

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Pregnancy and the Academy: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of Pregnant Graduate Students

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This study explored the lived experiences of graduate students in masters-level academic programs who become pregnant, whether intended or otherwise, and the sources from which they received support in their efforts to balance their dual responsibilities as students and mothers-to-be. Through a series of three, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, seven participants reflected on dimensions of their academic program in relation to their pregnancy, sources of support (or the absence thereof), challenges they faced, as well as strategies and resources that supported their resiliency and motivation to persist. Informed by Butler's (1988) theory of gender performances and the notion of gender as an embodied experience, the data collected and analyzed using the phenomenological process of "horizontalization" (Moustakas, 1994) reflected the following five themes pertaining to pregnant graduate students' experience navigating campus and classroom environments and relationships: Managing the physiological effects of pregnancy, private made public, conceptualization of support, re-prioritization, and navigating the graduate

experience. Based on the findings and resulting discussion of the visibility and unique needs of pregnant graduate students, recommendations are offered to staff and faculty in support roles as well as administrators regarding changes to policies, resources, and practice that may encourage more equitable and effective support of students navigating both master's programs and pregnancy.

Keywords: graduate student, pregnancy, mothering, performativity, embodiment

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Pregnancy and the Academy: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of
Pregnant Graduate Students

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Emma L. Larkins

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APPROVED:

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Emma L. Larkins, Author

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Pregnancy and the Academy: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experience of
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to topic

The number of women earning a master's degree surpassed that of men beginning in the mid-1980s (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Additionally, the number of women receiving doctorates has increased 52 percent between 2000-2001 and 2010-2011 in contrast to 24 percent of males (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Despite the increased presence of women pursuing graduate level degrees, women remain more likely than male counterparts to have their education pursuits interrupted due to the formation of their family and mothering responsibilities (Lynch, 2008). As a consequence, graduate students who are pregnant or mothering experience higher rates of attrition than their male or non-parenting peers (Lynch, 2008).

Attrition from graduate programs poses potential financial, personal, and vocational burdens to students, which may have a long lasting impact on the reconstruction of their personal and professional lives following their departure (Lovitts, 2001). Studies exploring the experience of women in tenure-track positions indicate that increased numbers of women pursuing careers in higher education are beginning families while in graduate school and early in the tenure process in an effort to balance the competing responsibilities of both (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014). Although this subset of women reflect those who intend to persist through doctoral programs and remain in academia as researchers or instructors, the findings illustrate the heightened consciousness around the timing of family formation and professional advancement some women must consider. Due to the reputed incompatibility between higher education and parenting, Mason, Goulden, and Frasch (2009) found that more women are choosing careers outside of higher education, pursuing work in business, government, teaching

without a research emphasis, and industry. Although a significant proportion of students pursuing graduate degrees do not intend to work in academia, the societal benefits of educated professionals in a range of vocations creates an impetus for institutions to develop systems that encourage student persistence. Lovitts (2001) suggests that graduate student attrition, at all levels, is a reflection of the institutional culture, structures, and distribution of opportunities rather than students' background characteristics and academic skills.

In the face of significant challenges and barriers, a rising number of mothering students and academic professionals are using blogs and articles published on higher education news sites to give voice to their experience of balancing parenthood in higher education and advice to current students or those considering a return to higher education (see Baker, 2014; Keenan, 2014; Kendzior, 2014; Levethal-Weiner, 2014 for a recent series on the topic). And yet there is little research to complement and support these narratives and much less that focuses on the intersection of pregnancy and masters-level students. Thus, to frame this study's exploration and understanding of graduate students' experience of persisting in a masters program while pregnant, literature focusing on a breadth of student and early professional populations, including research focused on pregnant and mothering students in high school, non-traditional mothers pursuing bachelor's degrees, mothering students in doctoral programs, and women balancing tenure-track positions in academia and mothering is discussed. Additionally, the majority of existing literature and research on mothering students in higher education primarily focuses not on pregnancy and, instead, looks to student experiences following the birth of their child.

