**Ep3: Paternity leave and maternal bias**

**INTRO**

**Kadie Ward (KW):**  Today we'll be discussing paternity leave and maternal bias with Maya Roy. Maya Roy is Director of Research and Impact at Women at the Centre. She's also the former CEO of YWCA Canada and Newcomer Women's Experience Services Toronto. And she's an executive leader with really incredible extensive experience in a variety of sectors in public policy development, social determinants of health and community development for social impact. So, we really appreciate Maya having you here with us to share insights on such a vital topic.

**Maya Roy (MR):** Thank you for having me. Thank you for the invite.

**KW:** So, you may have heard, this season of Level the Paying Field, we are exploring some of the broader gender-based biases that impact women in the labour market and ultimately the gender wage gap. One of those biases is what we are calling sort of a maternal bias. There's both anecdotal and statistical evidence of the often-called ‘motherhood penalty’ and ‘fatherhood bonus’. So, while women see their earnings drop in the years following childbirth, men see their salaries often increase. What do you see as the main drivers of this? Do you think that more equal and equitable distribution of unpaid labour can help change this, or are there other drivers?

**MR:** That's a really great question around the main drivers. I would say it's multiple things. Basically, political, economic and social. And then women, men and gender diverse folks are basically in the middle of that diagram. So, it's social culture, it's the status quo in terms of political norms. And then we have these economic structures that basically keep reproducing the same systems over and over again.

**KW:** Yeah, those economic structures are massive in what we are diving into. Have you had conversations around these drivers at all and a linkage to unpaid care labour?

**MR:** Absolutely. So, it can be anything. And I think it also depends on which communities of women and men we're talking about. So, for example, we know for Indigenous women, they make 61 cents for every dollar that a non-Indigenous woman makes. So, there's different kinds of pay gaps. And we know, for example, after the truth and reconciliation commission of Canada, we know, for example, there's a direct line between residential schools, how that has impacted the lack of supportive education supports for Indigenous communities, and that also leads to pay gaps in addition to discriminatory attitudes of employers, which also drive behaviours. So, it's complex and very unfortunate, but we also know that laws, and good laws, and good public policy can actually change and drive more positive behaviour. So, for example, when they've done studies of parental leave in Korea and Japan, they found 10 years after parental leave policies were put in place for men – paternity leave – men were 10 years later, even after spending that time with their child, were actually doing more of the housework, and who doesn't want that equitable housework between men and women? So, it sort of depends on the community, but I think all of those drivers kind of intersect and inform each other.

**KW:** So, let's pick up on that policy piece because I think there has been a lot of governments responding and listening and coming up with more robust parental leaves. And a lot of ‘use it or lose it’ where it's on the table, and if the fathers don't take it, it's gone. We know from anecdotal and actual research that fathers who take leave help their partners, their employers and themselves. But there's still a stigma around men who take parental leave. Some experts believe this sort of peer effect is important to eliminate the stigma. So, sort of being judged by your colleagues for doing this. What do you recommend employers should do to stimulate and encourage more equitable distribution of parental leave between parents and busting that sort of stigma for men in the workplace?

**MR:** Definitely. I think that myth busting is really important. So, for example, Deloitte has done a lot of research. So, I think having influencers in the corporate sector such as Deloitte, the World Economic Forum, doing that myth busting really helps. And as you point out, there is a stigma, which is really unfortunate. Because we know, for example, from the research that when men take their paternity leave, it also leads to increased early child development health outcomes. That there's greater bonding between the father figure and the child, again who doesn't want that? So, I think interestingly as unfortunate and painful and tragic covid has been, because of the shift to remote work, really where we didn't have any choice, I'm cautiously optimistic. This is the first time I've seen in decades where men and for example, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the local Niagara Chamber of Commerce, where I've seen civic and business leaders men all get onto the same zoom call like this and say, even before the women get there, talking about the importance of childcare policies, the importance of paternity and maternity leave. So, it's led to a really interesting shift and a really interesting discussion around allyship, and I think that's one way we can reduce the stigma and do some of the myth busting. But also good public policies are really important. So, for example, Iceland is a really interesting country. In Canada we pride ourselves. We have a Canadian Human Rights Commission who does really important pay equity audits. But you know, what they do in Iceland, so it's not just the fabulous country of gnomes and ski, they also have really healthy pay equity legislation. And unlike in Canada where the burden is on the employees, in Iceland it's actually up to the employer to share with the government, this is how we're producing pay equity. And I think that's really important and it's really healthy because, I've been doing work as a proponent of pay equity for 20 years. But also as a small business owner, as a CEO, as an executive director of non-profits, I've also made mistakes. So, having the right policies in place basically create the culture and sort of guide leaders in making the right choices for good pay equity.

