Gendered Bodies: Negotiating Normalcy and Support

Linda L. Putnam[1] and Jaime Bochantin[2]

1 Department of Communication, University of California-Santa Barbara, CA, U.S.A.
2 Department of Communication, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, U.S.A.

Correspondence

Linda L. Putnam, Department of Communication, University of California-Santa Barbara, 5812 Ellison Hall, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-4020, U.S.A.;
e-mail:
lputnam@comm.ucsb.edu.

Abstract

Research on gender and negotiation typically focuses on formal bargaining about salary and compensation. This work needs to be expanded to everyday negotiations in the workplace, especially negotiations on organizational issues deemed germane to women. Drawing from research on work-life issues, this study focuses on how women frame problems about menopause at work in ways that make them open to negotiation. Specifically, it examines message board posts on an online discussion board to see how issues are named, blamed, and claimed and how this framing situates them as interests, rights, or power concerns that foster or hinder opportunities for negotiation.

Gender has become a salient topic in negotiation research. Scholars are moving away from treating this topic as an individual difference variable and are instead focusing on the ways that gender plays out in negotiations, when it counts, and why women don't ask (Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005). Past research reveals that men typically outperform women in highly distributive settings, on particular types of tasks, in unstructured environments, and when women negotiate for themselves (Wade, 2001). These effects, however, are situational and hinge on the context of negotiation. Thus, when women bargain for others, especially in integrative settings, they set high aspirations, make competitive first offers, and even outperform their male counterparts (Bowles et al., 2005).

For the most part, studies on gender and negotiation focus on salary, compensation, and transactional bargaining (Barron, 2003; Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998). While this work is important, it overlooks contextual issues in the workplace, such as relationships, social structures, and networks that may set the stage for negotiating about compensation and pay entitlements (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishi, & O'Brien, 2006). This research, typically conducted in laboratory settings, needs to be expanded to

include everyday negotiations in the workplace, especially those that explore what leads up to the negotiation, shapes the arena, and defines what is said and not said in bargaining (Kolb & Williams, 2000, 2003).

This study adopts a gendered lens to examine how women frame issues that are typically not seen as negotiable. It focuses on what counts as normal and acceptable in the workplace regarding bodies, life changes, and work policies. Thus, it centers on a particular type of second generational issue, bodies and aging, in the workplace; a topic that on the surface seems neutral, but clearly has differential effects for men and women. Framing issues as negotiable goes beyond traditional work by focusing on how disputants name a problem, assign blame to it, and decide how to confront it. Thus, this article employs a gendered lens to examine the framing of routine issues in the workplace that deal with the body and aging and that focus on interests, rights, and power.

This article presents an overview of the literature on second generation gender issues, the body, and aging in the workplace. It then situates workplace concerns about the body and aging as sites for negotiation. The study then examines posts on a web discussion board that deal with menopause and the body at work as issues open to negotiation and dispute resolution.

Organizations, Second Generation Issues, and the Body

Organizations in which most negotiations take place are not gender neutral (Ashcraft, 2004; Valian, 1998). Advocates of this position contend that bureaucracies and other organizational forms are fundamentally gendered in structures, patterns, and routines that typically privilege characteristics of masculinity, accent objectivity and rationality, and prescribe ways in which roles should be enacted (Acker, 1990, 1992; Ferguson, 1984; Grant & Tancred, 1992; Kanter, 1977; Kolb & Putnam, 2005). Past work in this area centers on intentional and overt acts, such as promotion, unequal pay, the glass ceiling, and differential career paths. Gender scholars treat these overt acts of discrimination as first generation gender biases.

Second Generation Gendered Issues

Second generation gendered issues refer to practices that appear neutral and normal, but continue to favor masculine values and work-life situations (Sturm, 2001). They affect the context and social conditions of negotiation, such as the legitimacy of actions, informal work norms, and particular task assignments (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). Because they are informal and develop through fluid social interactions, they function subtly and inadvertently to produce differential effects for women and men. These biases also become salient when men and women bargain about work issues deemed more relevant to women than men, for example, flexible work, family-leave policies, body and work, and life situations (Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Kirby, Wieland, & McBride, 2006).

Work-life issues are typically topics reserved for informal discussions, such as in lunchrooms and conversations outside of the job, rather than topics included in official

employee negotiations (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996). Moreover, women typically "edit-out" discussions of family activities or personal problems in the workplace because these topics might raise questions about job commitment or professional dedication (Jorgenson, 2000). Yet, it has been shown that talking with coworkers and supervisors about family and personal life leads to greater job satisfaction and higher work functioning (Clark, 2002).

The Body at Work

This reluctance to talk about second generation gendered issues is particularly salient on the topic of the body. Organizational studies reveal how the body at work has become a site for self-discipline, an arena for political and organizational control (Wendt, 1995), and a topic for rumors in office folklore (Bell & Forbes, 1994). As a site for self-discipline, the body is expected to conform to the norms of managerial practices; thus, it must be disciplined or shaped to fit the confines of the workplace. The female body becomes disciplined through normative requirements for physical appearance, fitness, dress, and makeup (Butler, 1993; Dellinger & Williams, 1997; Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000; Smythe, 1995); through masking femininity and preventing leakages (i.e., menstruation, crying, or sweating); and through the concealment of bulges or the protruding body (i.e., pregnancy, extra weight). The body, then, becomes a potent symbol for forming gendered identities in the workplace.