The intention behind the education of women in the United States emerged in its earliest form to prepare wives for motherhood and the raising of male children for lives as future civic leaders and moral citizens (Solomon, 1985). Over time, education came to be seen as a way to

enable women without marriage prospects to work and financially take care of themselves, thus alleviating some of their family's financial burden (Solomon, 1985). Although education provided women with the training and opportunities to work and provide financially for themselves, it was expected that women would exit the workforce in favor of motherhood. Reflecting the dominant sentiment facing women in both professional and maternal roles, anthropologist Margaret Mead questioned, "Have we cut women off from their natural closeness to their children, taught them to look for a job instead of the touch of a child's hand, for status in a competitive world rather than a unique place by a glowing hearth?" (as cited by Solomon, 1985, p. 192). Women in academic and professional roles who decided to remain in their vocational fields were the subjects of critical inquiry, a sentiment that became more pronounced when women additionally considered family formation.

During the same time that the United States began to institute policies to protect women from sex-based discrimination, ensuring their right to quality education, increasing numbers of women entered graduate degree programs in the 1970s (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Despite the growing presence of women, Kuperberg (2009) points to the "pioneering effect" (p. 500) as one possible explanation for the relative absence of literature focusing on the experience of mothering graduate students up to the past decade. Due to relatively low representation of women in graduate programs initially, Kuperberg (2009) posits the early pioneers sought to acculturate to the male-centric norms and systems within the graduate education system in order to avoid the perception of ingratitude or weakness by criticizing the experience or pursuing changes. In this system, primarily comprised of men, parenting and childbearing was not of significant concern as they did not carry the pregnancy nor were they likely to be the primary caregiver (Kuperberg, 2009). The time and work demands expected of graduate students was

modeled after the expectations of professors to teach, conduct research, and publish, among additional informal responsibilities (Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009). This was perceived as fitting to men whose primary task was providing financial security for their family and dependents (Lynch, 2008). Although Kuperberg (2009) suggests the gendered dichotomy has become less salient as more women have pursued graduate education, women in faculty positions continue to report discomfort over sharing feelings of stress related to managing motherhood and work responsibilities out of fear that they will be perceived as uncommitted or less serious about their work (Lynch, 2008). As a consequence, some mothering students and faculty compartmentalize their identities, hiding their maternal role from students and colleagues when in an academic setting (Lynch, 2008).

Researcher's Background and Interest

I attribute my focused interest in the construction of and presentation of women and, more specifically motherhood, as a way to make sense of my own experience in a mothering role. Within my family unit, I have been granted a level of involvement in the process of caring and mothering that went beyond the level typically attributed to my position as daughter and sister. Because of the atypical level (or what I perceived to be atypical) of involvement that I played in the care for my youngest brother and now, my nephew, I have identified as a mother, to a certain extent for much of my life. Although I am acutely conscious that this is not an identity that I can claim in some spaces because of the way motherhood is typically reserved for those who experience the biological process of pregnancy and, subsequently, the continuous care of one's child. It is for this reason that I now more closely identify as an allomother, an anthropological notion used to denote systems of communal care and nurturing of infants and children (Hrdy, 2009).

Thus, it is from my own personal experiences and understanding that I have had a long-term interest in the representation of motherhood and women's lives that began in my undergraduate coursework and now guides my current research interest on the relationship between institutions of higher education and mothering students. Additionally, as a current graduate student, I have personally experienced the unique shift in sense of belonging and connection to the institution that takes place between undergraduate and graduate school and the sense of isolation or displacement that can take result (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). Through shared narratives and experiences of close friends and relatives in graduate school who were explicitly warned by department staff against becoming pregnant at points in their program, I became interested in the way women, particularly those who become pregnant, experience spaces in which they receive messaging around whether or not they belong. As such, it is my hope that in learning about the embodied experience of pregnant graduate students and the methods or resources that supported their overall wellbeing, sense of belonging, and ability to pursue their academic aspirations, changes and enhancements can be made to institutional and programmatic structures, policies, and advising so as to avoid current notions of the incompatibility of motherhood and higher education (Kuperberg, 2008; Lynch, 2008; Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009).

