Negotiating Pregnancy at Work: Public and Private Conflicts

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Abstract

While pregnancy in the workplace is a fairly common occurrence today, there are still numerous covert and overt biases women must navigate when pregnant at work. Current research on pregnancy in the workplace has primarily highlighted the substantive negotiations that pregnant women engage in with regards to maternity leave and role definition. In this study, we move beyond existing research to explore the full range of issues pregnant women negotiate in the workplace. Through in-depth interviews with 30 professional women who were pregnant for the first time, we identify both intrapersonal and interpersonal issues women negotiate during pregnancy and we explore why these issues arise and how women respond to them. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of this study for both theory and practice.

Modern organizations offer an increasing number of family-friendly policies that are intended to support employees' needs to manage their work commitments in light of home demands and life outside of work (cf. Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Osterman, 1995). Even though these policies are well-intended, most organizations are still tightly wedded to the traditional ideal worker model, which assumes organizational members commit the majority of their physical and psychological time to their work. This norm perpetuates the expectation that organizational members should work full time—even

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overtime—and creates the expectation that employees who take time away from work for childbearing or child rearing are limiting their potential for work success and advancement (Williams, 2000). This steadfast tradition of the ideal worker has meant that, in today's organizations, well-intended policies rarely provide support for work–life balance and caretaking because of the stigma associated with those who take advantage of them (Kelly & Kalev, 2006).

While there are many points in working women's careers when they may be challenged to assimilate into the ideal worker norm, this experience is particularly pronounced when a woman is pregnant. During pregnancy, the maternal body and its suggestions of pregnancy, babies, and breast milk sets mothers apart from the norms of the ideal worker as these norms are grounded in masculine assumptions about work (Gartrell, 2007; Williams, 2000). Williams argues that the ideal worker model is fundamentally a gendered norm that discriminates against mothers. The inherent contradiction pregnant women face between performing as an ideal worker and an ideal mother is likely to give rise to a wide range of personal and interpersonal conflicts that a pregnant woman will have to negotiate while at work. While some research has been done on the negotiations pregnant women face (i.e., Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Liu & Buzzanell, 2004; Miller, Jablin, Casey, Lamphear-Van Horn, & Ethington, 1996), existing research has primarily focused on the negotiations related to maternity leave. Yet, we would expect that the conflicts pregnant women face in the workplace are likely to extend far beyond maternity leave.

In this study we move beyond existing research to investigate the range of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts pregnant women negotiate during their pregnancy at work. Through in-depth interviews with 30 professional women who were pregnant for the first time, we classify the varied issues women negotiate during pregnancy as well as explore why these issues arise and how women respond to them. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of this research for both conflict management and gender issues in the workplace.

Pregnancy in the Workplace

In the past decade, there has been an increase in cross-disciplinary studies of pregnancy in the workplace (i.e., Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Gross & Pattison, 2007; Hilfinger Messias & DeJoseph, 2007). Existing research has primarily focused on the impact that pregnancy has on the dimensions of a woman's career such as earning trajectory, career path, and hiring and firing (Correll et al., 2007; Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). This research has shown that even though pregnancy in the workplace is a fairly common occurrence (Miller et al., 1996), pregnant working women still face covert and overt biases (Liu & Buzzanell, 2004). In the United States, the occurrences of pregnancy-bias complaints have risen by 40% in the past decade (Shellenbarger, 2008). In Great Britain, half of working pregnant women can expect to experience some disadvantages at work (Gross & Pattison, 2007). Pregnant women also find their professional identity and legitimacy is attacked in covert ways (Gross & Pattison, 2007; Liu & Buzzanell, 2004). These injustices arise in part because of the biases organization members may hold against pregnant

women. Coworkers often assume motherhood will weaken a woman's commitment to her work performance and her profession (Correll et al., 2007; Gross & Pattison, 2007). These covert and overt biases create a complex landscape that pregnant women must navigate.

At the same time, pregnant women must also contend with their own shifting views of themselves as they move from nonmotherhood to motherhood (Gross & Pattison, 2007). During pregnancy, a woman is likely to question who she wants to be as a mother and as a professional woman and how central each of these identities will be to her overall self-concept. Pregnancy is also a role transition process in which women must negotiate whether and how they want to alter their work role (Miller et al., 1996).

