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CROSS-DOMAIN IDENTITY TRANSITION DURING LIMINAL PERIODS: CONSTRUCTING MULTIPLE SELVES AS PROFESSIONAL AND MOTHER DURING PREGNANCY

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Through our grounded theory qualitative research, we explore how women begin to construct and react to images of possible multiple selves as professionals and mothers during the liminal period of pregnancy. Our study makes a contribution to identity transition scholarship by introducing and exploring the intricacies of cross-domain identity transitions, which we define as those identity transitions that occur when an individual's established work identity must be adapted to be integrated with a change in a nonwork identity (e.g., becoming a mother). Our work also contributes to work-family scholarship by demonstrating how women begin to experience and address inherent conflicts and enrichments between their maternal and professional identities during pregnancy, long before a child is born. We do so by demonstrating how organizational and personal context color the vision a woman builds of her possible multiple selves as mother and professional.

Over the course of a work life, most individuals will experience a wide range of work and nonwork identity transitions. Identity transitions involve a process of evolution in self-definition and are often due to changes in a work role and provoked by major life events (e.g., marriage, divorce, motherhood) (Ashforth, 2001). Many organizational scholars have been intrigued with work-related identity transitions. Extensive research examines identity transitions that involve sequential movement from one distinct work identity to another. For instance, scholars have studied sequential identity transitions occurring when an individual is promoted to a management role or a person changes from one job to another (cf. Ibarra, 1992, 2007; Ashforth, 2001). Scholars have paid scant attention to "cross-domain identity transitions," which we define as those identity transitions that occur when an individual's established work identity must be adapted to be integrated with a change in a nonwork identity. This definition draws on theoretical insights from Louis, who refers to these types of transitions as "extrarole adjustments" [in which] "a change in one's life role (e.g. a family role) leads to an adjustment in orientation to another role (e.g. work role)" (1980a: 335).

Prior research on how individuals' work identities change as they take on new and different work roles cannot be generalized easily or directly to shed light on identity transitions that occur across domains for two primary reasons. First, two identities are changing at once, and the changes are intertwined and recursive. For instance, a working woman's initial pregnancy often provokes a nonwork identity transition as she starts to see herself differently—as a soon-to-be mother. The pregnancy also means that she must address the implications of becoming a mother for her already-established work identities. How she sees herself as a working person may then influence how she sees herself as a mother. As this example suggests, cross-domain identity transitions appear to differ in complexity from sequential identity transitions. Secondly, generalizations from sequential identity transition re-

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search cannot be directly made because the mechanisms provoking work identity change will likely be distinct when the source provoking identity change is a nonwork role. For instance, an assumption in models of work identity transitions is that one work identity ends when another begins (e.g., Nicholson, 1984; Ibarra, 2003). In the middle is a liminal period, which is a fluid state in which individuals are in the midst of an identity change process without work ties. In contrast, nonwork role changes do not involve the end of a work identity. Rather, the nonwork role change generates a shift in how one sees and experiences the self in an already established work role.

Recent research by Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000) explores the management of cross-domain micro role identity transitions, which are daily movements between already-established work and nonwork roles—for instance, how a working mother "takes off her work hat" when she leaves work and "puts on her mom hat" as she enters her house at night. The work and nonwork identities are assumed to be in a state of relative stability, and the identity change being navigated has to do with how the person shifts between the hats being worn at any particular time during the day by segmenting (e.g., separating) and integrating the cross-domain identities. Our interest is in understanding how a life-altering change in an individual's nonwork self often instigates a need to reorient her/his work identity. This process may include envisioning a changed sense of how to segment or integrate work and nonwork selves daily or even hourly. Yet scholars do not treat micro and macro identity change processes as interchangeable (cf. Ashforth, 2001). Thus, work on microtransitions cannot be directly generalized to our research interests.

We explore links between nonwork and work identity changes through qualitative research with 30 pregnant professional women who were first-time mothers. In light of the limits of prior research, we make several theoretical contributions through this research. First, our theoretical contribution is to demonstrate how cross-domain work and nonwork identities start to coevolve during liminal periods. In sequential conceptions of identity change during liminal periods, a person is conceived as "in between" two identities (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). In the liminal period of pregnancy we study here, women have started to experiment, navigate, and enact their new mothering identity, which will be realized for the first time in a matter of months, as they also start to imagine a new work self. A number of studies investigate how women integrate and segment new mothering identities in light of established professional identities after this liminal period of pregnancy, when they return to work after the birth of a first child (Bailey, 1999; Ladge, 2008; Millward, 2006). Scholars express much interest in these issues because motherhood often poses significant challenges to women as they navigate shifts in their professional identity after the birth of a first child and reconstruct aspects of their professional identity in response to their new life role (Ladge, 2008). However, scholars have provided limited insight as to how women start to work through issues of identity change as soon-to-be mothers, during the liminal period of pregnancy. Our research provides a rare glimpse into the ways that work and nonwork identities change and are intertwined with one another during liminal periods.

Our research makes a second theoretical contribution by offering insight into how women start to build future maternal and professional selves during this liminal period during pregnancy. Women in our study achieved varying degrees of clarity about their envisioned future identities as working mothers. Some women rejected any identity changes, some did not see a need to work through an identity change during pregnancy, and others already had actualized identity shifts. Our findings reveal that organizational and personal contexts shape pregnant women's visions of their work and mothering identities. These findings contribute to work-family scholarship that tends to support the notion that identity management and negotiation between two competing identities are socially constructed through contextual cues (e.g., Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Our research builds upon two foundational literatures on identity transitions. The first is the literature on macro and micro identity transitions at work. The second is research in the domain of work-family scholarship focused on women's experience of workplace identity change linked to pregnancy. Before discussing these literatures, we give our definitions of "identity" and "identity transition process."

Definition of Identity and the Identity Transition Process

Scholars conceptualize identity at an individual level of analysis in many ways. Here we adopt a commonly used definition of identity as a "self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question 'Who am I?' (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008: 327). Although

this definition is well accepted in organizational research, organizational scholars appear to differ in their understanding of identity as relatively stable and enduring (Levinson, 1978) or as an evolving, context-sensitive set of self-constructions (Alvesson, Ashcroft, & Thomas, 2008; Gibson, 2003; Markus & Wurf, 1987). In the latter case, identities are viewed as derived from socially constructed meanings in particular situations (Thoits & Virshup, 1997). The focus of this work is on how particular social interactions or environments may bring to light specific aspects of an individual's identity that then will have an influence on the individual's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors in those particular situations (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). In contrast, some scholars (e.g., Markus & Kunda, 1986; Ibarra, 1999) assume individuals have a great degree of identity stability and focus on macro transitions provoked by major events, such as job changes, provocative life experiences, or developmental changes. Such research explores how changes from one relatively stable self-identity to another relatively stable self-identity evoke experiences of new social roles (Schouten, 1991), shifted priorities (Ibarra, 2003), and/or overturned basic life assumptions (cf. Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Our study focuses on the complexity associated with this second focus, the more macro forms of identity change.

However, our work builds beyond the definitions of identity change found in the macro identity change literature through its focus on the experience of a life-altering, cross-domain identity transition. Ibarra defined identity transition as "the process of disengaging from a central, behaviorally anchored identity while exploring new possible selves, and eventually, integrating an alternative identity" (1992: 3). This definition of identity transition implies work identity A is replaced by work identity B. A prominent example in Ibarra's (2003) book is the transition process of a psychiatrist becoming a monk. In contrast, we assume that cross-domain identity transitions involve changes in a work identity because of an altered nonwork identity. We relax the assumption that work identity A is being altered, not abandoned, in light of a new identity, the nonwork identity, B.

In studying identity transition, Van Gennep (1960) proposed three distinct phases of the process: (a) separation, when an individual disengages from prior social roles, (b) liminality, when he/she transitions to new social roles, and (c) integration, when new social roles are incorporated into the individual's self-identity. In this study, we focus on women's experience of pregnancy, which we define as a liminal period during which a professional woman is a "threshold person" (Turner, 1969) who begins to experiment with provisional maternal and altered work identities that will take hold after the baby is delivered. We assume that many women will no longer be fully connected to their old professional identity in the same way after pregnancy. During pregnancy they are also not yet fully experiencing being working mothers, and they are likely to feel as if they have one foot rooted in an old identity without a child and one foot stepping into the new identity, which will include being both a mother and a professional. Building on the classic work on liminality of Van Gennep (1960), we expect that feelings of ambiguity, openness, disorientation, self-questioning, and indeterminacy are likely to be part of the experience many women go through. These experiences often open the door to the development of new self-understandings. We assume that during this process, an individual must reconstruct a new sense of her professional self in light of changing maternal roles, that this process begins during pregnancy, and that it is likely to continue long after the baby is born, for most women.

As explained above, we introduce an adapted definition of identity transition that can be used in cross-domain identity transition contexts, building from macro identity change literature and Van Gennep's classic work. Our definition of cross-domain identity transitions recognizes a more complex process in which an individual does not necessarily disengage fully from an old work identity, but rather, applies a new meaning to the work identity in response to a changed nonwork identity. We assume that, as do sequential identity transitions, cross-domain identity transitions may involve a lack of clarity about roles. They also may lead individuals to change their engagement level in their work identity when the nonwork identity shifts their priorities. We also assert that the liminal period in which cross-domain identity transitions occur is distinct from the liminal period in which sequential identity transitions occur. We make this distinction because the uncertainty experienced is related both to taking on a new work identity and to unforeseen changes the new identities (e.g., motherhood and work) may wreak on one another. Now that we have provided our definitions, we briefly discuss the informing literatures upon which our work builds.