Research Scope and Significance

Building upon research that explores the experiences of pregnant students in high school (Pillow, 1997, 2006), undergraduate (Brown & Nichols, 2012), and doctoral (Mason & Goulden, 2002; Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008) level educational settings, this study addresses a population that has been largely absent from educational research on students experiencing pregnancy or with

dependents. Additionally, research focused on women in tenure track positions with children demonstrates the long-term impact of gendered expectations within academia for mothering professionals and the continued challenges that women face in balancing both roles (Mason & Goulden, 2002; McBride, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004, 2012; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014).

The study intends to enhance the quality of services and outreach available to female identified students who are simultaneously pursuing a master's degree and experiencing pregnancy. In addition to the increasing rates of women pursuing graduate education overall, women between the ages of 22-30 represent the largest proportion of enrolled female students which coincides with the peak fecundity ages for many women (Kuperberg, 2008; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014). Despite the tenuous relationship between academia and mothering, more women are pursuing both graduate degrees and family formation, unwilling to compromise one over the other (Kuperberg, 2008; Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009). Although research on this topic primarily pertains to women pursuing careers in academia and the challenges created by the tenure system, growing numbers of women view the relative flexibility of graduate school as the ideal time to become pregnant before entering into careers and facing added responsibilities and pressure (Grenier & Burke, 2008; Kuperberg, 2008; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014). As such, women's experiences in and messages received during their master's program around the ability to balance multiple roles may have a significant impact upon mothering students' educational and professional aspirations.

Regardless of the availability of institutional services in place to offer assistance to parenting students, research indicates that women tend to rely on their own efforts to manage their responsibilities as both mothers and students or professionals in higher education (Wolf-

Wendel & Ward, 2014). Thus, the study aims to enhance current understanding of the experience of pregnant graduate students and their use (or non-use) of institutional resources in an effort to discern how institutions of higher education can encourage students' academic resiliency and well-being. Underlying the study is the premise that as more women complete graduate programs while pregnant, it is an institution's responsibility to ensure that students considering or experiencing pregnancy have access to appropriate services and that professional staff and faculty have the knowledge to support students who are serving multiple life roles (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014).

Research Questions

The study aims to understand the experiences of pregnant graduate students and the relationship between higher education's academic environment and students' perception of support. The study's primary question asks: What is the experience of female graduate students who become pregnant during their master's level program of graduate study, whether intended or otherwise, and face the process of re-negotiating an identity that accounts for their dual roles as both student and parent? Additionally, in an effort to understand the way in which pregnant students regard support and sources from which they receive encouragement, the study's secondary questions include: (a) In what ways did the participants' perspective change over the course of their pregnancy, if at all? And (b) From what sources do (or did) students receive support necessary to manage their multiple competing roles? The emphasis on experience within phenomenological research lends itself to the study's research questions. Thus, in accordance with a phenomenological design and guided by the research questions, participants reflected on their experiences in a series of multiple semi-structured interviews.

Relevant Terminology

The following definitions of key terms or concepts integral to this study establish a shared understanding from which this study operates. In many instances, these definitions reflect a condensed version of a larger definition marked by nuance and complexity. These definitions will be explored and complicated in greater depth and clarified in discussions in future chapters.

Sex. The term is most commonly used to refer to an individual's biological attributes, including reproductive or sexual anatomy, hormones, and/or genetic composition (Shaw & Lee, 2009). Although Western culture primarily focuses upon a male/female binary, biological sex is rarely as simple. This perspective fails to account for "intersex" or those "whose reproductive or sexual anatomies do not seem to fit the typical definitions of 'female' or 'male'" (Shaw & Lee, 2009). Judith Butler asserts that sex, as much as gender, is a social construction. Butler writes, "I think for a woman to identify as a woman is a culturally enforced effect. I don't think that it's a given that the basis of a given anatomy, an identification will follow. I think that 'coherent identification' has to be cultivated, policed, and enforced; and that the violation of that has to be punished, usually through shame" (Kotz, 1992, p. 88).