**KW:** That's really helpful, especially in the context of paternity leave because we know that the gender wage gap starts to widen, when mothers, particularly mothers, take, as we've already said, the motherhood penalty. So, it's really important context in that light. And I think it's just fair to mention that we're talking right now a lot about a heterosexual couple, but I think there's probably these challenges in any couple where there's not a shared parental responsibility. I think you can still see this in same sex parenting where the conversation still needs to be around equitable distribution because there's the challenges.

**MR:** Yeah. And thank you so much for naming that because we don't want to take a heteronormative view of things. And the interesting thing in Quebec, when I was at the YWCA, it was really interesting to see how pay equity measures and parental leave that were introduced in the late nineties in Quebec, a lot of my Quebecois colleagues pointed out to me that it also benefited same sex couples. So, the nice thing about taking a human rights approach is not only does it support economic prosperity, but it actually creates equity for different communities, including LGBTQ2S. And one of the things I'll never forget, one of my Quebecois colleagues said, and this was before, Quebec was sort of 10 years ahead of the other provinces and territories, and she said, no, Maya, because also many heterosexual couples and same sex couples in Quebec are also common law, she said it's custom here that when we find out about a pregnancy the two partners will sit down, literally fold a piece of paper in half. And start just because of the way the parental leave works, cause it can go between either partner and you can actually sort of give and take between each other that they actually fold that piece of paper in half and start mapping out the parental responsibilities and the housekeeping, that benefits everyone. So, I think, again, a really good example that when they brought in both accessible childcare in Quebec, and also equitable parental leave policies for same sex couples in Quebec, again, how you know, everyone benefited.

**KW:** Absolutely. So, it's an interesting relationship there in that model between effective policy, but also effective just culture, the way that they approach parenting in general. I want to pick up on the stereotypes and biases around motherhood in particular that assumes that a couple of things women are more naturally suited for. Nature versus nurture - that's a whole other conversation, but in the workplace let's focus it there: once women have children, they are perceived as less likely to be committed to their careers. There's an assumption that they don't want promotions, they are not interested in leadership, and there's sort of these biases around promotion or systemic discrimination in the workplace because they're perceived less competent, less committed, less likely to be promoted. We have lots of reports to back this up. In your opinion, what can be instrumental in busting these sorts of wrong and harmful assumptions about motherhood, but also about women in the workplace who are mothers?

**MR:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think part of that also goes back to your earlier question where the more men that take parental leave, that also sort of leads to a levelling of the playing field. But also, I hear you wondering how do we change those perceptions? So, I think again, having think tanks, talking about the motherhood penalty is one way. But I've also seen, for example, employers take really interesting approaches. So, for example, I've seen employers approach organisations such as the YWCA or the YMCA and ask a local NGO to provide onsite childcare services. So, not only does it help with their keeping employees and helping them become a good employer for all of their employees, irrespective of whether they are, mothers or fathers, but really sort of building that holistic community, corporate social responsibility into their operations. And again, that ultimately benefits their bottom line because when you have both men, women, and gender diverse employees feeling like, yeah, this employer really cares about the family, really cares about the community, ultimately, that starts, that basically helps shift the culture and also helps the myth busting. I was the executive director of Newcomer Women's Services Toronto for many years, and my favourite part of the program and former colleagues know this, is we had our English as a second language school on the fourth floor, our Link school, but then we had the care for newcomer kids on the second floor. And each day at lunch break, the mums would go downstairs and have lunch with the kids and then read a story. The kids would go to nap time and the mums would go back to class. And this is a model in Canada where basically this model is actually being studied by other countries to help newcomers access the labour market. And ultimately that narrows the pay gap between immigrant and refugee women and Canadian born women. So, there's a variety of models we can use to really kind of get at that motherhood penalty and kind of myth bust, and also disrupt the stigma and disrupt the status quo.