Research on Macro and Micro Identity Transitions

The first literature upon which we build is organizational research on macro and micro identity

transitions at work. As discussed in Ashforth (2001: 7), the vast majority of research on identity transitions in the workplace focuses on sequential "macro role transitions," which are significant work changes, such as that occurring when a line manager transitions into a support role. Among the most influential studies is Louis (1980b), on "newcomer experiences," in which a person enters an organization, shifts from one work role to another, or experiences changes to existing work roles for the first time. As a second example, Ibarra (1999) studied the transition between organizational levels, looking at the identity construction tactics used by individuals who were making the leap to first-time managers.

The liminal state between a prior work role and a new work role is assumed to involve a lack of ties to a specific work role. Although the person may still experience a prior role-related identity as psychologically important, the role itself has ended or will soon end. The person is literally an "in-between" person—someone with no or lessening attachments to the prior relevant role, which is left behind for new work roles (Ashforth, 2001). The individual is presumed to be in a free state, separating from an identity attached to a former work role and moving toward a new identity that is attached to future roles. This research has much to offer in its focus on individuals' subjective experiences with such transitions, yet we are unable to generalize this work because of its focus on sequential work role identity changes rather than on cross-domain identity changes that do not involve a transition out of a prior work role.

Much less research concerns cross-domain transitions, but recently scholars have started to address some of these cross-domain complexities between work and nonwork identities through research on everyday micro role transitions (Ashforth et al., 2000). Interest in this relatively new area of research was spurred by a seminal article by Ashforth and colleagues (2000) exploring the notion that individuals navigate daily role and identity transitions and boundary crossings—called "micro transitions"—as they exit work and enter home roles (and vice versa) throughout any given day. This work is an important basis for our own research because it provides a theoretical platform upon which we can build our focus on how women navigate cross-domain work and maternal identities. In particular, this literature's focus on segmentation and integration across work and nonwork domains is useful. Segmented roles and identities are those whose boundaries are relatively separate from one another. In contrast, when roles and/or identities are integrated, they intersect one another in certain instances, causing the identities to become blurred. Integration can generate conflict, ambiguity, and overload (Ashforth et al., 2000). We expect that pregnant women are at the cusp of having to build an appraisal of their own cross-domain identities and having to cope with the inherent challenges attached to "changing hats" that they will face after their children's birth. We also anticipate that women's preferences about the segmentation and integration of their new identities and roles will influence these identity changes. Women often start to make decisions during pregnancy, such as childcare choices, that influence their segmentation or integration strategies as they prepare to face potentially competing maternal and work roles. We can therefore build beyond the micro identity transitions work by showing how pregnant women start to orient themselves toward segmenting and/or integrating their new identity as mother with their preexisting identity as professional. The visions they develop during pregnancy shape how they will navigate micro role transitions between work and family after the baby is born.

Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Identity Transitions

A second literature that informs our research has investigated the interactions between work and family identities and the experiences of working women who are pregnant. Though there is some overlap in this literature with the research on micro identity transitions, its primary theoretical home is the field of work-family integration. A key work-family research insight upon which we build is that, although there is potential for work-family enrichment, whereby a person's work identity positively integrates with her/his family identity (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), this is not the case for many working mothers. Being a working mother is a stigmatized identity in many cultural contexts (Gatrell, 2007; Major, 2004), especially that of women in professional occupations (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004: 701). Women must construct for themselves the ideals of good mother and good professional in light of these biases (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Further, women experience practical conflicts between their work and nonwork roles. Extensive research demonstrates that full-time working women still perform the majority of home life tasks (Bianchi, 2000). Work-life conflict results from the competition for time, resources, and emotional energy expended between work and nonwork roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). As women manage these competing devotions and demands, they experi-

ence psychological tension and work-family conflict because of occupying the two incongruent roles (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964).

Most scholars assume that the challenge of managing the tension between work and family identities begins for women after childbirth, when they transition back to work and begin a process of redefining their work roles (Bailey, 1999; Ladge, 2008; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971). As women return to work, they often struggle with feelings of inadequacy and wonder whether they can be both good mothers and good employees (Millward, 2006). Women must face these conflicting feelings and expectations if they are to achieve resolution between their work and family identities (Fursman, 2002). To establish a strong sense of self, a woman must find a way to link the dual identities that comprise a "working mother."

However, we assert that women must contend with the changes in their identities long before they transition back to work; we contend they must do so when they are pregnant, perhaps even when they begin to think about conception. Several recent studies focused on pregnancy highlight some of working women's experiences as the new mothering identity develops at that time. For example, prior research shows that women are simultaneously rewarded and punished during pregnancy for their choice to become mothers (Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007) and that women often encounter a series of mixed messages from their colleagues and organizations about their ability to manage the conflicting demands of profession and motherhood (Halpert & Burg, 1997). These messages are likely to influence how pregnant women begin to shape their identities as professionals and mothers (Ladge, 2008; Liu & Buzzanell, 2004). Although research is only suggestive, scholars still know little about how women experience the liminal nature of pregnancy in light of these challenges and how they react to the cross-domain identity uncertainties and begin to navigate the transition from "worker" to "working mother." Therefore, our goal here was to study women's experiences of the liminal period of pregnancy as they develop their new maternal identity and begin reconstructing their professional identity in light of impending motherhood. Women's vision of "working mother" may begin before pregnancy, yet we focus on pregnancy itself because it is during pregnancy that the physical and emotional changes are invoked and women's internalized assumptions about working mothers are likely to be heightened.

METHODS

This study used a grounded theory approach to gain a more nuanced understanding of how individuals experience the cross-domain identity transition process in which they move from childless professional to working mother, during the liminal period of pregnancy. Our research team had predetermined that we wanted to study pregnant women as a population, yet only later did we realize that this population offers an extreme context in which to study cross-domain identity transition processes. Scholars have long argued that theory building can best be examined in extreme contexts because the dynamics being studied are more visible (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). It is important to note that work-life research usually engages a quantitative methodology (for exceptions, see Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, and Brinley [2005] and Kreiner et al. [2009]); our study responds to a call by scholars for more qualitative research that exposes the lived work-life experiences of participants (Kreiner et al., 2009; Neal, Hammer, & Morgan, 2005).

Pilot Research Design

We began this project with a pilot study in which we conducted semistructured 60–90 minute interviews with women who were either currently pregnant with their first child or who were within six months of having given birth to their first child ($n = 10$). Participants had a minimum of three years professional work experience and were planning to return to work following maternity leave. Our questions surfaced women's reactions to and understanding of their work experiences while pregnant. All pilot interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim.

Preliminary findings from the pilot that influenced full study design. On the basis of our pilot research, we decided that for the full study we needed to further refine the population we would study, the conceptual frame of our research, and the questions that comprised the interview protocol. We learned from the pilot study that we needed to focus on a precise segment of working women. Pilot study data suggested that women who deeply defined themselves with respect to their professions face a unique burden of integrating work and nonwork identities (Lambert & Waxman, 2005). Thus, we decided to focus our attention on women who had at least three years of professional experience.

The interview transcripts also suggested that pregnancy represented a different kind of identity

transition process than organizational scholars typically study, because participants experienced ambiguity and uncertainty about the impacts of their emerging maternal identity on their professional identity. We returned to the literature on identity transitions and recognized that pregnancy represents a liminal space. Thus, we modified our full study to focus exclusively on pregnant women, excluding those who had given birth.

The final key learning from the pilot study related to factors shaping women's experiences during this liminal period. Pilot study findings indicated that experiences were influenced by personal and work-related contexts. We introduced new questions in our interview protocol that enabled us to capture more information on women's personal and pregnancy histories as well as on the influence of organizational context.

Second-Stage Study

For the second stage of the study, we interviewed an additional 25 professional women, all of whom were pregnant with their first children. Combining the second-stage interviews and the pilot study interviews with pregnant women resulted in a total of 30 participants. All of the women had a minimum of three years of professional work experience and intended to return to work following maternity leave (at least 30 hours a week). Since we anticipated that women's experiences might differ depending on their stage of pregnancy, we stratified our sample into 8–20 weeks pregnant, 21–30 weeks pregnant, and 31–40 weeks pregnant. We anticipated differences across stages of pregnancy with respect to how pregnancy symptoms and bodily changes impacted work, how participants perceived others' reactions to them at work, and how women prepared for the birth of their children, in light of their work commitments. We were unable to interview women who were fewer than 8 weeks pregnant because women at this stage did not volunteer for the study. However, analysis suggested no discernable differences pertinent to identity change linked to pregnancy stage. Therefore, we did not organize our data on the basis of pregnancy stage; rather, we focused on building themes having to do with changes in identity. We also attempted to stratify the sample by age and organizational tenure, assuming that older women and those who had been in their positions for a significant period of time might have different experiences. However, these stratifications did not produce any compelling distinctions either.

We identified research participants using a snowball sampling technique, which is useful for researching a unique population that is difficult to access through traditional means (Heckathorn, 1997). We initially identified participants by publicizing the study on two university alumni networks and leveraging our personal and professional networks. Participants often referred us to other women who met our sampling criteria. We identified approximately one-third of the participants through alumni networks, another third through our own networks, and the last third through referrals given to us by research participants.