While researchers have highlighted the interpersonal and intrapersonal shifts that are likely to occur for pregnant women in the workplace, there has been little to no empirical research on this topic. In the few studies that do exist (i.e., Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Correll et al., 2007), researchers have focused on the negotiations that relate to maternity leave. In addition, existing research has been conducted with women after they have given birth. The aforementioned research may be biased by women's retrospective sensemaking after childbirth and their decisions to return to work. As such, we believe there is a need for research that investigates the experiences of women while they are still pregnant.

Hence, our study is unique in that we bring together diverse research streams to inform our exploration of the issues women face when they are still pregnant in the workplace. While we expect some of the issues women need to negotiate will be of a substantive nature, such as maternity leave and return to work, we also investigate the shadow negotiations that are likely to arise during pregnancy (Kolb & Williams, 2000). Understanding these negotiations is important, as how women negotiate these conflicts has a lasting affect on a woman's relationship with work and her organization (Gross & Pattison, 2007).

Research Description

The findings we present in this paper are drawn from a large, qualitative study we conducted on first-time mothers' experiences of being pregnant at work. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), we chose to use an inductive approach, as we wanted to build an in-depth understanding of women's experiences from their own perspective. As such, our data gathering and data analysis were guided by an interest in identifying the commonalities and patterns that underlie the conflicts pregnant women negotiate in the workplace.

We began our research with a pilot study in which we interviewed 10 women about their experiences being pregnant at work. Based upon the pilot data and additional literature review, we designed a qualitative, inductive study in which we interviewed 30 women regarding their experiences being pregnant at work. Women were recruited for this study through a number of venues, including college alumni network groups, human resource professional networks, and local medical and health professionals who work with new mothers.

All research participants were pregnant with their first child at the time of their interview. We chose to study new mothers because the issues women face with the birth of their first child are more complex and ambiguous than those encountered by experienced mothers (Miller et al., 1996). All research participants were in professional work positions, had at least 3 years of full-time work experience, and intended to return to work after their maternity leave. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min and followed a semi-structured format. All interviews were transcribed, yielding approximately 1,000 pages of double-spaced text to analyze.

We began data analysis by reviewing the transcripts to identify any instances in which participants mentioned issues they were negotiating. During this process, the authors also used a grounded theory approach to develop themes to categorize these negotiations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After independently developing a set of themes, each author then identified the data that supported these themes and reviewed existing research that connected to the themes. The three authors then met to discuss and condense the themes into a coherent framework.

Private and Public Negotiations During Pregnancy

As previously mentioned, the academic literature related to pregnancy in the workplace tends to focus on the negative experiences of women. As such, in this study we expected to find pregnant women would be challenged in their ability to fulfill the ideal worker norm (Williams, 2000). We were surprised to uncover that while women felt their professional identity as an ideal worker was being challenged, they also experienced an affirmation of their personal identity as a pregnant woman as they gained access to a network of working parents.

As a result of these mixed messages, women found themselves negotiating conflicts in two distinct spheres. In the public sphere, women were negotiating with various stakeholders in their organizations. These negotiations involved substantive issues related to pregnancy and role along with intangible issues related to identity, professional image, and public/private boundaries. At the same time, we found pregnant women were dealing with internally charged, private negotiations. These negotiations related to women's identity and self-image rather than substantive pregnancy and work role conflicts. In the following sections we discuss the dimensions of the private and public negotiations women faced.

Private, Intrapersonal Negotiations

From our data analysis, we found women engaged in private negotiations with themselves as a result of the internal struggles they experienced as they navigated their pregnancy at work. Women were negotiating the interface between their past, present, and future selves and were questioning their personal and professional aspirations (Millward, 2006). These shadow negotiations occurred below the surface and were based on assumptions these women had about their own strengths, weaknesses, and desires as working professionals and mothers (Kolb & Williams, 2000). We found there were three

general themes to these private, intrapersonal negotiations: negotiations about one's legitimacy as a professional; the degree of importance of career over family and other life roles; and the impact of pregnancy on women's aspirations as professionals and mothers.