The body is also a political symbol for organizational control through making sexuality a commodity, a power-game, or a form of humiliation—for example, using sexy bodies to sell products (Spradley & Mann, 1975; Wendt, 1995). Ironically, this process also occurs through the ways in which organizations recast the female body to resemble a male image, such as requiring women to wear boyish uniforms and constraining their body movements and locations at work (Bordo, 1989; Wendt, 1995). Thus, organizations shape the meanings and discursive management of bodies in addition to expecting women to discipline their bodies to conform to the workplace.

Gender and the Aging Body

The role of the body at work overlaps with another second generation gendered dilemma, the aging worker. Compared to their younger counterparts, aging workers are often treated as invisible and superfluous (Glover & Branine, 2001; Loretto & White, 2006); hence, they experience frequent job relocations, downsizing, and layoffs, despite policies and practices aimed at curtailing age discrimination (Duncan, 2001; Redman & Snape, 2002; Taylor & Walker, 1998). Moreover, the social construction of aging is often different for men than women. In particular, public policy deliberations reveal that older men who lose their jobs are seen as more disadvantaged than older women because of a man's greater need for work (Ainsworth, 2002; Ainsworth & Hardy, 2007, 2008).

Aging is also viewed as a form of bodily betrayal (Warren, 1998) and a "cultural icon of decline and helplessness" (Tulle-Winton, 1999, p. 297) in which older workers, especially women, are expected to control their bodies and make themselves appear youthful

and fit (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008). For women, the aging body is a professional liability because it symbolizes the master narrative of decline in which a menopausal woman is treated as suffering, hormonal, emotional, and asexual (Gullette, 1997; Trethewey, 2001).

Organizational members often become aware of a woman's age through her menopausal symptoms (i.e., sweating, hot flashes, weight gain, irritability, mood swings, etc.), which send cues of her body's decline. These body appearances are "the tabula on which inscriptions of age [are] written and read" (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008, p. 397). Employers have been slow to recognize that women of menopausal age may need special considerations. As a result, women are reluctant to discuss issues associated with menopause for fear of embarrassment, ridicule, or professional liability (Reynolds, 1997). Moreover, inattention to workplace conditions such as poor lighting and ventilation and inadequate restroom facilities can seriously aggravate menopause symptoms (Paul, 2003). In the U.K., a survey by the Trades Union Congress reported that 22% of the female respondents felt that workplace situations aggravated menopause symptoms. Hence, for women and aging, the body becomes a dominant arena for negotiating about workplace problems.

The Body as a Site for Negotiation

Although the body is clearly a site for organizational discipline and control, women are not necessarily passive agents in accepting their plights. Their active involvement in resisting dominant views of the body hinges on recognizing that second generation gendered issues are negotiable in everyday practices. Very few studies focus on negotiating about the body at work, but research on pregnancy and maternity leave shows how the body enters into the micro practices of negotiation.

Requesting and implementing maternity leaves involve complex and often controversial interactions as supervisors and coworkers become ambivalent about workload reductions (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Kirby & Krone, 2002). Women who request maternity leaves must negotiate about their organizational roles, rights and obligations, and expectations before and after taking absence from work (Miller, Jablin, Casey, Lamphear-Van Horn, & Ethington, 1996; Greenberg, Ladge & Clair, this issue). Treating this topic as suppressed gender conflict, Buzzanell and Liu (2007) interviewed women about their experiences prior to, during, and after they returned from maternity leaves. Their findings revealed that women who felt discouraged about their organizations after their leaves reported using a limited repertoire of negotiation strategies, specifically avoidance, repetition of demands, competitive confrontations, and win–lose tactics that resembled distributive bargaining. In contrast, women who were encouraged after their experiences focused on mutual interests and employed a wide range of strategies like compromise, problem solving, and win–win approaches. Moreover, women who felt encouraged about their organizations indicated that they were assertive and direct about their needs, presented multiple perspectives, and devised creative solutions for negotiating problems with their leaves. Women's choices for handling these conflicts also seemed contingent on their supervisors' support and the extent to which women maintained an ideal worker image in these negotiations.

Buzzanell and Liu's study also revealed that negotiating about the body at work was more difficult than working out the details of policy issues. Both the encouraged and discouraged women felt high levels of stress in managing physical symptoms of pregnancy at work. Some women confronted supervisors about their symptoms but many of them avoided these issues and did not see them as negotiable concerns. Clearly, labeling issues linked to the body as open for negotiation is difficult and poses greater challenges for women who express concerns about menopause at work.

Framing Issues as Negotiable

One feature that is critical to engaging in negotiations about the body is how parties frame the issues. Issue framing focuses on the development of meanings or labels for problems (Putnam & Holmer, 1992). In this sense, issues are not simply agenda items, but exist as ambiguous topics that become named, blamed, and claimed as individuals interact about them (Felstiner, Abel, & Sarat, 1980–1981). Naming occurs when a person identifies a situation as a problem and determines what the problem is about; blaming focuses on who or what caused the problem; and claiming occurs when the person with the grievance decides to confront, file charges, or take action against an organization or the individual that they believe caused the problem. Thus, issue framing singles out and makes salient particular experiences related to problems, opens these experiences to labeling, and offers remedies or ways to approach them (Entman, 1993).