A summary of demographic data for the research participants can be found in Table 1. The women in our sample held various professional roles, including small business owner, manager in a for-profit or not-for-profit organization, physician, lawyer, consultant, and college professor. The average age was 37 (range, 29–40). This average age is higher than the U.S. national average for a first birth, 25.1 years (Lawler-Dye, 2010). All of the women in our study were highly educated and lived in a northeastern U.S. state known for above-average-age first births. Both of these factors contribute to a higher age at first birth than the national average (Matthews &

TABLE 1
Participant Demographic Characteristics

Age	Mean = 37, range = 29–40
Race	82% Caucasian
	15% Asian/Asian American
	3% Multiracial
Stage of pregnancy	23%, 10–20 weeks
	43%, 21–30 weeks
	33%, 31–40 weeks
Organizational level	50%, individual contributor
	50%, manager or above
Organizational tenure	Approximate mean = 5; range = 1.5–15 years
Professional tenure	Approximate mean = 12; range = 7–18 years
Work role examples	Law clerk, project/product manager, IT specialist, consultant, firm partner, financial planner
Industry examples	Accounting, consulting, law, biotechnology, high technology, education, social work, nonprofit, small business owner

Hamilton, 2009). Although our sample is lacking in some kinds of diversity (e.g., nonprofessional women), our sampling approach allowed us to reduce some potential variation (Patton, 1990) so that we could examine a particular kind of extreme experience.

Interview Protocol

One of the three authors conducted each of the semistructured 60–90 minute interviews. Our interview protocol covered three general themes. A first set of questions asked participants to share their thoughts and ideals related to work and pregnancy in light of their personal and professional backgrounds. Additionally, in this section, following presentation of the identity definition developed by Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004), we asked women to reflect on their past, present, and future as professionals, pregnant women, and working mothers and the thoughts, feelings, and images that arose for them related to these identities (e.g., "Please give us a picture of your personal history. What aspects of your youth and history have formulated your views of motherhood? Your career? Growing up, how did you envision your life? What were some of your dreams? How would you compare them to how things have turned out? What influences or events from your culture do you feel have shaped your professional experiences? Give us a picture of your aspired/future self. What is your most feared image of the pregnant working woman? The working mom?").

A second set of questions probed women's experiences with their pregnancy and being pregnant at work. Specifically, women were asked to discuss their feelings about getting pregnant and sharing this news at work (e.g., "Tell the story about when you first found out that you were pregnant. What were your first reactions? What were you thinking and feeling? Can you tell us a bit about how you became "public" about your pregnancy?"). A third set of questions explored specific experiences women had had in the workplace related to their pregnancy as well as their strategies for managing their pregnancy in the workplace (e.g., "In general, do you feel that being pregnant is influencing how others treat you as a professional woman? In the past month or two, have you encountered any unusual situations or conversations related to your pregnancy at work? In the past month or two, have you had any encouraging or empowering situations with someone at work related to your pregnancy? Are there specific strategies/tactics you are using right now to manage others' impressions of you at work as a pregnant woman?").

Participants were ensured of confidentiality. We explained to participants that our goal was to learn more about how women experience and manage their pregnancy identity in an organization context. Participants also were given a choice to opt out of the interviews if at any time they felt uncomfortable during them. None of our research participants opted out.

Data Analysis

All of the interviews were tape-recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim. Each transcription was 40–60 pages long, and together they totaled approximately 1,200 pages. We coded the data as they were collected and used grounded theory techniques to analyze them (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These methods are best used to delve deeper into an unknown phenomenon and to develop further understandings of existing theoretical perspectives (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Our goal was to expand knowledge on the liminal period and to build new theory around cross-domain identity transitions. A set of general questions (How do women experience moving through pregnancy? How do women manage their work identity while pregnant?) guided our research, but as we moved through the data, we were open to making adjustments to these questions and emergent coding categories based on our own interpretations of the data and the interpretations of respondents. Thus, we analyzed the interview data using an iterative approach of moving back and forth between the coded data and existing theory. We did this by following a multistep analytic approach to move from the concrete data toward a conceptual understanding of the data. This approach is similar to that taken by other qualitative researchers concerned with identity (i.e., Pratt et al., 2006; Kreiner et al., 2009). These analytical steps are discussed in more detail below.

We began the analysis by developing a set of codes that emerged inductively from the interviews and evolved as the three researchers worked through a process of coming to shared agreement on the codes. We independently read all of the interview transcripts but began by initially coding a subset of them. Once each had completed the coding independently, we compared our individual coding schemes. During these meetings, we consolidated codes that were similar and developed a list of codes to be included in the next iteration of coding. When two of the coders disagreed, the third coder would step in and help decide how the coded passage should be treated. We include an example of a coded segment of data in the Appendix to

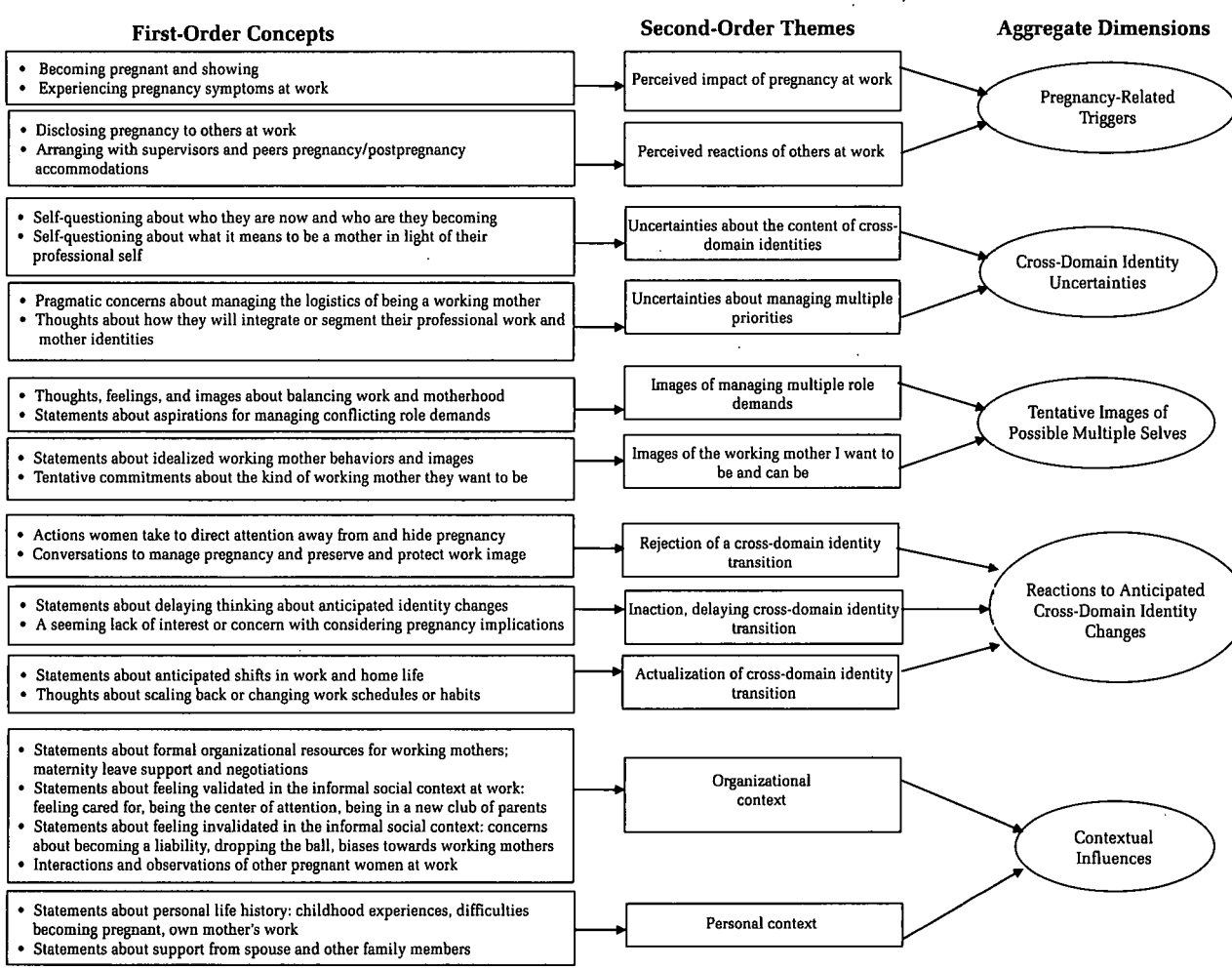
better illustrate this process. Our discussion of the passages and our coding resolved disagreements and assisted in our theory building. Following procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), we went through several iterations of interview transcript analysis, comparing our codings, returning to the literature, and then recoding. After coding 29 interviews, we felt we had reached the point of theoretical saturation because no new codes were being generated (Locke, 2001). Subsequently, we still had one more interview scheduled, so we conducted it anyway to ensure theoretical saturation and as a courtesy to the research participant. Given the many iterations and emergent nature of the codes and analysis, we were not able to test for interrater reliability. However, the rigor of our coding process and the multiple perspectives offered by three coders serve to minimize bias that may have existed in the analysis.

We derived the main thematic categories presented in our final analysis by linking related subthemes in our codebook. In an effort to be transparent, we present our coding in Figure 1. The figure illustrates how we moved from key themes to more conceptual categories. Although the diagram suggests linearity, our data analysis process was highly iterative, as we moved between the phases of coding, literature review, and conceptualization of the data. This analysis created the basis for the conceptual framework that is presented in the following section.