Gender. Distinct from an individual's biological sex and/or physical attributes, gender is the outward practice and performance of one's internal gender identity. Within the framework of Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity, which is explained in greater depth in Chapter 3, gender is constructed through the repeated process of donning or enacting symbols (including behavior, language, and physical appearance among others) attributed to the dominant conventions of gender. Based on this performance, individuals are rewarded or sanctioned based on the extent to which they are able to align their gender performance with the practices and behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity (Shaw & Lee, 2009).

Graduate student. Although the term “graduate” can connote an array of educational levels or achievements depending on the context or perspective, unless otherwise indicated, the term “graduate student” is used to refer to an individual enrolled in a masters-level educational program.

Motherhood. Within the context of this study, womanhood does not necessarily connote motherhood; that is, to identify as a woman, does not carry with it the automatic assumption of mothering. Additionally, though there is a recognition that motherhood is not an identity that is adopted at an established point during the process of pregnancy, if at all, by the participants in this study, it was not an explicit point of inquiry within this study (such as whether or not the participants identified as mothers and, if so, at what point this became a part of their sense of self).

While certainly encompassing the biological process of the development of a child, motherhood specifically connects to “the social relationship that is characterized by emotional intensity, selflessness, nurturing, and protection” (Stearney, 1994 as cited in Lynch, 2008). Adrienne Rich (1995) distinguished between two possible understandings of motherhood that become conflated; the first of which is the potential relationship between a woman’s and her biological ability to reproduce and, secondly, on an institutional level, which works to ensure that women remain under male control. Motherhood, depending on the focus and/or perspective, can serve as both a source of oppression and empowerment for women.

Mothering. Distinct from the role or title of *mother* and the institution of *motherhood*, Drawing upon the ideas of Adrienne Rich, O’ Reilly (2008) uses the word mothering to create a way to discuss the experience of motherhood in a way that is “female-defined and centered and potentially empowering to women” (p. 3). Motherhood, in a male-centered, patriarchal setting

can serve as the site of oppression (O' Reilly, 2008) while mothering, when focused on women's own experiences, can "be a source of power" (p. 3).

Looking forward

Examining the experience of master's level students who are simultaneously facing a major life transition presented by pregnancy has the potential to inform the way in which institutions support and encourage these students' persistence in a range of areas and services. Although it may seem limiting to focus solely upon the experience of women in higher education considering men, too, face challenges in balancing academic responsibilities and fatherhood, societal expectations hold that women, more so than men ought to be primarily responsible for the care of dependents (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). If institutions are to attract and retain the most qualified graduate students who possess the skills and knowledge base to contribute to the campus and greater academic community, it is essential that institutions possess the infrastructure necessary to support students' multiple life roles. This study aims to contribute to the discussion pertaining to pregnant students' experience in higher education and the ways in which students perceive and pursue support to understand the policies, programming, and resources necessary to better meet the needs of pregnant students.

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. Chapter Two, the literature review, includes an examination of literature and research on the social construction of motherhood in the United States and research detailing the experience of pregnant and mothering students across various educational stages. Recognizing that both academia and motherhood are highly socialized concepts that impact women's personal and professional pursuits, critical feminist theory is introduced as a way to understand and reformulate the way in which these systems and practices "have excluded, devalued, or undermined women's concerns" (Rhode, 1993, p. 619). Chapter 3,

the research methodology, offers an overview of the research design and methods selected to collect and analyze data in a manner that reflects the study's research questions and purpose. The results, analysis, and discussion presented in Chapter 4 will derive from the themes and perspectives that emerge from the data collected during participants' interviews. The fifth, concluding chapter will include continued discussion of the findings and themes in relation to the relevant literature, provide recommendations for current practices and implications to the field of higher education, as well as offer suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following chapter presents an overview of prior research focused on examining the negotiation of both a student role and motherhood, at a number of different educational levels, in order to inform the present study and locate the area in which the findings of the study may contribute to new knowledge. The first section presents an examination of motherhood and graduate education respectively as socialized, constructed roles as this underscores the role conflict mothering students must negotiate. The study draws upon critical feminist theory to illuminate the experience of women in higher education who, upon becoming pregnant must renegotiate their personal and professional identities in the face of numerous challenges and a history of marginalization in a higher education setting. The latter discussion examines dominant themes, barriers, and narratives culled from literature and research on mothering students in various educational settings and roles.