Issue framing is essential for making decisions about whether and how to negotiate. First, the way that a party defines a situation determines whether or not she sees it as negotiable (Putnam & Holmer, 1992). For example, treating a situation as closed for discussion clearly blocks opportunities to negotiate the issues. Also, viewing a problem as out of one's purview or realm of control affects an individual's sense of agency to address it. Second, placing a name or label on a problem influences the information that parties seek, the procedures and steps they take to handle it, and how they analyze the negotiation context (Lewicki, Barry, & Saunders, 2007). Hence, framing is an inevitable and fundamental part of the negotiation process.

In deciding how to name an issue and who to blame for causing it, parties decide whether they see the problem in terms of interests, rights, or power (Ury, Brett, & Goldberg, 1988). An interest-based approach centers on underlying needs, or what a party wants, rather than on her position. Parties probe for why an individual takes a particular position or puts an offer on the table. Naming a problem as a rights issue focuses on who is correct, what is fair, or whose standards are more appropriate. Rights-based conflicts are often referred to formal arbitrators or judges to decide who is correct in particular situations (Lewicki et al., 2007). Framing an issue as a power problem highlights the balance or imbalance between the parties in terms of physical or economic strength, expertise, status, or legitimacy. Power-based disputes often involve the use of coercion, threats, or other strategies that build leverage in negotiations. Of importance, parties can approach the same situation as either an interest, a right, or a power issue and each side's choice will likely lead to different negotiation processes and outcomes (Lewicki et al., 2007).

Drawing from issue framing literature, this study focuses on how women frame issues related to menopause at work and how this framing facilitates or hinders treating problems as negotiable. Thus, the following questions guide this research.

RQ1: How do women name, blame, and claim menopause problems at work? What types of framing help women view their problems as negotiable?

RQ2: How are menopause issues at work cast as interests, rights, or power issues? How does this framing influence treating work-related menopause problems as negotiable?

Methods

Data and Participants

To ascertain how women frame menopause issues at work, we examined an online community called *Power Surge* (http://www.power-surge.com) that caters to menopausal women. Users joined the site by filling out a short registration form with their names, email addresses, and expressions of interest in the topic. We focused on a message board designated as ''Menopause Relief at Work,'' which served as a channel for women to communicate with one other about their menopause experiences in organizations.

For this study, we drew an initial sample of 697 total posts, originating from 68 unique senders that appeared from January 17, 2006 to April 16, 2007. Since we were primarily interested in negotiations on the topic, we narrowed this pool to 85 posts from 21 different users who posted comments about menopause and workplace interactions at least three times per week. To determine what constituted workplace problems, we paid close attention to the language used in the posts to identify issues and track the advice given for how to deal with them. Entries ranged from short, one sentence responses to page-length postings.

Data Analysis

In this study, we used grounded theory to identify themes or reoccurring patterns about the framing of issues—especially how parties named, blamed, and claimed them (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In each of these areas, we employed open coding to identify themes and then developed emergent categories based on axial coding. We relied on the constant comparison method to develop categories and to compare them with concepts in the extant literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994). Framing referred to how the problem was defined, how it was named, how attributions were made about it, and whether women were advised to confront the organization about the issues. To identify framing, we listed the separate issues that appeared in the postings, linked them to the threads or responses to each issue, and listed alternatives or options for how to address the problems. We then examined the issues and the advice to see if the postings cast them as interests, rights, or power. We also noted which entries referenced aging or just bodily symptoms as ways of describing the problems.

Results

Naming, Blaming, and Claiming

The first research question focused on naming, blaming, and claiming of the menopause issues that surfaced on the message board posts. These issues included such topics as time off for doctor's appointments, work schedule problems, locations of offices and desks, reprimands for appearance, temperature control at work, concerns about restroom breaks, and reactions of bosses and coworkers to menopause symptoms. Overall, they fell into two categories of naming: personal problems and organizational concerns. Personal problems highlighted professional appearance, individual behaviors, or physical symptoms, while organizational concerns focused on the workplace environment, working conditions, and supervisor or coworkers' behaviors. The two types of naming differed in the patterns of blaming and claiming that accompanied them.

Specifically, two patterns emerged in the data—ones that had implications for defining situations as negotiable. In the first pattern, women posting on the message board framed issues as personal problems or individual struggles. Responses to these postings continued to frame issues as individual problems. In the second pattern, women implied that particular issues were personal problems, but the responses to these postings reframed them as organizational concerns. The first combination focused on such problems as feeling a loss of control, concealing aging or physical symptoms of it, inability to cope, and/or rejection of self. Responses to these entries often shifted the tone of them, but kept the issues within the personal problems category. For example, entries that lamented such negative aspects of menopause as feeling humiliated or wanting to hide one's age were often recast in positive ways by urging women to reveal their physical conditions or to embrace their menopausal selves. The postings listed below illustrate the first pattern:

> BooBoolena: My boss and my colleagues are wondering why I'm more often late at work these days and just looking so sick lately. … I'm just one of two ladies in an IT department so it's really hard to get them to understand … so now I am forced to deal with my menopause symptoms and hide them by faking an illness.