FINDINGS

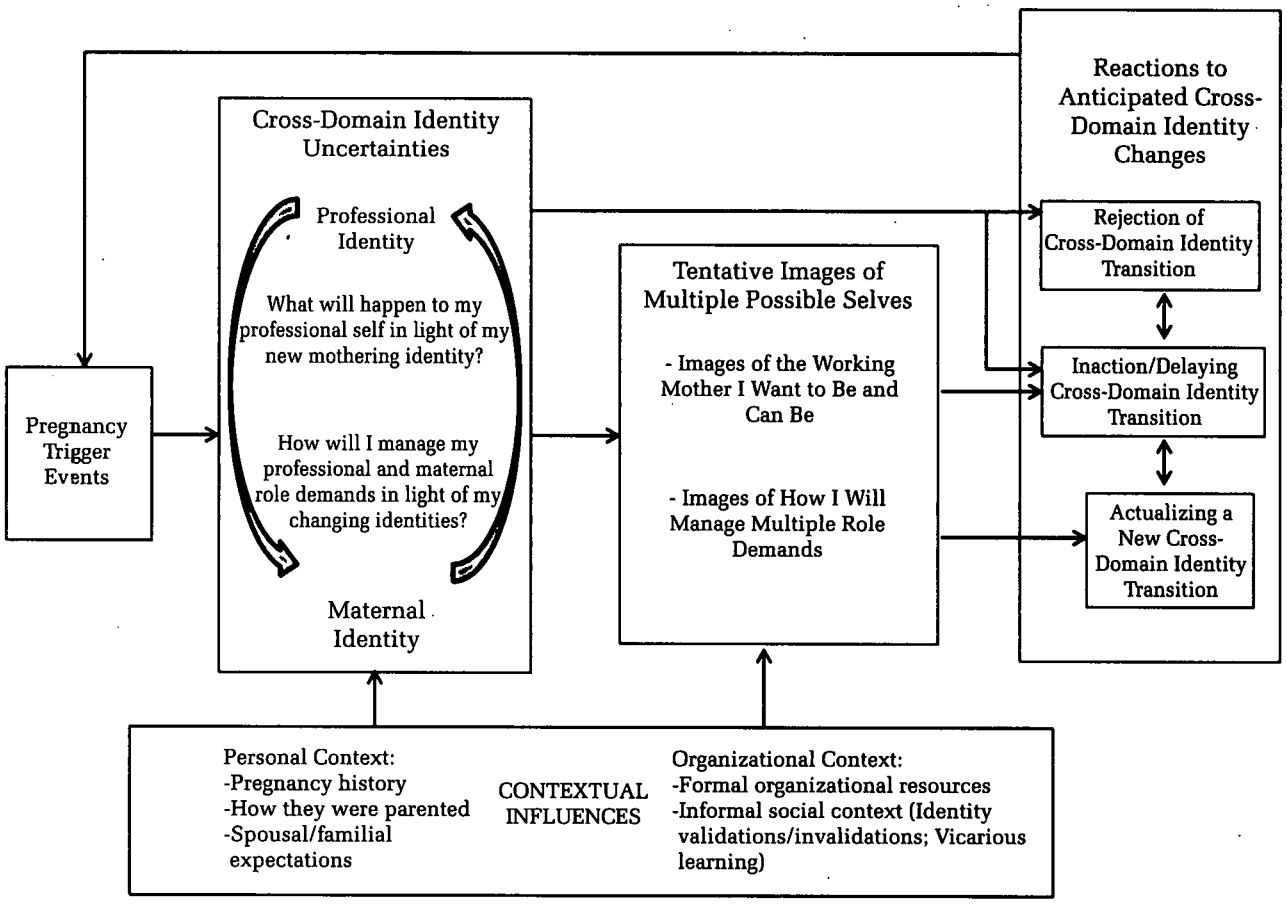
Our findings show how professional working women experience a cross-domain identity transition when they become pregnant for the first time. As shown on the left side of Figure 2, we found that

FIGURE 1
Data Structure[a]



[a] Our approach to this data structure diagram was inspired by Corley and Gioia (2004) and Gioia and Thomas (1996).

FIGURE 2
Cross-Domain Identity Transitions



the pregnancy acts as a triggering event and evokes cross-domain identity uncertainties. In an effort to begin tc resolve these cross-domain uncertainties, many (but not all) women in our study started to build provisional visions of their multiple possible selves as working mothers. Lastly, we found that women had different reactions to the prospect of actualizing multiple identity change. We saw three distinct reactions (see Figure 2, right-hand side). First, some women reacted by actively *rejecting* their emerging identity as a mother. Second, some women reacted by *delaying* working through identity changes. And finally, some women embraced the visions of identity and role changes they saw as inevitable, thereby *actualizing* a new sense of themselves as professionals in light of their emerging maternal identity.

We additionally found that personal and organizational context shape the visions women built of identity change. Finally, we found that the cross-domain identity transitions are iterative. Women often appeared to cycle through the process repeatedly when they experienced new pregnancy-related events in their work and organizational lives. We discuss this process in detail below, beginning by exploring the relationship between cross-domain identity triggers and uncertainties provoked during pregnancy.

Cross-Domain Identity Triggers and Uncertainties Provoked during Pregnancy

The initial phase of any identity transition is often triggered by a life-changing event. When organizational scholars study sequential identity transitions, this initial trigger is a change in work role that often leads to detachment from or suspension of that role as an individual searches for a new work self; our study, however, shows that the trigger for the start of a cross-domain identity transition is a nonwork event that leads to questioning the existing work identity, not suspension of that identity. Specifically, in the context of our research, cross-domain identity triggers lead women to begin to conceptualize their existing professional identity differently in light of their emerging maternal identity. Therefore, the pregnancy sets in motion multiple feelings of uncertainty about who

they are becoming as mothers and how this emerging maternal identity will impact their existing role and identity as professionals.

Our research shows that first pregnancy, as a bridge to motherhood, is a moment in a professional woman's life in which she faces uncertainties about who she is becoming as a mother and as a professional in light of her mother-to-be status. Although uncertainties typically peak during liminal periods of identity change, we found that the uncertainties of cross-domain identity transitions are different from those that accompany sequential identity transitions. Specifically, uncertainties arose from the need to build an understanding of how a woman's existing identity (as a professional) would change in light of the new identity (as a mother) and how the two identities would be integrated and segmented in light of a new conceptualization of herself.

Becoming pregnant was one trigger of cross-domain identity transition, yet we found that other experiences throughout pregnancy triggered new identity uncertainties. Examples of these other triggers included disclosing pregnancy at work, beginning to "show" or having pregnancy symptoms that impacted the ability to get work done, and beginning to organize childcare and maternity leave arrangements. However, pregnancy itself is the most salient and important life-altering trigger; therefore, we focus on the links between becoming pregnant for the first time and two kinds of uncertainties evoked for a professional woman: (1) the content of her future self in terms of cross-domain identities (e.g., Who am I as a working mother? And who would I like to become?) and (2) how she would manage the multiple priorities of being a working mother (e.g., How will I do it all?).

Uncertainties about the content of cross-domain identities. The first type of uncertainty we identified had to do with self-questioning focused on the coherence and continuity of a woman's current professional identity in light of her emerging maternal identity. Like sequential identity changes, these uncertainties involve the most basic aspects of self-identity having to do with questions such as, Who am I now? Who am I becoming? and What does this identity mean for who I was in the past? In addition, women in our study also expressed cross-domain uncertainties about the impact their new maternal identity would have on their professional self. And, conversely, how their professional life would influence who she could be or wanted to be as a mother. All of the women we interviewed intended to return to work after their children's birth, so the uncertain intersections between their emerging maternal and professional identities were often experienced as quite pressing. This experience of uncertainty is explained clearly and succinctly in the following:[1]

> I have always been focused on my career. I certainly don't know what parenthood is going to bring in relation to my focus on my career. (021)

As this quote illustrates, this interviewee, like many of the women we spoke with, expected that pregnancy and their emerging maternal identity would alter their professional identity, but women were often unclear as to what that change would entail and the extent of the impact.

Uncertainties about how to manage the multiple priorities of being a working mother. Women also experienced uncertainties that stemmed from pragmatic concerns about managing the multiple priorities that arise for a woman who is both a professional and a mother. These uncertainties focused specifically on not knowing how to balance the competing practical demands of being a professional and a mother. Participants questioned whether they would be able to live up to their own aspirations for being a mother and a working professional, how they would handle obstacles and challenges, and in general, how they would manage the logistics (such as childcare) of being a working mother. This pragmatic uncertainty is also illustrated in the following quote:

> I don't see how it's [mothering identity] not going to be prioritized—right now—it's very conceptual in my mind as opposed to reality—but I don't doubt it's going to be prioritized. . . . I need to figure out what my game plan is going to be once I come back to work. And I still haven't like—I know my game plan for the first six months let's say—and then beyond that—I want to re-evaluate. (027)

This particular woman appeared to know what she would do initially when she transitioned back to work, but the plan became much foggier beyond the initial few months after her return. As this example demonstrates, even if some plans are in place, new mothers often face many other unanswered questions and expect that plans will often be readjusted over the longer term.