Professional Legitimacy

Pregnant professional women are faced with the challenge of internally negotiating their professional legitimacy as they introduce their pregnancy into their workplace. For most women in our study, pregnancy invoked assumptions about changes in one's level of commitment and professional abilities. These findings are consistent with previous research that shows biases exist against mothers, who are often perceived as less competent, less committed, and less suitable for hire (Correll et al., 2007). Many of the women we interviewed were aware of these potential biases. They questioned whether and how their legitimacy as a professional would change or had already changed as a result of being visibly pregnant. For example, Penny explained, "I don't want anyone in my work life having a negative impression of a woman because she's pregnant, somehow she's disabled and you have to treat me differently, so my expectation and my attitude and my habits are such that people should treat me exactly the same."

Despite the physical visibility of pregnancy, women experienced intense feelings of invisibility as a valued employee (Millward, 2006). Many women in our sample were worried about being treated differently and felt the need to protect and justify their professional legitimacy. Women mentioned being excluded from important assignments or meetings in which they would have otherwise been involved and felt responsibilities were being taken away from them as their pregnancies progressed. As women reduced their workload to prepare for their maternity leave, they expressed feeling professionally vulnerable. For example, Rita reflected this sentiment when she discussed her maternity leave "[F]or the first time, I've been concerned that—and it's probably my own insecurities rather than somebody making me feel this way—but I get concerned that I'm not going to be needed any more once I go." Even for women who held a secure professional identity, pregnancy threatened their professional legitimacy and led many women to feel conflicted about the extent to which they could and would be able to prove themselves as valued employees.

Identity Salience

For the women in our study, pregnancy also raised internal questions about how to prioritize work and family. While the women in our sample had spent most of their adult lives focused on their careers and had prioritized career over other life roles, many of the women expressed a need to reprioritize their roles in the future. The desire to reprioritize roles was largely influenced by what women heard from friends and family members, read in parenting books, and how they interpreted what the media suggested about working parents. These findings are consistent with studies that focus on professional women's re-entry experiences following first births (Ladge, 2008; Lee, MacDermid, Dohring, & Kossek, 2005).

The need to reprioritize roles also meant women were contemplating how they would balance the competing demands of work and motherhood. Many women anticipated that it would not be possible to put 100% effort into both motherhood and work, and that they would need to make choices between their various roles. Cassie explained, ''Do I really want to move to a director level with a baby at home? What do I really want out of life? What's more important? My family or my career? To me it's my family. If that means that I want to have flexibility, be home at a decent hour so I can spend some time with my kid, that's what it's going to be. Maybe it's just who I am; but … that definitely takes the priority. And it does have an impact on my career; because, when I was younger, I did a lot of software implementations and traveled a lot. I still want to travel; but I don't want to travel so much once [I] have a family.''

Most women in our sample suggested the pending birth of their first child forced them to change their expectations about their careers and motherhood. Some women articulated that they had spent most of their lives in their careers working hard and now it may be time to focus on having a family. In response to the question, ''How would you rate the importance of your professional identity over other identities?'' one research participant responded with a common sentiment, ''I think it's changing now because I think before it would have been very strong. Before I was on a career path in my mind. And, it was important that I climb in a certain way. … There were certain things that I wanted to achieve. And now, it's not as important anymore. So, … today, I would say it's a three. I would say like a year ago, it probably would have been a four or a five.''

Possible Selves

Possible selves are aspirations, goals, and fears about becoming a mother and about managing the work and mothering domains (Markus & Nurius, 1998). We found that during pregnancy women were continually envisioning what their futures would look like and asking themselves what kind of mother and professional they hoped to become. Many women looked to the experiences of their work colleagues who were mothers as they thought about the kind of mother and professional they desired to become. As Sharon explained, ''A lot of my friends either work part time, don't work, or work in jobs that aren't very challenging. And then I go to my current job and to other work situations where there are women who are [in extremely challenging careers]. So, I think, what type of woman do I want to be? I could see myself doing either. And, I do like work. So, I don't see giving it up. But, there's probably part of me that feels guilty, like what am I missing? Should—there's a lot of shoulds.''

