as if this project utilized pertinent skills and knowledge that I gained throughout this program along every stage of the process. The first year of the

program allowed us to develop a strong foundation in research methods and how to critically apply relevant theories to a topic of our choosing for this project. I found that having that preliminary guidance and infrastructure was crucial to developing the groundwork necessary to create a literature review that backed and gave purpose to this topic. Additionally, while I have had personal experience in the multimedia design field through my minor in my undergraduate career, as well as in my professional endeavors, having a class that was tailored to enhancing these design skill sets provided me with a reinforced ability to design (and in the near future, implement) a strategic communication vehicle in the form of a website to bring the theories and findings of this topic to life.

My immediate future plans professionally are to continue nurturing and expanding my multimedia consulting studio that I started during the summer after I graduated with my bachelor's degree. I can now go forward with added confidence that I have the theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and critical analysis abilities to further develop my client base. Because of my experiences in this program, I feel that I am able to provide current and future clients with services that allow me to assess their situations, devise strategic plans based on research, and execute the tactics that will result in achieving the presented objectives.

APPENDIX A

Existing Sites for Female Firefighters

MEMBERS AREA | IWOMEN STORE | CONTACT | SEARCH

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
WOMEN IN FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES

ABOUT US | NEWS | MEMBERSHIP | CONFERENCES & EVENTS | JOB & CAREERS | RESOURCES

EMBRACING SUCCESS

MIND, BODY & SOUL

2018 CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED

FAIRFAX, VA MAY 24-25

LEARN MORE

What is iWomen?

An interactive non-profit network, iWomen provides education, support and advocacy for fire service women.

[About iWomen](#) | [FAQs](#) | [Member Directory](#) | [Mission](#)

JOIN OR RENEW NOW

BROWSE BENEFITS

iWomen News Updates

MORE NEWS

i-Women International Conference 2018 - The Choice of Fairfax County as Hosting Agency

There have been recent news stories and publicity surrounding the Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department (FFCRD). Some may wonder if this agency is the correct one to assist with hosting our 2018 International Conference. We, at iWomen, believe the answer is yes.

READ MORE

2018 International Conference - Classes and Instructors

We are happy to announce that the list of classes available and the instructors has been published! Make sure you sign up soon!

READ MORE

Become a Mentor or Find a Mentor

Careers

- Job Listings
- Post Your Job Opportunity
- Becoming a Firefighter
- Find Volunteer Fire & EMS Opportunities

Latest Job Posts

Firefighter
West Des Moines, IA - The City of West Des Moines - [Full Time](#)

Special Operations Division Chief
Anywhere - Vancouver Fire Department - [Full Time](#)

Deputy Fire Chief of Operations
Salem Oregon - City of Salem Fire Department - [Full Time](#)

Firefighter I (Entry-Level Firefighter)
Cottonwood, AZ - [Full Time](#)

About iWomen

- About iWomen
- Board of Trustees
- Committees
- iWomen History
- Mission
- Sections & Divisions
- Sponsor iWomen/Advertise
- iWomen FAQs

Resources

- History of Women in Firefighting
- Women in Firefighting
- Bibliography of Gender Issues in the Fire Services
- Fire Camps
- Mission
- Online Resources & Links
- National Report Card
- Women in the Fire & Emergency Services FAQs

International Association of Women in Fire Services | Image retrieved from <https://www.i-women.org/>


[HOME](#)
[OUR MISSION](#)
[TRAINING PROGRAM](#)
[RESOURCES](#)
[IN THE NEWS](#)
[CONTACT](#)
[DONATE](#)
[OPEN HOUSE](#)




Welcome to UWF!

We are the United Women Firefighters (UWF), an affinity group of women firefighters working in the Fire Department of New York (FDNY). This site is dedicated to all the women, both past and present, of the FDNY. This site will include information about training, events, photos, commerce, as well as support and try to help members stay in touch with each other. This site was created to keep the women firefighters of the FDNY together in their professional endeavor of City Service from the first day of their employment until retirement and more.

[Our Mission](#)

[UWF Training Program](#)


[Our Board](#)


[FAQs](#)


[About Us](#)

We are the United Women Firefighters (UWF), an affinity group of women firefighters working in the Fire Department of New York (FDNY). This site is dedicated to all the women, both past and present, of the FDNY. This site will include information about training, events, photos, commerce, as well as support and try to help members stay in touch with each other. This site was created to keep the women firefighters of the FDNY together in their professional endeavor of City Service from the first day of their employment until retirement and more.