In sum, our findings suggest that the uncertainties women experience during the cross-domain identity transition process are twofold. On the one hand, women experience uncertainties about how the newly forming maternal identity will impact the current professional identity. Secondly, they

[1] The numbers in parentheses are used to identify the range of participants from which we draw our illustrations.

experience many uncertainties as to how they will integrate and/or segment the two identities, professional and mother, after the baby is born. These uncertainties were expressed during our interviews with each of our research participants. However, most (but not all) of the women in our study started to resolve these uncertainties during pregnancy. We found that this motivation to resolve the uncertainties they faced led many women to start to build images of their multiple possible selves—in other words, a sense of who they would become in the future, after their babies were born, and how they would manage the inevitable pushes and pulls between their two roles. Not all women engaged in image building, however, and later we discuss why this may be the case. But we first explore the kinds of images of their future selves as working mothers women built as part of the cross-domain identity transition process during pregnancy.

Tentative Images of Multiple Possible Selves

We saw that as a way of starting to resolve some of the uncertainty they experienced, most women in our study were engaged in producing two kinds of tentative images: (1) images of who they wanted to be and could be as mothers and as professionals once their babies came and (2) images of how they aspired to manage multiple potentially conflicting role demands associated with these identities.

Images of the working mother I want to be and can be. Many of our participants talked about the kinds of working mothers they envisioned becoming. Specifically, women reflected on two kinds of images having to do with who they wanted to be and could be as mothers and as professionals. First, they reflected on the meaning they ascribed to being a working mother. As part of this image-building process, often women implied that there were certain "kinds" of women. For instance, often women divided mothers into "homemakers" and "working-women" types. Working women types were often further divided—for instance, into those women who scaled back work for family and those who did not. In light of these assumptions, women in our study built images of who they thought they were. Were they the kind of women who could be fulfilled by being full-time mothers? Or were they the kind who needed to stay involved in a professional career? Though all the women in our study intended to return to work "after the baby," most of them appeared to need to work through these images, even the image of staying home full time. As one participant explained, "I expect it will be hard to come back, but, I know me and this goes back to when you were asking if I was a career person, I'm not a housewife at all" (014). Other women in our study also spent time coming to terms with these different images of motherhood and work. They did so by exploring different visions of career selves and mothering selves, recognizing that both played a role in who they were and who they felt they could be.

Although none of the women in our study could envision themselves as full-time homemakers, many women envisioned that they would need to alter their investments in their professional identities after they became mothers. Therefore, a second set of images had to do with the anticipated reprioritization of their identities as professionals and mothers after their babies were born. This often included visions of how they would revise their professional identity given what they envisioned for their emerging dual identity as a working mother. As one participant explained,

> I think, you know, once we have the baby I'll probably think of myself as a mother first, and a law clerk second, instead of law clerk one, and pregnant woman two. So I think, you know, that will be my occupation. I'll tell people, "Oh, by the way, I work at the U.S. Attorney's office too," but I'll also explain that I am a mother as well. (008)

The majority of the women in our study envisioned needing to scale back their professional selves in light of their new maternal identity, yet some women envisioned "having it all." In other words, they envisioned that they would continue to stay equally invested in their professional selves after they became mothers. As one participant reflected, "I see myself finding a balance between the two because I don't want to sacrifice either'" (001). The vision of equal investment was not typical among our participants and, as we discuss later, personal and contextual factors appeared to play an important role in shaping how women felt that they could invest in their professional identity in light of their new maternal identity.

Images of managing multiple role demands. Women also envisioned the practicalities of managing multiple role demands. This involved assessing the ease or difficulty of doing so in light of who they aspired to be after the baby came. Building a vision of the ease or difficulty of managing work-family commitments seemed to serve a particular purpose for women, which was to help them build a sense of their ability to navigate between their work and mothering identities in desired ways. As one research participant explained, "It will definitely be difficult working my eight or nine hours a day, and I'm going to have to figure out some, kind

of flexibility" (031). For others, the hurdle appeared less daunting:

> I definitely did my time but I look at it that my life is going to change and they say once you have a child it's the most amazing thing in the whole world. But I think that I'm a very organized person and anal—I'm going to be able to make it work. (016)

Whether the hurdles seemed high or low as they envisioned managing multiple selves, women also appeared to need to build plans for how they would manage. Therefore, women often also spent considerable time envisioning how they would like to segment and/or integrate their work and home identities. Some women envisioned a more segmented approach. For instance:

> I really do want to be a good mother, but I don't think I'm the type of mother that necessarily sets the norm. I don't see myself being at work and wishing my baby was at home with me. I think that for me I need both spheres and my goal would be to be able to really separate the two. (004)

Conversely, other women built desired images of what appeared to be a more integrated approach to managing work and mothering roles. For instance:

> I think again there's that balance that has to be created and I feel lucky that I was very much supported in my childhood and up until now so I see these roles blending well together. (010)

We didn't find many women talking specifically about how they envisioned the roles being integrated. We suspect that without the experience of having to do so in practice, women had trouble imagining a way to do that. However, although women often did not talk explicitly about how they envisioned integrating the two roles, many did express a desire to fit their emerging identity as a mother into their existing professional life in a way that the two identities and roles complemented rather than competed with one another. As we will discuss later, personal and organizational context appeared to play an important role in the visions that women created of integration and segmentation because the context within which the work-family divide must be managed shapes what women see as possible and desirable. Whether or not women build images of a more integrated or segmented approach to managing their work and mothering roles and identities, this finding suggests seeds of integration and segmentation approaches are often sown long before a baby comes.

In sum, our findings show an integral step in navigating cross-domain identity transitions is image building, in which women imagine changes to their professional identity in light of their new maternal identity. Specifically, two kinds of image building activities are observable during this stage. First, women built images around the meaning they ascribed to the kind of working mother they could be and desired to be. Second, women built images of their desired approaches to managing the multiple role demands placed on working mothers.

Reactions to the Anticipated Cross-Domain Identity Changes

We found through our analysis of the data that experiences of cross-domain identity transitions invoke diverse reactions to the actualization of identity change. Our findings suggest whether or not and how women built tentative images of their multiple possible selves had an important role to play in how they reacted to anticipated cross-domain identity changes. As we will explain next, we found that that women who did not or could not actively engage in image building were more likely either to be caught in a state of inaction, in which they delayed identity change until later (presumably after their babies came), or likely to reject the notion that any change would occur at all. Conversely, women who were facile at building new visions of their future selves seemed more prepared to start to actualize those changes during pregnancy. We explore these findings in depth next.

Rejection of a cross-domain identity transition. We found that 17 percent of the participants we interviewed rejected the notion of any cross-domain identity transition. Specifically, rather than build images of multiple possible selves, they took action to "preserve and protect" their professional selves by rejecting the notion of any change at all. Evidence in the data suggested that this reaction stemmed from the feeling that their maternal identity was threatening their professional identity. For instance, women said that they did not want to be perceived as less committed professionals if others, or if they, focused on their mothering identity during pregnancy. One of our participants expressed her feelings about having been passed over for a promotion: "I knew that to announce that I was pregnant would have an impact on them thinking of me as a candidate for his position." The same participant also expressed concern that her colleagues would alter expectations of her:

> I think when I show up [thus seeing people she primarily works with over the phone] and I'm obviously pregnant, I anticipate there being a feeling of "Oh, well she used to be someone whose whole life was her job. This was her career. We were kind of the [focus] and now, she's pregnant. Isn't that

> wonderful but, she's probably not going to be as focused." (024)

We found that women who rejected the notion of change often also downplayed their pregnancy by working harder and taking on more responsibility, and they discussed how they were doing that to stave off threats they perceived to their professional identity. For instance, one participant explained that she tried to focus people's attention on her professional identity and away from the pregnancy. She stated:

> I think when people see me and I still—and I'm walking around the floor and I've got a lot of energy and I'm just the same person I was seven months ago, that's good for women and men to see that. That this hasn't completely changed me and that I'm not all about, you know, talking just about babies. (024)

Although for some women rejecting the notion of change was a method for protecting their professional identity, for other women such rejection was a reaction to feeling threatened by the vision of themselves as mothers (regardless of implications for their work selves). They dealt with this fear by rejecting any vision of a mothering identity. For example:

> I'm not a housewife at all, the weekend comes to an end and if I haven't been doing something special, I'm ready to get out of the house again. I don't want to look at the laundry, cleaning, I don't want to deal with it. Part of being home with the baby, it's not stated but, it's going to be, so while you're home maybe you can take care of some of these things. I hate it. I just don't identify with it. . . . If I'm home I really need to think about these things. I need to start being a mom and that's a huge change. . . . I know I need to think about it but it just stresses me out. (016)

Inaction: Delaying a cross-domain identity transition. Twenty-seven percent of participants reacted by keeping their options open and putting off working through identity changes until later. We label this reaction *inaction* because, as one participant aptly explained, she would "figure it out when she gets there" (021). Another participant, who was nearing the end of her pregnancy, explained: "I'm just going to wait and see. . . . I think I'm putting off the whole dealing with work thing, I mean I have to figure out how much time I have off and stuff. . . . I really need to start planning but it's kind of like, oh yeah, that'll change things" (014). As this quote illustrates, unlike rejection, in which the notion of identity change is denied all together, for some women inaction involved procrastination in which women delayed figuring out identity questions until later. There may have been many reasons that women wanted to push off dealing with change until later. For instance, as the prior quote suggests, some women in this category were uninterested in or lacked a sense of urgency about the need to work through identity issues at this time. For other women, feeling uncertain about the future was scary, and they reacted by not addressing the issues that scared them most. And, for still other women, a state of inaction represented their feeling that their identity as professionals would not change as a result of having a baby. As one participant explained,

> I probably haven't given it as much intellectual analysis as maybe other women have. I'm aware and I'm interested in reading about things, but . . . I'm thirty-six this year. I feel like I have a sense of identity. I don't feel like I'll be threatened by a child taking my identity away from me. (009)

As this quote illustrates, women who did not see any disparities between their current and future selves were not provoked to take action to manage the cross-domain identity transition.