Role-Based Gendered Socialization

The process of socialization influences and enforces the expectations, behaviors, and values of specific communities regarded as necessary to achieve success in particular organizations or communities (Sallee, 2011; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Popular messaging and images influence the expectations that an individual carries into a community or experience where they then learn to adjust or nuance their understanding of what successful membership requires through interactions with others within that community. From this understanding, women undergo dual processes of socialization as both mothers and graduate students. In many ways, as will be shown, these roles carry similar messaging regarding the behaviors and values necessary to be successful in both realms which can create conflict for those who negotiate both motherhood and academia. Attention is first given to the distinct processes and messaging

around motherhood and graduate education as distinct entities in order to understand the role conflict that results when women bring the two together.

Motherhood. Dally (1983) posits that notions of motherhood are inextricably connected to the historical ideals and expectations of motherhood. Informed by a white, middleclass, heteronormative perspective, past trends, traditions, and expectations of women in mother roles reveal the origins of and process by which motherhood in privileged contemporary American settings came to be socially constructed and understood as a set of ideals. However, there is an incongruity between the expectations of motherhood and the actual lived experience. In some communities or spaces mothering is promoted to women and continues to represent the “primary route to physical and emotional fulfillment...and an essential part of female identity” (Lynch, 2008, p. 586). And yet, depending on the way in which women make sense of the conflicting relationship between the weighty idealism attributed to motherhood and the laborious nature of the lived experience, performances of motherhood are interpreted as acts of compliance or resistance.

Societal notions of motherhood are conflated with ideas of biologically rooted behaviors and hold that women are innately best suited for the nurturing and care of children. Within this perspective, mothering is regarded as an intensive or greedy “profession” (Lynch, 2008; McBride, 2008). To be done effectively, the dominant narrative asserts that children ought to be raised under the care and attention of a mother whose sole responsibility is to her dependents (hooks, 2000; Kawash, 2011). It is important to note that dominant conceptions of motherhood are deeply connected to notions of class and race; namely a white, able-bodied, middleclass, heterosexual, youthful experience of motherhood. “Normal motherhood” is marked by ideals of limitless, unconditional love, nurturance, and sacrifice (Shaw & Lee, 2009). Mothers with non-

dominant identities or experiences may face a different set of assumptions or expectations of their experience, which can create other forms of internal conflict and stress when (or if) their experiences do not align with the dominant, idealized vision of motherhood.

Building upon the idea that external systems influence women's performance of gender and identity construction, West (1989) suggests the important question to ask is not whether or not women are inherently more nurturing and caring due to biological composition, it is, instead, why women's "sociological role [and] psychological upbringing" (p. 48) causes women to be frequently attributed with nurturing and diminutive qualities. Feminist theorist hooks (2000) takes a more focused examination and suggests women play a role in the perpetuation of intensive mothering ideals by internalizing the perception that the care of children is their primary responsibility as women.

If women are to participate more fully in professional realms in addition to holding a mothering role, a societal shift away from the notion of parenting as the sole responsibility of the mother must occur (hooks, 2000). In a sense, McBride (2008) mirrors this sentiment by advocating that women resist the expectations thrust upon them by the model of intensive mothering and the notion that mothers ought to be able to balance multiple life roles, giving equal attention to all responsibilities. Contemporary women activists and authors have encouraged women to give voice to the role conflict they experience and, to some extent, resist the seeming impossibility created by societal expectations of motherhood as well as professionals, which make women hesitant to admit challenges for fear of being considered less competent (McBride, 2008).