[Contact Us](#)

UnitedWomenFirefighters@gmail.com

UNITED WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS | unitedwomenfirefighters@gmail.com
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FIRE SERVICE
WOMEN

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UNITED FIRE SERVICE WOMEN

BIG THANKS!

Thank you to everyone who came out to support our event on September 23 at 111 Minna Gallery, **Celebrate 30 Years of Women in the San Francisco Fire Department**. We had an amazing turnout at the event and raised tons of money for the San Francisco Firefighter Cancer Prevention Foundation, Breast Cancer Prevention Partners, and SFFD Toys Program.

Thank you for your support of our honorees, the original five women in the SFFD, Mary Carder, Frances Focha, Eileen McCrystle Tellez, Sara Coe and Shelia Hunter.

PHOTO BOOK NOW AVAILABLE - Order your book from photographer Christie Hemm-Klok | [The Women of SFFD – 2017](#)

A special thanks to our major sponsors for their generous donations:

United Fire Service Women – San Francisco | Image retrieved from <http://ufsw.org/>

APPENDIX B

*Interview Discussion Guide*Demographic Information

1. Ask for:
 - a. Age
 - b. Marital status
 - c. Number of children and age(s)
 - d. County/location of fieldwork

Occupational Background

1. Please describe your current occupation (official title and description of a typical day-in-the-life)
 - a. Include details about average shift length
2. Please describe your overall experience working in your field
3. What made you first want to become a firefighter?
4. Did your decision to pursue this occupation have an impact on starting a family?
 - a. What did you think it would be like raising a family as a female firefighter?

Work-Life Balance

1. Please explain your current work-life situation (do you feel like you have achieved work-life balance in the following areas)
 - a. Family life
 - b. Personal life
2. If you were pregnant as a firefighter, please explain the benefits you were offered and accepted regarding
 - a. Time off throughout the pregnancy
 - b. Maternity leave after giving birth

3. How soon after giving birth did you return to work?
4. Do you relate to the other women/moms in your department?
 - a. Do you have a community of moms outside of work?

Challenges

1. Tell me a particularly memorable story of managing work and baby life on the job
2. Describe the challenges you feel that you face as a firefighter mother
3. How does job fear affect your mothering?
4. Does fear as a mom affect your work?
5. Have you had any experiences on the job that made it difficult to transition into the motherhood role once you go home to your family?
6. What advice would you give to other women who are in a similar position?

Final Thoughts

1. Have you ever looked to online resources regarding any work-life balance challenges while being a mom and firefighter?
2. If there is a perfect website being design for women like you, what would you be looking for?
3. Anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

Homepage[Home](#) [About](#) [Legislation](#) [How-To's](#) [Contact](#) [Blog](#)[f](#) [t](#) [in](#)FIREFIGHTER MOTHERHOOD
FIGHTING THE FIRES AROUND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The first site for firefighter moms, by firefighter moms

Firefighter Motherhood

Welcome to the central hub for all firefighter mom needs. From resources for maternity policies, tips and advice on prominent topics, and access to a community of fellow firefighter mothers, our goal is to provide a space for support and to help you achieve work-life balance.

[Create an Account](#)[Sign In](#)[f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

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APPENDIX D

How-To's Page

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[f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

FIREFIGHTER MOTHERHOOD
FIGHTING THE FIRES AROUND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

HOW-TO'S

Your Firefighter Motherhood Resource Hub

In this How-To section, you can find stories, experiences, questions, and all things related to life as a firefighter and mother.
Browse topics • read about others' journeys • join the conversation
As told by firefighter moms, for firefighter moms.



How to Talk to Your Employer

June 9, 2019

"Instead of us driving around and checking out buildings, I would need to get back to the pump, and I would just be discrete about it, but I felt comfortable enough to talk with the captain about it."

[Join the Conversation](#)



How to Handle the First Goodbye

June 9, 2019

"It was really tough, because I had never been away from my daughter and then to be away from her for 24 hours a time. The first time I left my daughter it was for 24 hours instead of 72. I thought I was gonna die."

[Join the Conversation](#)



How to Deal with Breastfeeding

June 9, 2019

"With all three of my kids, I breastfed, and so being in the firehouse with usually mostly all other male counterparts it was challenging to not necessarily bring attention to it."

[Join the Conversation](#)



How to Find Work-Life Balance

June 9, 2019

"I had this very 'I can handle it, I can do it all.' I didn't want to be a burden on anyone, and I wish now that I would've pulled a ticket and said, 'You know what, I need help.'"

[Join the Conversation](#)



How to Get Back in Shape

June 9, 2019

"I would love to know creative ways to work out with your kid, because, you know, we have to, and for a lot of us, we work out at home."