> Kasper95: I know what you mean about hiding the fact that you are going through menopause. I did that for the first three years of menopause … but I came to the realization that I no longer want to hide what I am going through! For the first time I felt liberated. Embrace it.

> SuperMom062: I agree with what Luna said … I tell [my male colleagues] I am menopausal and to go easy on me!! I have found that if you make a joke out of it, it really takes the pressure off your coworkers.

Even though these responses recast the issue as positive rather than negative, they continued to treat menopause as a personal problem. This pattern implied that women should own their problems and address them through developing individual solutions. Moreover, supervisors and coworkers reinforced this blaming through attributing these problems to the female employee.

40Something: I recently had a doctor's appointment for HRT counseling and when I called in to tell my boss [that I would be late for work] … he made a snide comment about ''managing my woman troubles *on my own time*'' (emphasis added).

Resam10: I tried to talk to my boss, who was absolutely no help with what I was going through … he basically told me they were *my problems* (emphasis added).

Thus, framing menopause issues at work as personal problems led to blaming the woman, even when the message board responses tried to help the employees gain control of their work lives or feel liberated about their conditions. Of significance, this pattern of framing rarely triggered advice to confront other employees, negotiate the situation, or take organizational action. Instead, women were urged to take individual steps to address their problems or to just cope. Examples of these solutions include:

Zoom290: I use anti-aging creams, dye my hair, and change my wardrobe to look more youthful, so no one will know.

Anti-Mensi: I wear those cold packs that are supposed to stay cold for up to eight hours. … I also keep a blanket in my filing cabinet and a heater under my desk.

FrazzledGayle: I just dealt with whatever was thrown at me. Most of the women I worked with were going through the same thing and they just dealt with it. A lot of humor helps.

In effect, naming menopause issues as personal problems and offering solutions such as bringing a fan to work, wearing blazers to cover sweat stains, working out, or taking medications implicitly blamed the women and discouraged them from confronting their coworkers or supervisors about these issues.

In the second pattern of framing, women described issues as personal concerns and responses reframed them as organizational matters. This pattern altered the naming of the issues and typically shifted both the blaming and claiming of the problems to organizational solutions, as these examples illustrate:

Resam 10: I finally began a new job with a chiropractor. I am 49 … with hot flashes and sometimes severe palpitations make my heart rate go up really high for a few minutes and I feel dizzy and weak. I don't want to look like a wimp, but I'm nervous. How do you cope [with these problems] without the entire department knowing all your personal stuff??

Rendy: On really bad days where I haven't slept or feel like crying all day, I can work at home. I was able to negotiate a deal with my boss to work from home from time to time … I understand from our local chiropractor that they can often help meno symptoms. Sounds like you have an advantage.

Matia: If I were you, I would simply tell your new employer about the situation and that you might experience some symptoms at work and that you just wanted to let him know not to be alarmed.

In both instances, the framing shifted the blaming and claiming to the organizational level with advice focusing on sharing information with the new boss, negotiation options to deal with the physical symptoms, and taking advantage of the work context.

In summary, the postings that framed menopause at work as an organizational concern opened up options for negotiation. In particular, they typically triggered a set of responses that shifted the blaming away from a woman's ability to cope or reveal physical symptoms to discussing the issues with supervisors. Thus, the framing of a problem shaped the definition of the issue and the decision to make it an organizational matter.

Interests, Rights, and Power

Another type of framing that surfaced in the postings was identifying whether the issues or the advice reflected concerns for interest, rights, or power and to what extent casting them in one of these categories contributed to defining the problem in a negotiable way. Of the issues that were cast as organizational problems, the majority surfaced as interest-based concerns. Discussions of underlying needs led to generating alternatives to address such problems as work schedule flexibility, shifting to part-time work for a short time, working from home occasionally, adjusting thermostats, creating a bank of shared annual leave, moving office locations, and talking with supervisors.

Some of these suggestions even generated creative solutions. For example, Gee Gee shared a story in which her doctor recommended natural sunlight to help relieve menopause symptoms. Since she worked 70 hours per week, she and her colleagues moved the lunch table near a window to provide more sunlight. Her boss would walk through the room and ask, "Who moved this?" and then ask folks to move it back into the center of the room. Then, "After he left the room, us women, who are all menopausal, moved it back to the window," added Gee Gee. In great humor, they continued this round-about game for months.

Another posting demonstrated how a woman stood up for her interests and avoided being insulted by her boss. Her response to this situation helped her get something "out of the deal" as opposed to "taking it":

> Zoom 290: One of my bosses wrote me a note on a post-it [about] how "unsightly" my sweat stains under my arms were and … it's in my best interest to either wear a blazer over it or find "another way to manage my problem." I was so upset that I wrote her a letter back [saying], "I would be more than happy to address "my problem" by wearing a blazer over my blouses just as soon as she paid me more money to accommodate my new wardrobe." That pretty much shut her up! She hasn't bothered me since and in fact, recommended me for a raise this past month! … now, I'm sitting pretty with an extra $400/month!