Graduate student socialization. While highly contextual and dependent upon the individual academic program or department, the graduate student experience is highly shaped by

idealized notions of intensive devotion and sacrifice. Students enter an organization with an idea of their role and the experience and through their transition into the program or department learn and adjust to the behaviors, expectations, and skill sets regarded as instrumental to students' success (Lovitts, 2001; Sallee, 2011). Students learn through their interactions with others and experiences in the program the values and norms, including gender, that are at the center of the department and the respective roles and responsibilities expected of its members. Other factors such as enrollment status, whether students are part-time or full, may also impact students' transition into a program and perception of support and belonging. For example, programs may invest more time, training, and funding into full-time students with teaching or research assistantships as they provide the department with a tangible service and one that is likely tied to the educational purpose and mission of the institution (Williams, 2007). In spite of the number of factors that contribute to students' conceptualization of the graduate experience, Sallee (2011) suggests that student' relationships with their advisor and faculty members are among the most influential factors in students' socialization into a graduate program. Peer relationships are similarly significant between students in sharing program and discipline specific information to support one another in the acclimation process. The two, according to Sallee (2011) are both integral aspects of students' acculturation to the gendered role culture of the program or discipline; one is not regarded as more significant or influential than the other.

Graduate students' prior experiences within higher education environments as well as presumed life experiences contribute to the perception of students as having mastered the skills necessary to navigate their experience and develop community independently (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). In some instances, this expectation of graduate students' abilities and skill sets contributes to the perception among institutional personnel that graduate students require

fewer resources. As such, services including formal orientation programming, academic advising, and career services primarily (or entirely) focus on the needs of undergraduate students (White & Nonnamaker, 2008).

Despite the minimal resources or intentional programming to support students' transition to their program of study, the expectations of their devotion to the discipline and program remain demanding (Lynch, 2008). Students are taught that to be a "good graduate student" requires an intensive level of complete commitment (Lynch, 2008); a reality that may be more acute depending on the academic discipline or program. The similarity between the level of time and energy output expected of both mothers and graduate students can result in role conflict for women striving to bring both together and a conscious decision of whether or not to make their dual roles visible and in what space it is safe to do so (Lynch, 2008).

Academia and motherhood. Mothering becomes significantly more challenging when partnered with roles that carry similarly intensive expectations; as already discussed, academia is one such realm (Lynch, 2008). Kuperberg (2008) posits that the socialization around the incompatibility of graduate school and family formation begins in graduate school. For women pursuing careers in academia, Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012) find "beliefs and perceptions about socially appropriate roles for women, many of them hidden" (p. 39) can have an undermining effect on women in the pursuit of equitable positions and advancement. Despite the advancements women have made in accessing higher education and professional lives as scholars, little has changed around the expectations held of mothers (McBride, 2008). This becomes further complicated for students with non-dominant racial and ethnic identities and/or lower socioeconomic status, among other factors which lead students to enact and engage in motherhood outside of the dominant Western ideals (Anaya, 2011; Kawash, 2011).

The convergence of responsibilities and roles that women fulfill when both a student and a mother leads women to report higher levels of stress and distress than their male peers. Grenier and Burke (2008) posit women experience extended periods of stress that extend beyond pregnancy into the birth and development of one's child. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) report women feel a pull between their dual responsibilities as mother and scholar. Because of the intensive expectations for both roles, women internalize a sense of guilt for not spending enough time with their child as well as their inability to devote as much time to their academic responsibilities as they feel they ought to dedicate or allotted prior to the birth of their child. Yet, by delaying the formation of family in favor of focusing on the completion of one's graduate program, not to mention the tenure process, women run the risk of not being able to have children (Mason & Goulden, 2002). At the least, the focus on the negotiation women in higher education must make between career and family and consideration around timing has been interpreted by some as an indication that having children comes at the detriment of women's career success (Williams, 2007)

Critical Feminist Theory and Performativity

Similar in many respects to socialization, within the theoretical purview of critical feminist perspectives, individuals' gender identities are regarded as fluid constructs that are contextually bound by the social structures within which one operates (Harris III & Lester, 2009). The following analysis examines Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and the notion of embodiment as a framework for the way in which individuals come to understand and enact gendered selves. It is through the application of gendered performance and embodiment in relationship with notions of socialization that the study begins to examine the educational context in which graduate students must navigate and their experience of pregnancy.