[Join the Conversation](#)



How to Cope with Not Being There

June 9, 2019

"There were times when I definitely just really wanted to be home with my daughter. Like only mom could give her that hug, and when I couldn't do that for her, it was hard."

[Join the Conversation](#)

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

APPENDIX E

Sample Blog/Forum Page

[Home](#) [About](#) [Legislation](#) [How-To's](#) [Contact](#) [Blog](#)

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

FIREFIGHTER MOTHERHOOD

FIGHTING THE FIRES AROUND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Safety first: Making sure your milk is safe for baby

February 2, 2018

Especially if you had a lot of fires that day, all the carcinogens, all the smoke, all the soot... when my child was really little, I was always worrying about that. Even when we had our CBA on, I'd still pump and throw away stuff for like a day and us...

[Read More](#)

No lactation room? No problem.

February 1, 2018

There's no place in the firehouse really to breastfeed like you would maybe have at an office place where they have a quiet room or something like that. So, it was typically in the bathroom and I would find a space and totally disinfect it and make i...

[Read More](#)

Pumping horror stories

January 31, 2018

I was on the truck company and for me, breastfeeding was a total nightmare. I would try to express milk in the bathroom and then store it in the fridge to take it home, but it just wasn't working out. I ended up not being able to breastfeed for very...

[Read More](#)



How to Deal with Breastfeeding

Our Recent Posts

Safety first: Making sure your milk is safe for baby
February 2, 2018

No lactation room? No problem.
February 1, 2018

Pumping horror stories
January 31, 2018

Tags

[baby](#) [breastfeeding](#) [community](#) [firefighter](#)
[pumping](#) [work-life balance](#)

OPEN FORUM

FIREMOM324 -
I completely agree. I felt like when I was breastfeeding my first child, I had to figure out how to be discreet and not draw attention to myself...

SOCALFD2 -
How did other people handle bringing and/or storing pumping equipment at the station? Did you get a lot of resistance from anyone?

ANONUSER86 -
I had a really great conversation with my captain when I returned to work. We established a level of openness since he knew I was breastfeeding...

[- JOIN THE CONVERSATION -](#)