Discussions about interest-based problems also helped women determine whether to engage in a negotiation or to file a complaint. In particular, Solla Luna described a problem in which her boss kept putting tons of work on her desk while she was gone on restroom breaks. Frequent urination was her worst menopause symptom, given that she made over 12 trips a day to the restroom. The responses to this entry asked when the situation started, how long she had worked for this supervisor, and how communicative her boss was with her. This discussion culminated with a decision to confront him, tell him about her problem, engage in negotiation about work allocation, and make it clear she knows what is going on.

Issues framed as rights-based problems were those labeled as abusive, inappropriate, or potentially discriminatory. Interesting, two types of rights-based postings appeared. Entries that focused on age discrimination were quickly reframed as positive, with statements like, "Don't be afraid of your age. Embrace your croniness! Who cares what your coworkers think! You can't be fired … that would be age discrimination" (Zoom290).

In contrast, postings that focused on a coworker or a supervisor's derogatory reactions to menopause symptoms were framed negatively and elicited calls for outside interventions. The responses to these postings helped women determine how to name the problem and what actions to take. For example:

> 40Something: My boss told my male colleagues that I was not coming into work because I'm going through the dreaded menopause years. I heard rumors that I was being called a "spinster" … he questions every time I need a day off, even though I told him that I have saved up tons of sick time during my 22 years with the company … I am really stuck because I love my job and my coworkers.

> RegLove 49: Have you tried talking to your boss? Sometimes just pouring your heart out and being totally honest can really help remedy the situation … tell him how hurt you are feeling…

> Rendy: I am sorry to say this, but that is terrible advice, Reg! Going to her boss and telling him how "hurt" she is only sets her up for disaster and even more mistreatment. I say, you go to Human Resources (HR) and file a complaint against him.

In these excerpts 40Something felt torn between labeling the situation as abuse or as fear of losing her job. The two responses proposed different names for the problem, labeling it either a boss–employee relationship issue or as a work climate concern. In her response to these posts, 40Something embraced the rights frame, writing, "Thanks, ladies … I see both sides but I have decided to go to HR and deal with the issue. My boss is completely uncaring and uncompassionate."

Another scenario that was quickly labeled as a rights-based issue referred to an embarrassing comment about a woman's physical appearance:

> Kollete12: Have you ever been embarrassed at work? … A male coworker actually told me that my sweat stains were unsightly and that if I wanted to uphold a professional appearance, I might think about not wearing silk blouses … I should excuse myself to the ladies' room to "fix" myself up.

> Gee Gee: What you have been experiencing at work is *discrimination*. You need to go to HR at your work and talk with someone about this. If it were me, I would tell the higher-ups about his behavior. Explain that you deserve respect from all employees.

Gee Gee's post renamed the comment about physical appearance as a rights issue that shifted the claim and opened this problem to negotiation. Thus, in the rights-based framing, women used such labels as "abusive work climate," "inappropriate behavior," "disrespectful," "unprofessional treatment," and "totally out of line" to name issues as potential discrimination. Ironically, workplace reactions to bodily symptoms were more

readily labeled discrimination than were scenarios about aging in the workplace and losing one's job—issues protected by legal mandates.

Naming a problem in ways that evoked a sense of agency also characterized rights-based issues. Framing issues with a sense of agency cast them in ways that women could control or take action to change (Kolb & Williams, 2000). Two responses to Kollette12's entry above illustrated how agency differed regarding this framing:

> Solla Luna: What you are describing is definitely abusive and totally out of line! … It isn't just men being men! Men, women, old, young, no one should talk or treat you that way!! … And who cares if your blouse has a small sweat stain under the arm? Cover it up with a jacket!

> RoundRobin: To add, I definitely don't let fellow coworkers bring me down about my symptoms or my menopause. At my job, we celebrate our menopausalness!! A group of women on my floor affectionately refer to ourselves as the ''mensi-mob!''

Both responses returned to a personal issue framing of the problem. Even though Solla Luna labeled the situation as ''abusive'' and RoundRobin emphasized the need to celebrate menopause, both entries failed to cast women with agency to negotiate. In contrast, postings that emphasized confronting coworkers, filing complaints, or taking issues to HR granted women the agency to address these workplace situations.

Women also employed power-based framing to describe interactions with coworkers. Power-based framing fell into two different categories: casting women as agents of power in contests with younger women and urging women to employ particular tactics for leveraging negotiations. Two postings depicted menopausal women as agents of power in struggles with younger women to control the temperature in their offices:

> 40Something: Well, one hot summer afternoon last year, I got up to adjust the temperature and sure enough, before I could even sit back down, this young, little thing that works on my floor gets up to set the temperature back to where it was! So I got up and readjusted it and within seconds she sets it back down to where it was … This went on for about 20 minutes [until] one of my fellow coworkers says out loud, ''this is ridiculous'' and sets the thermostat at a median temperature.

> Gee Gee: I had a similar situation … I finally asked the younger girl who insisted on making it a furnace at my work, what was her problem with me? … she scoffed at me and said that I should get a fan! … my response was that she should get a jacket … Other employees spoke up in my defense. … Finally, she gave in and now wears a jacket, but I know she is irritated every time she has to put that thing on!