**KW:** Thank you for sharing that example. I think it's very powerful when we can look to things that are actually working in, in other places. And that's a small sort of micro example, but you can see how it can be scaled up and applied across multiple different sectors.

**MR:** Absolutely. For example, we actually had trade commissions from the European Union Parliament, so groups of MPs and CEOs who actually came to look at that model. And admittedly they were a little bit sceptical at first. We were just kind of another stop on the tour. And then they happened just the way the tour worked out, they happened to come into the care for newcomer children into the day-care during kids' nap times. And they saw all the kids sleeping. And I was literally watching billionaires and Members of Parliaments melt and just say, oh my goodness, they look like sleeping angels, and can we stay?

**KW:** Well, it's relatable, right? They're probably all parents.

**MR:** Exactly. And even for the ones who weren't parents, they had such a complete shift in their mindset. So yeah, there's kind of different ways, but having some cute kids sleeping never hurts to help myth bust.

**KW:** Oh no, that is such a great story. Thank you for adding that on. And so I'll finish with bringing back up to that broader level. You were talking with the EU, different countries, regions and provinces adopt different approaches towards, regulating parental leave or dealing with these stigmas and biases and just these structures. Can you share some of your own, you just shared a best practice, but is there anything else that you'd like to share with us that has seemed to have been effective in closing that gender gap in the labour market, especially for women or new mothers?

**MR:** No, absolutely. And sort of some of the practices I'm sharing also comes from my own mistakes as a leader. Because I think sometimes, there is that process of continuous improvement. So, I would say pay transparency. Early in my career as CEO what I was always told by HR especially in smaller workplaces, don't post your salaries. If employees know who's making what, it'll lead to tension in the workplace. And because that was sort of standard policy practice at the time, I would go with that advice. I've changed my mind since then. And especially with covid. And sort of what we're seeing in terms of all of the civil rights discussions happening around the world, I think pay transparency is really really important, and being able to report back. So having, whether it's government or a pay equity commission, actually monitor and track and asking companies, non-profits, small, medium enterprises to post that information, I think is really helpful. But I think a missing piece of that is small, medium enterprises and tiny charities need the HR supports in order to make the transparency happen. Because it's not as though the CEO and the board can wake up one morning and wave a magic wand, as you know it's a lot of intensive work. This is why you're doing this really important podcast series to educate. But also the how, having the tools and the templates so your finance team can crunch the numbers is really important. And I've noticed a lot of smaller business and charities, we don't have that capacity. So, I think also having some of that capacity support will help shift the culture and shift the policies and the conversation. And so, we have an agreement around the why pay equity is important, but it's also the focus around the how do we actually get this done when there's so many other pressures and competing interests.

**KW:** Excellent. This is a good time for me to shamelessly plug that the Pay Equity Office of Ontario recently launched a do-it-yourself kit for small businesses. You're nodding. You've probably seen it. And it's exactly for that reason that small businesses don't have the larger, sophisticated teams to be looking at the complexity of this. And we are delighted to offer those tools. And there's other tools from other countries and jurisdictions that companies can also use as well. So, thank you for mentioning that because I think it's an important part for businesses to hear. That they can lean on tools and templates and other processes that have been done to apply it to their own. Thank you so much, Maya, for being with us today. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.

**MR:** Thank you. Thanks so much for having me on your platform today.

**OUTRO**