While all of the women in our study planned to return to work, they were conflicted over whether working was the right choice and how their decision would impact the type of professional and mother they hoped to become. Rita expressed this dilemma clearly, ''That's one of my bigger concerns, what do you do—if you chose not to work, what do you do when your kids are gone? And I never want to lose my own identity. And I think it's very difficult. It has to be hard to keep your own identity when your life is around your kids. There are pros and cons to both.'' The women in our study

revealed that the personal conflicts they faced had to do with how accomplished they felt in their professional lives and how much they hope to accomplish in the future. Cathy's personal conflicts were apparent as she stated, "I think having grown up understanding the financial aspect of things and also having worked really hard to get where I am; I've gone for continuing education certification, different designations in my field, I definitely don't think I'm ready to give that up yet."

In summary, we found pregnant women experienced private, personal conflicts as they reflected on their past, present, and future as working mothers. They felt conflicted as they tried to preserve their professional identity while managing their new identity as a pregnant woman and they struggled with how they would define and then prioritize their future roles as professionals and mothers. As women shared their stories, we noticed that these internal negotiations occurred both consciously and unconsciously. The degree to which there was an awareness of any intrapersonal conflict was, in large part, influenced by the public negotiations that occurred with others. We discuss these public negotiations in more detail next.

Public, Interpersonal Conflicts

While the aforementioned intrapersonal conflicts were transpiring privately, the women in our study were also engaged in public, interpersonal conflicts. While researchers have primarily focused on the maternity leave negotiations that occur between a pregnant employee and her direct supervisor (i.e., Buzzanell & Liu, 2007), our research shows women were negotiating a wide range of issues with diverse organizational stakeholders. Pregnant women entered into formal and informal negotiations with their bosses, human resource representatives, coworkers, subordinates, and clients. There were three general themes to these public, interpersonal negotiations: substantive issues related to the pregnancy, redefining a woman's work role, and public/private boundary shifts. We discuss these themes in more detail below.

Substantive Pregnancy Issues

The women in our study had to negotiate many substantive issues that directly pertained to their experiences being pregnant. While researchers have highlighted pregnant women's needs to negotiate maternity leave (i.e., Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Liu & Buzzanell, 2004), pregnant women also have to negotiate changing physical and psychological needs, taking time off for doctor's appointments and pregnancy-related ailments, and making determinations about future child care options.

While organizational researchers focus on the emotional and psychological issues associated with pregnancy, pregnancy also has an important physical, biological component. For many women in our study, the biological changes of pregnancy such as fatigue, nausea, and more serious complications compromised their ability to work. The physical demands of the pregnant body may directly contradict a woman's workplace demands, and few employers readily accommodate these physical needs (Cherry, 1987; Hilfinger Messias & DeJoseph, 2007). The women in our study frequently had to negotiate their work schedules as a result of these physical demands.

In negotiating the physical issues related to the pregnancy, we found women typically engaged in either an accommodating or a competing strategy (Thomas, 1976). With an accommodating strategy, women suppressed their own needs and focused primarily on their organization's needs. For example, Carolee stated, "I just tend to suck it up … if I'm in a lot of pain and I have a deadline, I'll just work through it." Similar to many of the women we interviewed, Carolee was unwilling to approach her boss and renegotiate her work schedule to accommodate her pregnancy. The women who invoked an accommodating strategy expressed concern that their physical limitations might signal to their colleagues a lack of work commitment or a shift in their professional image. As such, these women put aside their own needs in order to demonstrate their commitment to their organizations and their professions.

A few research participants were more explicit about their own physical needs and used a competing approach to negotiating the conflicts that arose due to the physical demands of their pregnancy. With this competitive stance, women focused on obtaining the accommodations they wanted and showed less concern for their organization's needs (Thomas, 1976). Some women used a competing approach because they had struggled to become pregnant and were now clearly prioritizing their baby's health and their personal self over their professional self. Other women used this approach because they were confident in their professional image and were less concerned about how others would respond to them if they put their needs ahead of those of the organization.

The second substantive pregnancy issue women negotiated was time off for doctor's appointments, hospital visits, and day care provider visits. Most women in our study tried to avoid formally negotiating this issue. The women we interviewed typically tried to schedule appointments early or late in the day so their colleagues would not notice their absence. When women did have appointments during the day, they mentioned complex arrangements they created to avoid negotiations with their bosses, colleagues, or clients. Women avoided these negotiations because they were concerned that their colleagues would think their work commitment was diminishing. Julia articulated this challenge quite clearly when she stated, "I find myself sneaking in the back door a lot. And probably most people in here know that I have a strong work ethic, that I'm not bolting out for no reason. But, I still feel guilty about it. This guy's going to notice and think something."