Interestingly, the power framing in these scenarios capitalized on age as status and strength and cast ''younger women'' as naïve and less resourceful. Also of note, the younger workers were female rather than male employees.

Another type of power-based framing urged women to use the word *menopause* as leverage in negotiations or to offer an ultimatum to quit their jobs if they could not reach a satisfactory settlement. This ultimatum served as a Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA). Even though it was the only type of BATNA that

appeared in the message board postings, it worked effectively for several women who were highly valued workers. The following entries illustrate these types of power-based issues:

> Sybille Ruth: When I wanted an office closer to the restrooms to accommodate my many uri-nation breaks, all I had to do was mention the ''M-word'' and [my boss] immediately moved me closer to the restroom. I think any mention of menopause makes him uncomfortable.

> Round Robin: Maybe, you should try approaching your boss again and say something about how much you value your job but that you … will need to quit if they can't accommodate you. I really think if he/she hears that ultimatum from you, your boss might be more under-standing of your situation…

> Frazzled Gayle: Well, I took all of your advice and finally told them at the hospital that I needed something to give here. I made them realize that I am a valuable employee (best attendance record, best reviews, the least amount of sick time) … I told them that if they didn't come up with an alternative, I would be forced to quit. Shortly after, I found out that one of the young girls who works the early morning shift hates it and would love to have the midnight shift … my employer is actually considering it.

Another posting also highlighted the effectiveness of threatening to quit as leverage for negotiation:

> Plumeria: When my boss decided to move my desk to a little corner office with absolutely no light or sun … I went to complain and rattled off the advantages of natural sunlight for menopausal women. I then told him I would quit if he didn't provide me with better space. I think he was so shocked … that he gave me back my window and provided me with a much larger cubicle.

A response to this entry, however, called this framing into question, ''I can see myself telling him [my boss] that I plan on quitting if I don't get to keep my window and then I can hear him saying, ''so be it.'' I can't afford to lose this job'' (Rendy). Thus, power-based framing entered into the postings as options to use for negotiation advantage, but women also questioned how and whether to use these power tactics.

As evidence of the effects of these framings, about a quarter of the message board posters returned to the discussion board to report on follow-up activity and to thank members for their advice. For instance:

> Rendy: I can't thank you enough. I took your advice and talked to my boss about the office configuration. … The conversation went really well! He totally understood my plight and … we came up with a configuration for the new office space that accommodates both [of us]!

> Kollete12: Thanks for the tips … I have already made an appointment with HR for next Tuesday! … I will use all your advice! Thanks!

In general, posts that reframed personal problems as organizational matters fostered defining issues as negotiable. As these entries were reframed, they shifted the blame for problems to the work environment. Moreover, they fostered claiming the situation by encouraging women to talk with their supervisors or to file charges to correct the

problems. Specifically, these postings renamed personal problems as interest-based issues that supervisors or coworkers needed to address. Scenarios that described the body's inability to cope with night shifts, oppressively hot room temperatures, lack of natural sunlight, and frequent urination were often recast as interest-based concerns open for negotiation. As such, women were urged to confront their bosses or coworkers, take actions to address their needs, and stand up for their interests.

For circumstances in which other employees made embarrassing comments about bodily problems, like sweat stains on blouses, the postings were quickly labeled as rights issues with recommendations to file complaints or contact HR. Responses to these postings helped women challenge workplace norms and muster the courage to make waves, especially regarding work situations that seemed abusive. Power-based discussions were less common than interactions about interest and rights-based framing. Discussing power tactics also helped women see that they had options and could use menopause as leverage or refer to their BATNAs in negotiating solutions. Thus, women who were experiencing menopause at work were framed as potentially powerful rather than helpless victims of their own physical conditions.

Discussion and Conclusions

One reason that women fail to raise issues for negotiation is the gendered organizational context in which they enact their everyday lives (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). To view negotiation through a gendered lens moves beyond a simple comparison between men and women to examining the gendered nature of organizations; in this case, the role that the body plays in organizational life. Symbolically, the female body disrupts the notion of a disembodied worker (Trethewey, 1999). When menopause enters into a negotiation, the taken-for-granted routines of everyday practice are called into question.

Negotiating about the body creates even more stress than bargaining about policy matters, particularly when organizations fail to grant accommodations for physical distress (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007). Our study reaffirmed that inattention to workplace conditions aggravated menopause symptoms (Paul, 2003). Moreover, it revealed how different ways of framing menopause issues helped women see their problems as open to negotiation. Basically, women were less likely to recommend negotiation when physical symptoms were cast as personal problems that needed individual solutions. Also, they were less likely to see issues as negotiable when posted responses simply urged women to embrace their menopausal selves. This effort to shift negative fears into positive stances, however, aimed to reduce the stigma linked to menopause and to cast it as an asset rather than a liability (Reynolds, 1997).

The pattern of reframing personal problems as organizational concerns contributed the most to helping women see menopause issues as negotiable. Interest-based framing helped women sort out underlying needs, gave them feedback in deciding how to approach situations, and generated alternatives for addressing menopause problems. In rights-based framing, women typically separated concerns for age discrimination from concerns about menopause issues. For the most part, they framed age discrimination as being legally protected, even though a number of the postings included comments about

not wanting to lose their jobs or noting "women past 50 mysteriously leave the company to pursue other opportunities" (Rendy). Thus, the women did not put blind faith in legal policies, but they also did not equate age discrimination with menopause issues at work (Duncan, 2001).