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

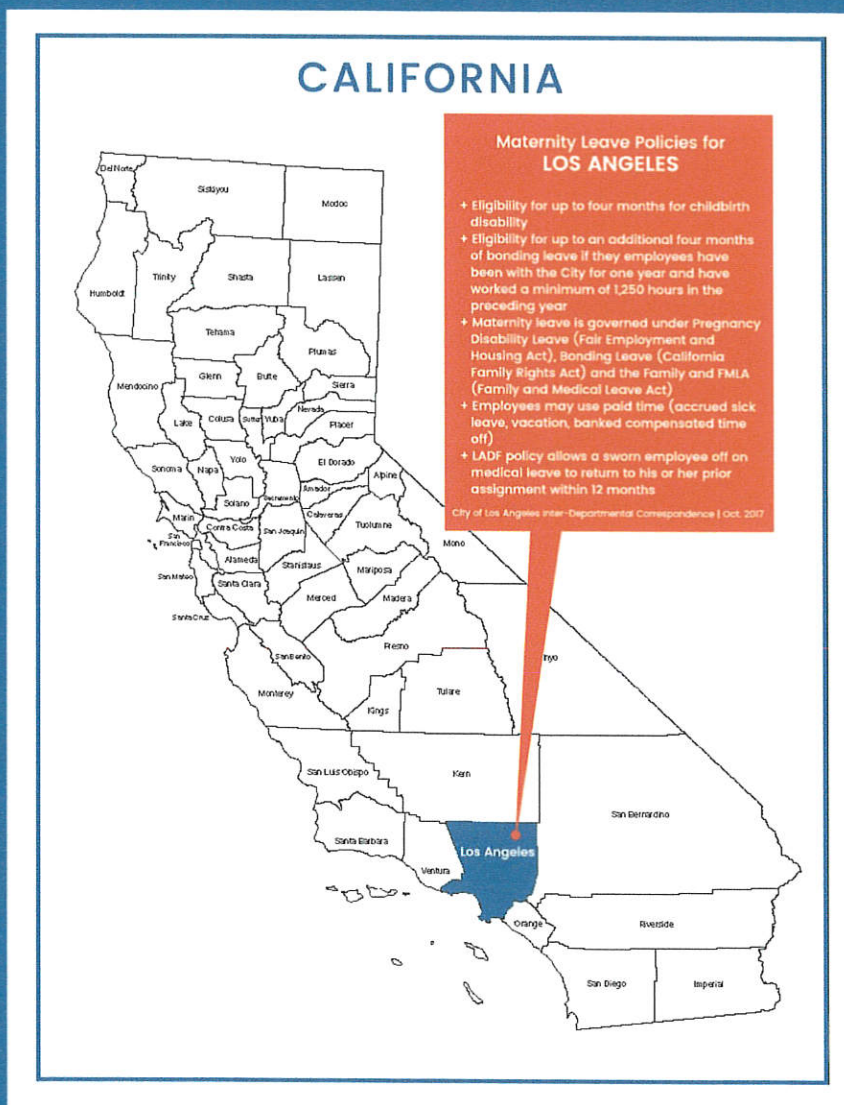
APPENDIX F

Map of Maternity Policies

Home About **Legislation** How-To's Contact

f t in

FIREFIGHTER MOTHERHOOD
FIGHTING THE FIRES AROUND WORK-LIFE BALANCE



f t in

APPENDIX G

Web Policies

Terms of Use and Privacy

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 Posting or transmitting any advertisement, promotion, or solicitation of goods or services for commercial purposes without Firefighter Motherhood's prior written approval;
 Posting or transmitting any Firefighter Motherhood publication without Firefighter Motherhood's prior written approval;
 Posting or transmitting any information or software that contains a virus, worm, time bomb, Trojan horse, or other harmful or disruptive component;
 Posting or transmitting materials in violation of another party's copyright or intellectual property rights;
 Using the site for any commercial or unlawful purposes;
 or Modifying, adapting, sublicensing, translating, selling, reverse engineering, decompiling, or disassembling any portion of the site.
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- (a) user's breach of this agreement;
- (b) user's violation of the Code of Conduct above; or
- (c) user's activities in connection with the site or site-related services.

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To the extent the site contains links to outside services and resources, Firefighter Motherhood neither endorses nor is affiliated with the linked sites and is not responsible for any content that appears on the linked sites. Users are encouraged to review any privacy policy or terms of service posted on the linked sites. The respective owners of the linked sites neither endorse nor are affiliated with Firefighter Motherhood.

Parental Control Provisions

Pursuant to 47 U.S.C. Section 230(d), as amended, Firefighter Motherhood hereby notifies users that parental control protections (such as computer hardware, software, or filtering services) are commercially available that may assist users in limiting access to material that is harmful to minors. Information identifying current providers of such protections is available at the Web sites of the Electronic Frontier Foundation: <http://www.eff.org> and America Links Up: <http://www.netparents.org/>.

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Although the site is accessible worldwide, not all products or services discussed or referenced in or on the site are available to all persons or in all geographic locations or jurisdictions. Firefighter Motherhood reserves the right to limit the availability of the site and/or the provision of any product or service to any person, geographic area or jurisdiction it so desires, in Firefighter Motherhood's sole discretion, and to limit the quantities of any such product or service that it provides. Any offer for any product or service made on the site is void where prohibited.

Miscellaneous

This agreement is entered into in the state of California and shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the state of California, exclusive of its choice of law rules. Each party to this agreement hereby submits to the exclusive jurisdiction of the state and federal courts in the state of California, and waives any jurisdictional, venue, or inconvenient forum objections to such courts. In any action to enforce this agreement, the prevailing party will be entitled to costs and attorneys' fees. In the event that any of the provisions of this agreement shall be held by a court or other tribunal or competent

jurisdiction to be unenforceable, such provisions shall be limited or eliminated to the minimum extent necessary so that this agreement shall otherwise remain in full force and effect and enforceable.

This agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the parties hereto pertaining to the subject matter herein, and any and all prior or contemporaneous written or oral agreements existing between the parties hereto are expressly canceled. No waiver by either party of any breach or default hereunder shall be deemed to be a waiver of any preceding or subsequent breach or default. Any heading, caption, or paragraph title contained in this agreement is inserted only as a matter of convenience and in no way defines or explains any paragraph or provision herein.

Firefighter Motherhood may at any time change the site, including eliminating or discontinuing any content or feature of the site, restricting its availability or limiting the amount of use permitted. Such changes, modifications, additions, or deletions shall be effective immediately upon notice thereof, which may be given by any means including, but not limited to, posting on the site, or by electronic mail, or by conventional mail. Use of the site after such notice shall be deemed to constitute user's acceptance of such changes, modifications, additions, or deletions.

Privacy Policy

Firefighter Motherhood provides this site as a service to firefighter mothers. Use of the site is subject to the terms and conditions set forth below in Firefighter Motherhood's Privacy Policy and the Terms Of Use Policy.

Although the makers of this web site respect the privacy of this site's users, it collects information from its Web site members and visitors. The Privacy Policy governs users' interaction with the site and users' registration for and use of the site's online services. Except as set forth within this Privacy Policy and/or other published guidelines, the makers of this web site do not release personally identifiable information about the site's visitors without their permission.