Maternity leave was the one issue all women in our study formally negotiated. As previous researchers have indicated, maternity leave is fundamentally a negotiation process that strongly influences women's desires to return to work, their job satisfaction, and their organizational commitment (Liu & Buzzanell, 2004). We found women began these negotiations very early in their pregnancies—some even began to plan an approach to negotiating maternity leave before they announced their pregnancy. Women frequently decided how and when to reveal their pregnancy based on what they thought might happen during their maternity leave negotiation.

For most of the women in our study, these early maternity leave discussions did not involve a negotiation of role, responsibility, or work structure following the maternity leave. Rather negotiations were centered on how many weeks maternity leave a woman

would take. While the issue of paid versus unpaid leave was important, the majority of women were more focused on the length of their maternity leaves. Most women tried to negotiate time off beyond their company's standard policies. However, a few women were concerned with taking too much time off. These women were conflicted by their organization's expectations about working mothers and their own hopes about how to manage their new mother role and their professional role. Melanie stated her managers were advocating that she try to take more time off than the ''traditional 3 months.'' Melanie explained her anxiety about time off when she stated, ''I want to make sure that I just don't disappear and I continue the swing of my career path so that I don't have as much ground to make up when I return.'' Melanie was caught between being an ideal mother who wanted to be with her child and would take an extended maternity leave and being an ideal worker who was visible to her colleagues. In her desire to be seen as an ideal worker, Melanie ignored her manager's suggestions and took the standard maternity leave.

Negotiating Work Role

Our research provides empirical support to Miller et al.'s (1996) claim that women must negotiate their work role during their pregnancies. Yet, Miller et al. did not predict how pervasive these role negotiations would be. From the moment they revealed their pregnancies, the women in our study found themselves informally negotiating their work role with their colleagues.

Prior research suggests that work colleagues are implicitly dismissive of pregnant women (Gross & Pattison, 2007; Rodmell & Smart, 1982). We found women were constantly negotiating these negative biases in explicit and implicit ways. For example, Amanda stated: ''One negative thing I've heard recently that upset me—I work with this woman on two big accounts—and she had said to someone, 'Oh, Amanda has already checked out.' And I'm thinking, 'What? I do all the work on these two big accounts.' So I got pretty upset.'' While Amanda's work performance showed no indication that her commitment to her work role had shifted, the physical changes of her body signaled a different message to her colleagues.

The women we interviewed also entered into formal negotiations with their bosses over their current work role. These formal negotiations pertained to a pregnant woman's current work responsibilities, compensation, and promotions. In approaching these formal negotiations, the women in our study often concealed information related to their pregnancy because they were concerned that the information would diminish their power in these negotiations. For example, in explaining why she hadn't made firm plans regarding her maternity leave, Bridget commented, ''The reason I have not discussed this with my director yet is because I'm scheduled for a raise in October. I purposely waited to make sure that the raise is not undercut in any way. So that's been a strategy of mine''. While most women stated they didn't believe their pregnancy or maternity leave would affect their current work role, these women were still not willing to risk a potential negative impact. The need to conceal or delay discussing substantive pregnancy issues suggests women were subconsciously concerned about the negative repercussions that pregnancy would have on their professional image.

In addition to being immersed in formal and informal negotiations regarding their current role, the women in our study were also negotiating their future work role. Negotiations over future work role focused on work schedule and work responsibilities following maternity leave. Here too, women concealed information depending on how they thought this information might impact these negotiations. Katie, who was thinking about returning to work on a reduced schedule, explained, ''I'm trying to be a little bit strategic in my head about working 3 days a week and I'm not telling my boss about that.'' Women were concerned their bosses would be resistant to their desire to redefine their future work role when they returned to work.