Surprisingly, only one entry in the data mentioned the need for policies: "Employers can give employees maternity leave, but there is no such thing as 'menopause leave.' That just doesn't seem right to me, particularly with all the baby boomers in the workforce. … We are NOT a minority! How do we get legislation passed for this the way the Family Leave Act got passed during the Clinton era?" (Nancy). As other studies have shown, formal policies help create expectations, but the policies do not prevent discriminatory practices (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Kirby et al., 2006). The postings also demonstrated that supportive supervisors were vital to effective management of menopause problems. In this study, as in research on pregnancy leaves (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Kirby et al., 2006), supervisors depicted as "understanding," "helpful," and "offering options" made it easier to negotiate menopause situations at work.

As a forum for helping women frame menopause at work as a negotiable concern, the posts provided important inputs, ones that extended social support. In particular, the entries that seemed most beneficial to women reframed personal concerns as organizational matters, helped women uncover underlying needs, renamed issues as potential discrimination, suggested ways to exert leverage in negotiations, and constituted women as agents capable of negotiating their own problems. These entries stood in contrast to those that labeled menopause symptoms as personal issues that required individual solutions, such as bringing in a fan to work or wearing cold packs to cope with symptoms.

Examining how women negotiate second generation gendered issues is a ripe area for future research. These subtle and often invisible concerns about the body and physical problems at work are rooted in the traditional image of an ideal worker and in the separation between private and public spheres that perpetuate gendered organizational contexts. Finding ways to negotiate these issues, strive for collaborative solutions, and achieve small wins offers the potential to normalize the meaning of menopause in the workplace.

References

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender and Society*, *4*, 139–158.

Acker, J. (1992). Gendering organizational theory. In A. J. Mills & P. Tancred (Eds.), *Gendering organizational analysis* (pp. 248–260). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ainsworth, S. (2002). The feminine advantage: A discursive analysis of the invisibility of older women workers. *Gender, Work and Organization*, *9*(5), 579–601.

Ainsworth, S., & Hardy, C. (2007). The construction of the older worker: Privilege, paradox, & policy. *Discourse and Communication*, *1*(3), 295–313.

Ainsworth, S., & Hardy, C. (2008). The enterprising self: An unsuitable job for an older worker. *Organization*, *15*(3), 389–405.

Ashcraft, K. L. (2004). Gender, discourse and organization: Framing a shifting relationship. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick, & L. Putnam (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of organizational discourse* (pp. 275–298). London: Sage Publications.

Babcock, L., & Laschever, S. (2003). *Women don't ask: Negotiation and the gender divide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Barron, L. A. (2003). Ask and you shall receive? Gender differences in negotiators' beliefs about requests for a higher salary. *Human Relations*, *56*, 635–662.

Bell, E., & Forbes, L. C. (1994). Office folklore in the academic paperwork empire: The institutional space of gendered (con)texts. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *14*, 181–196.

Bordo, S. R. (1989). The body and the reproduction of femininity: A feminist appropriation of Foucault. In A. M. Jaggar & S. R. Bordo (Eds.), *Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist reconstructions of being and knowing* (pp. 13–33). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Bowles, H. R., Babcock, L., & McGinn, K. (2005). Constraints and triggers: Situational mechanics of gender in negotiation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *89*, 951–965.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge.

Buzzanell, P. M., & Liu, M. (2007). It's "give and take": Maternity leave as a conflict management process. *Human Relations*, *60*, 463–495.

Clark, S. C. (2002). Communicating across the work/home border. *Community, Work, & Family*, *5*, 23–48.

Dellinger, K., & Williams, C. (1997). Makeup at work: Negotiating appearance rules in the workplace. *Gender and Society*, *11*(2), 151–177.

Duncan, C. (2001). Ageism, early exit, and the rationality of age-based discrimination. In I. Glover & M. Branine (Eds.), *Ageism in work and employment* (pp. 25–46). Aldershot: Ashgate.

Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*, 51–58.

Felstiner, W., Abel, W., & Sarat, A. (1980–1981). The emergence and transformation of disputes: Naming, blaming and claiming. *Law and Society Review*, *15*, 630–649.

Ferguson, K. (1984). *The feminist case against bureaucracy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Gelfand, M., Major, V., Raver, J., Nishi, L., & O'Brien, K. (2006). Negotiating relationally: The dynamics of the relational self in negotiations. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*(2), 427–451.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Glover, I., & Branine, M. (2001). Introduction: The challenge of longer and healthier lives. In I. Glover & M. Branine (Eds.), *Ageism in work and employment* (pp. 3–21). Aldershot: Ashgate.