Firefighter Motherhood gathers two types of information about the site's users:

Non-personally identifiable information. As users access the site, Firefighter Motherhood collects and aggregates information indicating, among other things, which pages were visited, the order in which they were visited, and which hyperlinks were employed. Collecting such information involves the logging of IP addresses, operating system, and browser software used by each visitor. Although such information is not personally identifiable, Firefighter Motherhood can determine from the IP address a visitor's Internet Service Provider and the geographic location of the user's point of connectivity. The non-personally identifiable information collected helps in diagnosing any server problems, administering the site, identifying the most popular areas of the site, and determining the effectiveness of special features.

Personally identifiable information. Certain areas of the site may require that users provide personally identifiable information (including, for example, name, e-mail address, and phone number). In addition, when registering to set up an account to use certain services on the site Firefighter Motherhood may require that users provide their employment information. Firefighter Motherhood does not knowingly collect personally identifiable information from children (defined herein as minors younger than thirteen years of age).

Firefighter Motherhood does not control the acts of this site's members or visitors. All members and visitors should be aware that their disclosure of personally identifiable information on this website or any of its services may allow other parties to contact them. In the event visitors encounter any user on this site who is improperly collecting or using information provided by the site's members or visitors, please contact us using the contact form on this website. It is the practice of Firefighter Motherhood to remove and bar any member who knowingly violates this policy.

How Firefighter Motherhood Uses/Does Not Use Gathered Information

Please take some time to become familiar with the different ways Firefighter Motherhood uses the information gathered. Keep in mind that, while Firefighter Motherhood encourages all third parties involved to adhere to this site's Privacy Policy and to otherwise handle personal information in a responsible manner, Firefighter Motherhood cannot and does not assume any responsibility for any actions or omissions of third parties. Nevertheless, in the event users encounter any third party associated with, or who claims association with Firefighter Motherhood, who is improperly collecting or using personal information, please contact us using the contact form on this website and we will forward the message to the third party.

Use of non-personally identifiable information. Firefighter Motherhood uses non-personally identifiable information in aggregate form to build higher quality, more useful online services by performing statistical analyses of the collective characteristics and behavior of the site visitors, and by measuring demographics and interests regarding specific areas of the site.

The site may contain links to other Internet Web sites. Unless otherwise explicitly stated, Firefighter Motherhood is not responsible for the privacy practices or the content of such sites, including such sites' use of any information (such as IP number, browser type, or operating system) collected when visitors to the site click through links to those sites. Even though such information might not identify the user personally, users should be familiar with the privacy practices of those other sites.

Use of personally identifiable information. Firefighter Motherhood provides notice to potential registrants of this site whose personally identifiable information will be collected during the registration process. Such notice is provided simultaneously with the user's registration on this site; moreover, this policy itself serves as notice that such information is collected under those circumstances. Firefighter Motherhood will not share this information with third parties except as explained below.

Firefighter Motherhood reserves the right to release any and all information contained within access logs concerning any visitor when that visitor is in violation of Firefighter Motherhood's "Terms of Service" agreement or other published guidelines, or partakes (or is reasonably suspected of partaking) in any illegal activity, even without a subpoena, warrant, or other court order, and to release such information in response to discovery requests, or in response to any circumstance in which Firefighter Motherhood, in its sole discretion, deems an emergency. Firefighter Motherhood cooperates with law enforcement agencies in identifying those who may be using its servers or services for illegal activities. Firefighter Motherhood also reserves the right to report any suspected illegal activity to law enforcement for investigation or prosecution.

Security

All information gathered on the site is stored within a controlled database accessible only to Firefighter Motherhood to protect the loss, misuse, or alteration of the information under its control. However, as effective as any security measure implemented by Firefighter Motherhood may be, no security system is impenetrable. Firefighter Motherhood cannot guarantee the security of its database, nor can it guarantee that the information supplied by users will not be intercepted while being transmitted over the Internet. Questions regarding this Privacy Policy should be directed to us using the contact form on this website.

Deleting Personal Information

Personally identifiable information is stored in the Firefighter Motherhood database to monitor acceptable use. Though this information will not intentionally be made publicly available, users may have their information (and login) removed from the Firefighter Motherhood database by contacting us using the contact form on this website. Keep in mind that there will be residual information remaining within the databases, access logs, and other records, which may or may not contain such personally identifiable information. The residual information will not be used for commercial purposes; however, Firefighter Motherhood reserves the right, from time to time, to re-contact former users of this site.

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