Shifting Public/Private Boundaries

Lastly, we found the women in our study were constantly negotiating a shifting public/private boundary; that is, the boundary between their work self and their nonwork self. In most organizations, a norm exists for careful maintenance of distinct boundaries between public work lives and private personal lives (Gross & Pattison, 2007). These boundaries delineate how much the workplace accommodates organizational members' personal needs, what personal issues are acceptable to discuss in the workplace, and what personal questions others can ask (Nippert-Eng, 1996). During pregnancy, many women found the boundaries between public and private became more permeable. Pregnancy brings into the workplace aspects of one's private life that are normally reserved for close friends and family (Gross & Pattison, 2007; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

The women in our study were uncomfortable with the questions they received from their colleagues, bosses, and clients about how they were feeling and how were they doing with their pregnancy. While many women appreciated their colleagues' concerns for their well-being, they simultaneously found the conversation unsavory, and thus, tried to negotiate the discussion away from this topic. In explaining how she handled these comments, Patti stated, ''Well, just in hallway conversations, people stop me and ask me how I'm feeling and I tend to downplay it. … I don't want people to think of me, just 'Oh, she's the pregnant one.' They need to be thinking of me in the same exact way they thought of me whether I'm pregnant or not pregnant.'' The women in our study were concerned that the focus on their pregnancy would diminish others' views of their professional image and status.

The renegotiation of the public/private boundary was particularly awkward for the women in our study when their colleagues discussed issues of sexuality and body parts such as breasts and nipples. The visible nature of pregnancy provides an immediate cue of fertility and sexuality (Gross & Pattison, 2007). In most North American organizations, these topics are rarely discussed publicly. Our research shows that as pregnancy became more visible, conversations regarding body and sexuality became more common. In explaining the astonishing discussions that arose, Pam stated, ''Anything goes. I mean, some guy was telling me about how his wife's nipples were so chapped he had to go out and get her cream. And I'm like, 'Jim, we're at work.'" Many women in our study were uncomfortable with public conversations about their private selves and they had to find creative ways to negotiate these discussions. Katie mentioned all the different comments she received, ''They comment, 'You don't look like you're pregnant',

and, 'Are you gaining weight?' And, 'When my wife was pregnant, or when I was pregnant', or, you know, people telling me, like, crazy stories about nursing, and how difficult it is. And am I going to have a lactation consultant? Just questions at work, you know? I swear to God, all bets are off.'' For the women in our study, the boundary between public and private was shifting and these women had to negotiate awkward, private conversations about their pregnant self that diminished the value of their professional self.

However, we did find an interesting paradox to women's feelings about these private conversations. While women in our study were uncomfortable with the shifting public/private boundary, many women also enjoyed the added attention and support they received. As Melanie explained, ''Although everyone has been supportive and asks a lot of questions, it still feels kind of weird—there's a personal part of yourself that's very obvious at work. You can't hide it.'' Some researchers have argued that the public/private boundary shift during pregnancy is suggestive of organizational members' general discomfort of having pregnant women at work and of their beliefs that an inherent inconsistency exists between working and being a caretaker (Gross & Pattison, 2007). The women in our study appeared to be cognizant of these general attitudes towards pregnancy in the workplace. Therefore, while they were considerate and responsive to their colleagues' comments about their private life, they tried hard to refocus attention to their work in order to protect their public, professional image.

To summarize, we found pregnant professional women's work experiences were rich with both private and public negotiations. The private, intrapersonal conflicts pregnant women are engaged in influenced and were influenced by the public, interpersonal conflicts. As women were publicly negotiating with colleagues and bosses, they were simultaneously negotiating their own feelings internally. As one set of negotiations changed it affected the other. The reciprocal influence between these interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts meant that any agreements women reached were likely to be highly unstable. We now go on to discuss the implications this has for both theory and practice.

Discussion

Building on a relatively new stream of research which views pregnancy as a central territory for negotiations within the workplace (i.e., Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Liu & Buzzanell, 2004; Miller et al., 1996), this study explored the nature of negotiations that women engage in while they are pregnant at work. While prior research focused on interpersonal, formal, substantive negotiations related to pregnancy (e.g., when and how much time one might take for maternity leave), this study used an inductive qualitative design to reveal the range of issues that women formally and informally negotiated while pregnant at work.