Finally, it is interesting to note that six of the eight participants whose response to their cross-domain identity transition was inaction were in their third trimester. One reason for this distribution may be that women in their third trimester express a wait-and-see attitude based in a feeling of inevitability and a sense that the baby's delivery is imminent.

Actualizing a new cross-domain identity. Finally, the majority of the women in our study (57%) were starting to actualize their new cross-domain identity. For all of the women in this category, the reaction of *actualization* was provoked by the images of multiple possible selves they were envisioning. For some of the women, this vision had women prioritizing their maternal identity over their professional identity. These women were already starting to actualize their new selves in pregnancy by investing more in their emerging maternal identity and subtly divesting from their professional identity to some extent. Other women envisioned this multiple identity as one of balance, so as they began to invest in their maternal identity they also sought to hold their existing professional identity constant. Next, we explore these ideas in depth.

First, we found that women were actualizing a new dual identity in which the mothering identity was prioritized over the professional identity. Women who exhibited this approach to actualization had already started to relax their commitment to their professional identity in order to build their emerging maternal identity. Underlying this form

of actualization was a sense that one could not "do it all" and that the eventual integration of professional and maternal identities would not be a balanced coexistence. These women felt that their professional identity would need to play a less salient role in their self-concepts for them to give enough time and attention to their maternal identity. As such, these women accepted, with varying levels of self-regret, the need to partially divest from their professional identities to make way for their new maternal self.

This form of actualizing took on many forms but was predominantly expressed as a need to scale back or alter one's current approach to work. For example, one woman explained,

> I feel like I'm not going to be able to—my career being number 4 [referring to a rating given earlier on a 1–5 scale]—It will have to go down. And that might have to take a back burner for you know, I mean, how many years, 18? (004)

Beyond making adjustments to the way they were thinking about their professional identity, these women were also considering the structural changes that would need to be made to their work lives in terms of hours worked, travel, evening meetings, etc. One participant explained, "I definitely need to make adjustments; and I won't be able to work as many hours" (031). Another participant noted that, already in her pregnancy, she was unable to do the all the traveling that was a part of her required work role. She noted that if she couldn't travel now, how could she hope to travel after she had her child? She concluded by stating that it was obvious that she would not be able to be the superstar employee she'd been in the past, and she started tearing up in the interview, saying that though she realized this outcome was inevitable, the realization made her feel that she wasn't living up to her own and others' aspirations for "who she could have been" as a professional (009). Although committed to this actualization of her emerging cross-domain identity, this woman's emotional and cognitive response shows her struggles with accepting her changing professional identity.

Second, we found that other women were actualizing a new identity of balancing maternal and professional identities. These women hoped to invest in their emerging maternal identity while still maintaining the same investment in their current professional identity. The eight women in this category talked about the importance of preserving their professional identity because, even though they felt invested in their emerging maternal self, they had worked hard and were not ready or willing to give up their professional identity. For example, one participant explained that, although she understood there would be compromises, she was still committed to equally maintaining her career. In her words,

> I love what I do. But I definitely know there's going to be a compromise. I definitely feel I will be more of a 40-hour mom. And do work from home. And go for that balance. Again as I mentioned earlier, I've waited so long for this. And this is something I want so desperately. But still, my career is very important to me and I want to maintain that career. But try to find the balance between the two. (013)

Important to this reaction is the notion that it is possible to invest in a maternal identity while preserving the professional identity. For example, one participant, a 30-year-old estate planner, felt confident that, because modern society encourages working women and because her workplace was highly supportive, her emerging identity as a mother interfering with her professional identity would not pose a significant challenge. All of these women ranked their careers as highly important to their overall identity but were also excited about their emerging mothering identity. Additionally, unlike the women with the rejection and inaction reactions, these women were less likely to feel that their professional identity was threatened by their being pregnant. They really did feel that they could "do it all"; however, they self-defined "all."

How Organizational Context and Personal Context Shaped Women's Tentative Images of Multiple Possible Selves in Cross-Domain Identity Transitions

Our data suggested that tentative images of possible multiple selves produced during cross-domain identity transitions are largely influenced by two factors: (1) the organizational context in which women work and (2) the personal context of their lives. These tentative visions form the basis for women's reactions to cross-domain identity changes that they face during pregnancy. Next, we explore how both organizational and personal context shape the tentative images that women produce during cross-domain identity transitions.

Aspects of organizational context shaping women's tentative images for themselves as working mothers. For the women in our study, organizational context proved to be a significant influence on the tentative images of themselves they built during pregnancy. Specifically, we found that particular aspects of organizational context signaled information about the types of working mothers that were more desirable and acceptable in an

organization and, additionally, how easily women would be able to integrate their professional and emerging maternal identities, each of which would likely be competing for their time and attention. We found that two aspects of organizational context had an influence on the tentative working mother images women produced during pregnancy: (1) perceived formal organizational resources for working mothers and (2) informal social context in the form of social interactions with others at work that signaled how these others viewed the women's pregnancy and future motherhood.

Perceived formal organizational resources refer to participants' perceptions of the formal practices or policies provided by their organizations related to pregnancy, maternity leave, and work-life management. Women who saw richer resources available through flexible scheduling, maternity leaves, nursing rooms, and so on often felt that they would have an easier time balancing the competing pulls of their maternal and professional selves. We surmise from our data that participants in such organizations experienced that working mothers were valued and understood. We had the opportunity to interview several women from an organization that had undergone an extensive organizational change in order to be more supportive of working mothers. All of the women we interviewed commented about this organization's family-friendly culture and policies and how they expected to be fully supported as working mothers. As one participant stated, "I think conscientiously because I have such great support, Company XX has assumed that I can make it work. I can find a way to make it work" (021). These women had a much clearer vision of their future selves as easily integrating their lives inside and outside of work as working mothers.

We use the term *informal social context* to refer to the subtle validations and invalidations women of themselves as professionals with emerging maternal identities that women received in interactions with others at work. To be validated meant that others appeared to approve of their decision and support them in their future status as working mothers. Invalidating interactions felt unsupportive and signaled that others disapproved of a woman's pregnancy and/or future as a working mother. Women told many rich stories about daily interactions that signaled how others were starting to see them as professionals in light of their emerging maternal identity. Many women discussed invalidating interactions that signaled that they were losing legitimacy as professionals in light of their emerging maternal identity. One of our research participants described a series of interactions she had with her staff members:

> I mean definitely a few of my staff members are like "Well how are you going to do that?" And I was like "I don't know, we'll figure it out when it happens." I mean [they were] not just being a jerk about it, but they were just kind of wondering "how are you going to do that and this." I'm like, "It's called babysitter, I don't know, we'll figure it out, don't worry about it, don't stress me out." (016)

It was not necessarily what was said in interactions such as the one above, but rather how women ascribed a deeper meaning to such comments, internalizing them as something suggestive or as a passing of judgment with respect to their ability to fulfill their professional roles given the role as a future parent.

Conversely, other women felt that informal interactions validated them and their choices. These women saw validation in how well they were treated. For example, one woman said:

> Something very minor, but if we have a company meeting, a staff meeting, and they order lunch. They'll ask me what can you eat, what can you not eat, things like that. Whereas obviously they wouldn't really do that if I wasn't pregnant. Or they're very conscious of if we have to go somewhere for a staff meeting—the distance between the offices and things like that. (028)

Women also felt supported by the special treatment, attention, and collective wisdom about being a working parent they were getting from coworkers;

> I think it's given me positive attention if anything . . . I just notice, especially my female coworkers and senior executives are sending me [congratulatory] e-mails. Like I said, people have been very supportive. (027)

Still others felt validated because they felt their peers, supervisors, and/or clients started to build closer relationships with them:

> I'm validated. It's funny because I was talking to a woman on Friday about her son, who is fantastic. And she said, you know, "Do you have a baby? Do you have a son or daughter?" I said, "Actually, I have one on the way" . . . and the conversation—and she was great before that, but once I said that the conversation completely changed, and it was, "Oh, you're going to love this child, just like I love mine." And, you know, it's funny when you say things like that. So you're right, you know, it's almost I'm part of the club now. (012)

Women also discussed informal social cues gleaned by observing what happened to other pregnant women or working mothers in their workplaces. Simply learning about others' experiences and hearing stories shaped the women's sense of the challenges of balancing their changing identi-

ties and served as an indirect source of validation or invalidation. For example, an associate in a management consulting firm explained:

> I have seen the partners do it, and I said to myself, you know, if they can do it in such a demanding profession, and—even, I have seen a couple of people that haven't worked on my team, but have worked within this organization, at levels below me, and they have been able to do it. It is definitely something that is achievable. So, yes, I would think it is more of an influential thing, of the people around me, kind of observing everyone else around me being able to do it. (008)

Together, our findings demonstrate that a woman's perceptions of the formal structures available in her organization for work-life integration and her experiences of subtle (and not so subtle) validations and invalidations matter to how she envisions herself as a working mother. The organizational context signals who she should be and can be as a future working mother. She also assesses how easy or difficult it will be to balance her potentially competing identities in terms of the resources available and her observations of other working mothers' experiences. Subtle interactions send signals about how her leap into motherhood is starting to impact others' views of her as a professional and a person. In these ways, the organizational context appears to shape the images a woman builds of herself as a working mother by limiting or expanding her sense of how she can or will want to invest in each identity, the implications of one identity in light of the other for her legitimacy in the workplace, and how easy or difficult it will be to manage the practicalities of being a working mother after the baby comes.