Grant, J., & Tancred, P. (1992). A feminist perspective on state bureaucracy. In A. J. Mills & P. Tancred (Eds.), *Gendering organizational analysis* (pp. 112–128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gullette, M. M. (1997). *Declining the decline: Cultural combat and the politics of midlife*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Jorgenson, J. (2000). Interpreting the intersection of work and family: Frame conflicts in women's work. *The Electronic Journal of Communication*, *10*. Retrieved September 2007, from http://www.cios.org/www/ejc/v10n3400.htm.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Kirby, E. L., Golden, A. G., Medved, C. E., Jorgenson, J., & Buzzanell, P. M. (2003). An organizational communication challenge to the discourse of work and family research: From problematics to empowerment. In P. Kalbfleisch (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 27* (pp. 1–43). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Kirby, E. L., & Krone, K. J. (2002). ''The policy exists but you can't really use it'': Communication and the structuration of work-family policies. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 30, 50–77.

Kirby, E. L., Wieland, S. M., & McBride, M. C. (2006). Work/life conflict. In J. G. Oetzel & S. Ting-Toomey (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of conflict communication: Integrating theory, research, and practice* (pp. 327–357). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kolb, D. M., & Putnam, L. L. (2005). Negotiation through a gendered lens. In M. L. Moffitt & R. C. Bordone (Eds.), *The handbook of dispute resolution* (pp. 135–149). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Kolb, D. M., & Williams, J. (2000). *The shadow negotiation: How women can master the hidden agendas that determine bargaining success*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kolb, D. M., & Williams, J. (2003). *Everyday negotiations: Navigating the hidden agendas of bargaining*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lewicki, R. J., Barry, B., & Saunders, D. M. (2007). *Essentials of negotiation* (4th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Loretto, W., & White, P. (2006). Employers' attitudes, practices and policies toward older workers. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 16(3), 313–330.

Meyerson, D. E., & Kolb, D. M. (2000). Moving out of the ''armchair'': Developing a framework to bridge the gap between feminist theory and practice. *Organization*, 7, 553–571.

Miller, V. D., Jablin, F. M., Casey, M. K., Lamphear-Van Horn, M., & Ethington, C. (1996). The maternity leave as a role negotiation process. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 8, 286–309.

Nadesan, M., & Trethewey, A. (2000). Performing the enterprise subject: Gendered strategies for success? *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 20(3), 223–250.

Nippert-Eng, C. E. (1996). *Home and work: Negotiating boundaries through everyday life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Paul, J. (2003). *Health and safety and the menopause: Working through the change*. New York: Trade Union Congress.

Putnam, L. L., & Holmer, M. (1992). Framing, reframing and issue development. In L. L. Putnam & M. E. Roloff (Eds.), *Communication and negotiation* (pp. 128–155). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Rapoport, R., & Bailyn, L. (1996). *Relinking life and work: Toward a better future*. New York: Ford Foundation.

Redman, T., & Snape, E. (2002). Ageism in teaching: Stereotypical beliefs and discriminatory attitudes towards the over-50s. *Work, Employment and Society*, 16(2), 355–371.

Reynolds, S. L. (1997). Protected or neglected: An examination of negative vs. compassionate ageism in public conservatorship. *Research on Aging*, 19(1), 3–25.

Smythe, M. J. (1995). Talking bodies: Body talk at Bodyworks. *Communication Studies*, 46, 245–260.

Spradley, J. P., & Mann, B. J. (1975). *The cocktail waitress: Woman's work in a man's world*. New York: John Willey.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273–285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sturm, S. (2001). Second generation employment discrimination: A structural approach. *Columbia Law Review*, *101*, 458–568.

Taylor, P., & Walker, A. (1998). Employers and older workers: Attitudes and employment practices. *Ageing and Society*, *18*(6), 641–658.

Trethewey, A. (1999). Discipline bodies: Women's embodied identities at work. *Organization Studies*, *20*(3), 423–450.

Trethewey, A. (2001). Reproducing and resisting the master narrative of decline: Midlife professional women's experiences of aging. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *15*(2), 183–226.

Tulle-Winton, E. (1999). Growing old and resistance: Towards a new cultural economy of old age? *Ageing and Society*, *19*(3), 281–299.

Ury, W. L., Brett, J. M., & Goldberg, S. B. (1988). *Getting disputes resolved*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Valian, V. (1998). *Why so slow?* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wade, M. E. (2001). Women and salary negotiation: The costs of self-advocacy. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *25*, 65–76.

Walters, A. E., Stuhlmacher, A., & Meyer, L. (1998). Gender and negotiator competitiveness: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *76*, 1–29.

Warren, C. A. B. (1998). Aging and identity in premodern times. *Research on Aging*, *20*(1), 11–35.

Wendt, R. F. (1995). Women in positions of service: The politicized body. *Communication Studies*, *46*, 276–296.

Jaime Bochantin is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at Texas A&M University. She completed her B.A. and M.A. at DePaul University in Chicago. Her research focuses on organizational communication with a focus on work-family conflict, gender and careers, and aging in the workplace. Her dissertation centers on work–life conflicts in organizations.

Linda L. Putnam is a Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of California-Santa Barbara. Prior to this appointment, she was a Regent's Professor and the George T. and Gladys H. Abell Professor in the Department of Communication at Texas A & M University. Her research focuses on discourse and negotiation, gender and negotiation, environmental conflicts, and negotiation framing. She is the co-editor of *Organizational Communication: Major Works* (2006*); The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse* (2004), and *Communication and Negotiation* (1992). She is a Past President of the International Association for Conflict Management and the International Communication Association and has received funding for her research from National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.