Research Implications

Our work offers several potential research implications. First, we were intrigued to find that women engaged in both intrapersonal and interpersonal negotiations. Intrapersonal

negotiations usually involved women's self-questioning about the extent to which they would be able, or desire, to live up to ideal worker norms in light of their new mothering role. For some women, private bargains were ongoing at the time of our interview. Other women had already struck an invisible agreement with themselves. In either case, it appeared that women's internal negotiations were driven by a need to reevaluate their personal and professional identity in light of their upcoming mothering role and to reconcile their sense of efficacy in managing their new responsibilities (Ladge, 2008). While negotiations are typically framed as an exchange occurring between two or more parties, our research suggests that negotiations may start before a person comes to the formal negotiation table. Future research should focus on building fuller insight into the range of private bargains that women strike with themselves before they come to the table to formally discuss maternity and/or work role changes. This research could also provide greater insight into factors influencing women's self-talk and decision making.

Women additionally engage in interpersonal negotiations, which arise formally and informally in exchanges with others at work (i.e., colleagues, bosses, clients, etc.). These negotiations involve both the tangible and intangible aspects of women's pregnancies. As prior research suggests, the women in our study engaged in formal negotiations about maternity leave and role redefinition. However, women's negotiations extended far beyond the tangible aspects of their pregnancies. As discussed earlier, pregnancy sends signals to others that a woman may no longer be able to live up to the ideal worker norms of the organization. Women negotiate these perceptions as they try to reduce the gap between their desired professional image and the perceived image held by others (Roberts, 2005). Most often, pregnant women sought to minimize the extent to which others might view them as less capable by trying to alter the focus on their pregnancy. Yet, we would expect that there are many other tactics women use to negotiate their professional identity in light of their pregnancy. Future research should focus on identifying a fuller range of image negotiation tactics.

Women's pregnancies also triggered interpersonal negotiations because the pregnancy signaled to others that the woman's body is available for public consumption (e.g., staring, touching) and that topics of discussion normally reserved for private life are now acceptable to broach at work (e.g., breastfeeding, the birth process, symptoms of pregnancy, etc.). These conversations made women feel they needed to manage the gap between their desired and actual public/private boundaries. We need to better understand how women negotiate public/private boundaries and how these boundary negotiations affect other more substantive negotiations.

Finally, there are ample opportunities to further explore links between intrapersonal and interpersonal negotiations in future research. For example, in our study women may have faced greater challenges filling the gap between desired and perceived professional images when they were privately unsure of their own needs and desires. As we discussed earlier, many women expressed uncertainty and confusion about the professional image they were seeking. As Kolb and Williams (2000) suggest in their work on shadow negotiation, women's private thoughts and beliefs are likely to influence the outcomes of formal negotiations (e.g., over maternity leave or work-role redesign). For

example, we speculate that women in our study who were more confused personally probably lacked confidence to assert themselves with others publicly. How women privately negotiated their role and identity affected how they publicly negotiated role and substantive maternity issues. We would anticipate that research on women's return to work would benefit from better understanding these intrapersonal, shadow negotiations.

Finally, we believe organizational context is likely to influence a pregnant woman's private and public negotiations in the workplace. For example, a masculine organizational culture might evoke greater conflicts between a pregnant woman's desired and perceived professional images. Conversely, formal organizational structure may also influence pregnant women's negotiations, since the structural support may enhance or limit women's beliefs about whether they are able to or want to live up to the ideal worker norms in their organizations. We need to explore further how organizational context affects a pregnant woman's private, interpersonal negotiations as well as her public, intrapersonal negotiations.

Practical Implications

The findings from our study also yield several practical implications. First, and most centrally, we feel it is vital for both pregnant women and their organizations to recognize that the dynamics of work and family integration start well before one's first child arrives—it begins when a woman becomes pregnant. Women would benefit from recognizing that they need to start preparing for successful formal negotiations far before their third trimester. Additionally, managers need to recognize that women are not just engaging in formal negotiations over maternity leave benefits, but also are embroiled in intrapersonal negotiations in which they are striking private bargains with themselves about their future identities as workers and mothers. Organizations would benefit from providing women with resources to help them make thoughtful decisions about their professional futures.

Organizations must also consider that pregnant women have to negotiate other intangible aspects of their pregnancies at work, such as the extent to which their private lives become public during their pregnancy. While some women may enjoy probing questions and the concern of their colleagues, other women may feel that these questions and comments are intrusive and inappropriate. Organizations might consider expanding discussions on sexual harassment and diversity to include the topic of public/private boundaries, since these shifting boundaries can create a hostile workplace for many employees—not just pregnant women.

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