Aspects of the personal context of women's lives shaping women's tentative images as working mothers. In addition to organizational context, we found that three aspects of personal context shaped women's tentative images as working mothers: (1) pregnancy history, (2) how they were parented, and (3) spousal/familial expectations. First, we saw that pregnancy history influenced how women were beginning to think about the relationship between their mothering and professional identities. On the one hand, a number of the women we interviewed were older first-time mothers who had experienced some degree of difficulty getting and staying pregnant. Several of the women in our study had experienced one or more miscarriages:

> I miscarried twice, once very late in the pregnancy. So, the worry associated with this pregnancy. . . . It is something that we have been trying for a very long time. So, I think that emotional component has been distracting. (030)

Their experiences made salient the importance of how they envisioned themselves as mothers and how they were thinking about prioritizing their maternal and professional identities during pregnancy in anticipation of the future. We also found that for nearly all of the women we spoke with, how they were parented—and in particular their own mother's work status—shaped how they began to conceptualize themselves as working mothers and how they would prioritize their work and nonwork identities after their babies came:

> My mom worked as far back as I can remember . . . and, I consider her a very strong independent role model. . . . Growing up, I really didn't feel like I was going to be a mom. . . . I didn't think that was something that I was going to be interested in . . . and, I wouldn't say I was career focused but, I was focused on myself and you know reaching goals that were important to me. . . . I think you grow up and you realize that you can be career focused and also have a baby. (004)

As this quite illustrates, we found that women whose mothers were involved in paid work often felt more comfortable about how they would balance the pushes and pulls of work and maternal identities and roles. Having a working mother provided a road map that these women learned from as they began to form their own ideas of how they might integrate their professional and mothering identities.

Finally, most women were not making the decisions about how to prioritize their identities on their own. They were also influenced by preferences of their family members and spouse:

> My spouse is very supportive . . . and he is so proud of me and the fact that I've been promoted and recognized for the work I've done, and he's probably going to be the one that stays home. . . . He feels so strongly . . . that I have gotten to this position and I should be able to enjoy it, enjoy the hard work that I've put into it. . . . My family feels the same. (024)

This participant had strong spousal support for her professional identity as well as support for the work of taking care of the baby. This support made it easier for her to focus on her professional identity and to begin to establish how she might prioritize her professional identity relative to her work identity.

In summary, women's pregnancy history, their own mother's experiences, and spouse and familial support also shape women's tentative images of multiple possible selves as mothers and professionals. These personal factors expand or place limits

on their changing senses of self by shaping how much they can or want to continue to invest in their professional identity in light of soon-to-be motherhood status, and what is desirable and possible as they seek to integrate and segment their future dual identity as working mothers. In this way, the tentative images of multiple selves they produce are not just self-creations but rather derived from their background, the voices of parental role models, and their spouses and families.

DISCUSSION

This research explores first-time pregnant professional working women's experiences of cross-domain identity transitions. We found that women experienced their nonwork identities as soon-to-be mothers as having implications for their identities as professionals. We develop a model that illustrates the experiences of cross-domain identity transitions in which these anticipated changes begin. This model demonstrates that pregnancy acts as a triggering event and evokes cross-domain identity uncertainties focused on the impact of an emerging maternal identity on a woman's professional identity. To deal with these uncertainties, many of the women in our study started to build provisional visions of their multiple possible selves as working mothers. Finally, we saw three distinct reactions to the uncertainties women experienced and the visions they built of themselves as working mothers: rejection of identity changes to their professional selves in light of their soon-to-be mother status, delaying working through identity changes, and actualization of identity change. We also show how specific features of organizational and personal context influence the experience of cross-domain identity transitions by shaping the tentative images women begin to build of themselves as mothers and professionals. Our findings contribute to organizational scholarship on identity transitions by demonstrating how individuals work through cross-domain identity changes in which a work identity is altered by the introduction of or shift in meanings attached to a nonwork identity and by shedding light on the implications of early moments in cross-domain identity changes.

Our findings also contribute to the work-family literature by showing how personal and organizational contexts shape women's sense of themselves as working mothers-to-be at the earliest stages of motherhood, during the liminal period of pregnancy. We discuss the implications of our findings in the following sections.

Theoretical Contributions and Implications

We used grounded theory techniques to create a deeper conceptual understanding of how individuals experience cross-domain identity transitions. We have extended prior scholarship by Ashforth (2001) on identity transitions and by Ibarra (1999, 2010) on the elaboration of possible selves by building new theory about cross-domain identity transitions, which we assert are theoretically distinct from sequential identity changes at work. Our work sheds light on the nature of cross-domain identity transition processes and builds insight into how individuals navigate this complex transition process. Additionally, our study shows how in cross-domain identity transitions individuals begin a process of investing in a new or altered nonwork identity that has implications for an existing work identity. Our work makes several theoretical contributions, which we describe in depth next.

First, an assumption in prior research on macro role transitions has often been "the psychological and (if relevant) physical movement between sequentially held roles" (Ashforth, 2001: 7) and has primarily focused on within-role identity transitions. Sequential macro role transitions imply permanent movement from work one role to another. Thus, they are less complex than the kinds of transitions we study here, which involve movement across two distinct (work and nonwork) identity domains that leaves individuals in a long-lasting and potentially recurring state of liminality. Some research has focused on cross-domain identity transitions, but under the assumption that identities are stable, not in flux, have established boundaries, and are not under threat (Ashforth et al., 2000). In contrast, our study focuses on cross-domain, macro transitions and directly targets its assumptions by exploring how emergent nonwork identities can make existing work identities unstable, particularly when the emergent nonwork identity threatens the established work identity. The work-family literature has addressed the inherent conflicts and enrichments between competing identities; our research points to the need for women to address how these conflicts begin long before a child enters the picture. The anticipation of conflicts and enrichments paves the way for creating multiple visions of what may be possible and leads women to react in different ways. The transition to motherhood for many professionals is a time of recalibration and provides an opportunity to challenge existing identities that may be in need of rethinking. Anticipation of changes to existing work identities in light of emergent nonwork identities, such as parenthood, may cause individuals to self-reflect

and to improve upon or alter identities for self-benefit (Bailey, 1999; Ladge, 2008). Additionally, the anticipation of changes to one's work identity in light of one's mother-to-be status may be an antecedent to engaging in boundary management work.

Second, our work also suggests that timing matters when considering how visions of desired multiple possible selves are developed. Although prior research demonstrates that individuals begin the process of envisioning future selves as they begin to adapt to or encounter a new role (Ibarra, 1999; Louis, 1980b), our research suggests that identity renegotiation and visions of possible selves can occur over extended periods of time and long before a person encounters a new role. We look at only the period of pregnancy, yet women may begin this visioning of themselves as working mothers long before they become pregnant. For many women, this visioning may occur at the time they start thinking about having a child and continue long after the child is born, during maternity leave. In the present study, we focused on pregnancy itself as the initial trigger of multiple identity uncertainties and visions of possible multiples selves because it is the first moment in which motherhood becomes inevitable. Rather than imagining future changes that may occur if she becomes pregnant, at this time a woman is in the midst of certain life-altering physical and emotional changes for the first time. This finding could also be generalized to other contexts in which timing plays a role in understanding how one's work role will be impacted by one's future nonwork role. For example, consider a man who is anticipating his promotion to plant manager after years of work at his company who learns his mother has developed a chronic illness. He must anticipate how he may need to alter his work to care for his mother. He will need to consider how this new role is going to interfere with his plans for his existing role and what degree of support his organization will provide for him to manage the transition. Our findings also suggest that there are many triggers that occur at different times in liminal states that may lead individuals to experience repeated self-questioning and revisioning.

Third, our findings have implications for research on possible selves and identity development. Ibarra's (1999) seminal work on provisional selves provided insight into the ways in which individuals adopt provisional visions as they go from one kind of work role to another. Ibarra found that they either adopt a strategy in which they follow in the shoes of their predecessor or they use a more authentic, "true to self" approach. Our research suggests individuals may also reject a new self or may delay working through visions of possible selves, particularly when it seems that the new identity will threaten already established identities. Thus, our work sheds light on a more general important challenge associated with identity change that scholars have tended not to study as much as others. The challenged person cannot let go of or refuses to release an old work identity, even when he or she has already started a new work role and doing so is necessary for work performance. The shift in work roles implies a need for identity change, and the person's failure to make the shift may disrupt role enactment. Our work implies that this person may be rejecting the notion of identity change or may be delaying a leap to a new identity because he or she still values the old, no longer relevant identity or feels threatened by the change in a work identity implied by the role shift. In these ways, our work opens the door to new and interesting lines of research expanding insights about situations in which individuals resist identity changes attached to work roles as well as implications for people and organizations in this situation.

Lastly, our study suggests that, although there is some individual agency in the development of new identities, context matters (Johns, 2006). The women in our study already had preconceived ideas of the kind of mothers and professionals they wanted to be, but the signals gleaned from their organizations and their personal lives shaped their visions of themselves as mothers and professionals. Prior work on identity transitions has explored how individual and situational factors influence identity transitions, paying little attention, however, to showing how this process of influence occurs. Our findings demonstrate the mechanisms by which this happens in cross-domain identity transitions. For example, Ashforth et al. (2000) proposed that the more an individual identifies with a role, the more likely it is that he or she will be able to integrate it with other roles. Our study sheds light on this proposition by demonstrating that feeling supported and socially validated in their work context influences the degree to which individuals envision their ability to integrate their work and nonwork roles. Additionally, Ashforth et al. (2000) proposed interaction effects of personal and situational context on the ability to manage role boundaries in cross-domain identity transitions. Our study sheds light on these assumptions by showing that women's organizational contexts work in combination with their personal priorities to influence how they build visions during cross-domain identity changes. Future research could test which has a stronger influence, work context or personal priorities.

Organizational context has been an important area of research in the work-life literature, and the insights we have built about organizational context extend this literature as well. Despite many studies on the utilization and benefits of work-life policies and programs and the influence of formal and informal organizational support on how individuals integrate work and nonwork roles, little is known about the process by which these forms of support shape individual experiences. Our findings suggest that organizational context can and does play a role in influencing identity adaptation and discovery as women navigate their changing sense of self. Organizational context is integral not only to women's ability to manage work and family demands, but also to how they come to view themselves in light of their changing identities as early as pregnancy.

Practical Implications

Our findings have important and direct implications for how managers and organizations work with women who are soon-to-be working mothers during their pregnancies. Therefore, we focus our discussion of practical implications on this issue, though we recognize that our work also has implications for the management of other kinds of cross-domain identity transitions. In today's competitive work environment, many organizations have focused on how to provide greater flexibility and work-life support as ways to retain working mothers (Glass & Estes, 1997). We have not seen these programs extended to the management of pregnant women. Our research shows that the identity change process begins for professional women as early as when they become pregnant. How their organizations, their managers, and their colleagues respond to a pregnancy and to the professional identity of the pregnant woman has profound implications for how she begins to envision her possible selves. The formation of this vision of possible selves has significant implications for the pregnant woman's attitudes toward her future career. Our work suggests that organizations need to respond more proactively and supportively to women during pregnancy, as they wrestle with conceptualizing possible selves. At the same time, organizations and individuals need to be supportive but not engage in behaviors that undermine a woman's changing professional identity during this time. In particular, organizations should help women find ways to realistically envision how to invest in both their maternal and professional identities to enable their continued valuable contributions to their organization. Those working in organizations that do not help women envision how to remain as contributors, or women who are in denial during pregnancy and hope to have their professional identities untouched by the arrival of their children, may be the ones who are most likely either to exit the organizations later or to be unhappy in their work and life following their children's birth.

In looking to provide greater support to pregnant professional women during this identity transition process, organizations and individuals may proactively mentor or coach pregnant professional woman. As our research shows, vicarious learning is one of the organizational factors that influence how women begin to conceptualize their possible selves during this liminal period. Both individuals and organizations could look to formalize these learning opportunities. Pregnant professional women should be looking to engage more directly with other working mothers whom they see as role models in order to develop more positive visions of their possible selves as working mothers. Similarly, organizations may want to create opportunities to ensure that newly pregnant professional woman have access to other positive models of working mothers. By providing opportunities for information sharing and learning during this transition period, organizations may encourage women to form positive, empowering visions of their possible selves during this cross-domain transition.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As research on the cross-domain identity transition process has been limited, we chose to engage a grounded theory methodology to begin to explore this aspect of identity transitions. Our thick descriptions and iteration between data and literature enabled us to gain new insights about cross-domain identity transitions. At the same time, we recognize limitations to our work that provide opportunities for future research.

First, our conclusions regarding women's conceptualization of their possible selves during cross-domain transitions and the influence that personal and organizational contexts have on these conceptualizations need to be further studied in a larger population of women. Specifically, we encourage future research to explore these issues with a more diverse population of pregnant professional women. As we noted previously, in our research design we purposely limited our sample to learn from extreme cases and reduce variation (Patton, 1990). Yet we also know that individual differences such as occupational status, income level, and ethnicity have a significant effect on how women approach work-life issues (Lambert, 2000). Further, the experience of cross-domain identity transition

may differ when the focus is on work identities such as organizational identity and occupational identity rather than professional identity. In addition, differences in ethnicity are likely to yield different societal expectations, which will also affect this cross-domain identity transition process. Future research needs to explore the cross-domain identity transition process for a more diverse population of pregnant women.

Second, we recognize that there are inherent limitations to the generalizability of our research due to our focus on pregnant women. This type of cross-domain identity transition is somewhat unique, because, during pregnancy, the transition to motherhood involves physical and biological changes. In addition, both strong societal norms regarding what it means to be a good mother and potential stigmatization of working mothers impact this transition (Cuddy et al., 2004; Gatrell, 2007; Major, 2004). It is possible that other cross-domain identity transitions that do not involve biological changes or do not invoke strong societal stereotypes may unfold differently. For example, the cross-domain identity transition process for an individual who loses a spouse or battles a life-threatening illness may be different from the experiences of pregnant women. Future research would benefit from exploring other types of cross-domain identity transitions to better understand how these individual differences may affect the transition process.

Third, although our study doesn't directly address the ways in which women prioritize their current (professional) and emerging (mother) roles, we can speculate that woman's preferences for prioritizing one identity over another interacts with their perceptions of how supportive their work environments are with respect to balancing work and family demands in ways that drive their reactions to anticipated identity changes. We illustrate tentative relationships in the two-by-three diagram presented in Table 2, which could be used as a starting point to guide future research. The table shows that, in less supportive organizations, women are more likely either to start to proactively divest from their professional identity if they want to invest in their maternal identity during pregnancy, or to reject the addition of a new maternal identity altogether in an effort to protect and preserve their professional identity. Conversely, in more supportive work environments, women are less likely to feel the need to choose between the new and existing identities and can begin to actualize how to maintain their professional identity while investing in their new identity as mothers. Lastly, the table illustrates that women who work in environments that send mixed messages about the expectations of working mothers may be more likely to delay the process of cross-domain identity change. An assumption here is that all women anticipate making some investment in motherhood. However, we propose in this table that the degree to which they prioritize motherhood in light of their professional identity will depend on how they perceive their organization supports them.

Lastly, a limitation of our data analysis is that we present rejection, inaction, and actualization of change as distinct reactions. However, we suspect they are not stable states and that women move in and out of these different reactions as they experience new pregnancy-related triggers throughout the different stages of pregnancy. Although we don't have the longitudinal data to show how reactions change with stage of pregnancy, we speculate that women in the early part of their pregnancies may be more concerned about preserving their professional identity, and thus more likely to reject their emerging identity as mothers. Additionally, women in the latter stages of pregnancy may be more likely to put off identity change (in line with our findings) because they have given up any illusion of control they may have had earlier in their pregnancy. Future longitudinal research could build from our current theorizing via multiple interviews with women throughout the different

TABLE 2
Reactions to Visions of Possible Multiple Selves in Light of Contextual Influences

	Family-Centered Priorities	Career-Centered Priorities
Less supportive organizational response	–Investment in Maternal Identity –Divestment in Professional Identity	–Reject Maternal Identity to Prevent Shift in Professional Identity
Ambivalent organizational response	–Inaction (Keeping Options Open)	
More supportive organizational response	–Investment in Maternal Identity –Maintain Professional Identity	–Investment in Maternal Identity –Maintain or Grow Professional Identity

stages of their pregnancy to further explore the iterative experiences of cross-domain identity transition.

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APPENDIX

Example of Iterative Coding Technique

One of our initial research questions going into our data gathering was, How do women manage their identity while pregnant at work?

Step 1: All three researchers coded the transcripts with this as one of the research questions guiding us. All three authors identified the following data passage as connecting to this question:

> I've just tried to remain as professional as possible. So something as little as buying professional maternity clothes. That's what I've kind of thought. I need to look professional, regardless if I don't feel like dressing up. I still need to do that. People often ask me how are you feeling, things like that. I'm always quick to say, I'm feeling fine. And not necessarily switch the subject, but let them know that I'm still here and I'm still focused and not—even though inside I wish I was lying in bed at home—I make it very clear that I'm here and I'm committed to work when I'm at work. (028)

Step 2: Two authors initially coded this passage as "identity work." One author initially coded the passage as "protecting professional identity." We then returned to the literature on identity work, identity violations, and identity transitions to better understand what was important in this passage (and similar ones). We asked ourselves questions such as, What is this woman saying about her professional and mothering identity? What is important in this passage: The interaction of the identities, or how the woman understands and responds to the interaction? Why is she responding in this way?

Step 3: After discussing this passage and its coding and related similar passages, we came to the data code of "identity work." The description of this code was as follows:

> The person's engagement in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising her personal, pregnant and professional self. In other words, how the person tailors her identity or manages conflicts among various role identities (see citations in Ibarra, 2007). Also includes what she's not doing.

Examples: Information Management and Control, Body Management, Normalizing, Strategizing, Proving, Passing, Overcompensating

Step 4: After reviewing the passages that were given this code, we decided that the theme "identity preservation tactics" represented the next level of conceptualization of these data.

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