Embodying gender. Judith Butler (1988) draws from a historic genealogy of theorists including Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir who point to the way in which gendered bodies become the site of historic and cultural reproduction, an idea that Butler refers to as *performativity*. The crux of Butler's theory views the construction of gendered selves as an active process as opposed to a passive application of the histories and cultural symbols upon an individual's body and internal self. Gender becomes a literal process of embodiment through the repeated process of performing particular behaviors, gestures, and language, among other culturally recognized symbols of gender. As a result of this continual process, gender can be interpreted as "a performative accomplishment, which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler, 1988, p. 520). After donning symbols or repeating actions enough, women themselves come to regard their gender identities within the prescribed societal framework, failing to recognize the performative nature. However, as Butler's statement indicates, the way in which individuals enact gendered selves is not a process or understanding contained on an individual level. Instead, Butler draws upon language from theatre to describe a dynamic process of negotiation between the individual, the actor, and a prescribed audience, which could be a localized community or society at large. Thus, to some extent the performance of gender is never wholly a performance for oneself; instead it takes place in community and is open to the reading and interpretation of the individual's audience.

The same ideals and messaging that guide women's performances of gender influence the physical experience and interpretation of pregnant bodies that are "coded" (Pillow, 1997, p. 351) with the signs and ideals of the social systems in which the individual operates. Bodies, particularly pregnant bodies, "cannot be ignored" (Pillow, 1997). Bodies are always present and

influencing individuals' self-presentation, actions, and interactions with others (Kannen, 2013). Pillow (1997) suggests that women's pregnant bodies serve as physical representations of the dominant culture, and, by extension the community's practices and policies, particularly those pertaining to gender and sexuality. That is, bodies are rendered *political* as onlookers interpret and apply critique based on the narratives inferred and the extent to which the pregnant women is read as aligning with social codes, norms, and ideals (Pillow, 1997). Implied in Pillow's statement is a similar relationship to that established by Butler regarding gender and performativity between the individual and an external social audience that is simultaneously *reading* and interpreting the codes embodied and enacted by the pregnant subject. In the same way that individuals may find ways to subvert the social systems and symbols used to police, monitor, or reinforce performances of gender, Pillow (1997) asserts that individuals experiencing pregnancy can (and do) use their bodies as sites of resistance. Applying this perspective, pregnant graduate students seemingly embody a form of resistance by pursuing the formation of a family in defiance of the dominant narratives that the socialization process imparts, particularly that mothering and participation in academia are incompatible roles.

In the section that follows, I detail key themes that emerge from current scholarship and literature focused on student mothers, specifically the challenges and barriers students report as influential to their academic pursuits. Thus far, I have broadly explored the positionality and gendered experience of women who are mothering as well as participants in higher education environments. An overview of current scholarship reveals an emphasis on the challenges and barriers pregnant and mothering students and academic professionals face as they pursue both motherhood and a graduate degree. Although I intentionally tried to avoid framing the interviews and questions from a deficit perspective, I found that the participants' understanding of support

became more evident as a result of the ways in which they discussed experiences or areas in which they felt unsupported. Thus, the themes and trends that emerged from this review provide a point of comparison in Chapter 4 from which to determine common challenges reported by the participants of the present study as well as unique counterperspectives of strength or support not found in current scholarship on the topic.

Challenges of Pregnant and Parenting Graduate Students

Three reoccurring themes emerged from the literature and research focused on mothering students' experience of pregnancy or parenthood in combination with educational pursuits: Mothering students' fear of stigmatization, a real and perceived sense of isolation from the campus community and the significance of emotional support, and insufficient resources and policies to address students' multiple life roles. Although each of the themes is presented as commonly occurring challenges for pregnant and parenting students, each experience differs according to students' marital status, degree of familial support, race/ethnicity, and educational standing, among other salient aspects.

Fear of stigmatization. Regardless of their age or student status, mothering students report feeling limited to their roles as mothers rather than students by their peers, colleagues, and faculty and staff (Brown & Nichols, 2012). In some instances, fear of stigmatization leads women to compartmentalize or segment their dual identities depending on the environment in an effort to appear more committed (Lynch, 2008). This is also seen in tenure-track professionals returning to work shortly after giving birth or hiding evidence of their mothering selves when in a professional setting (McBride, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). For example, one participant in Lynch's (2008) study of mothering graduate students reported she intentionally chose not to include any objects or images in her office that might indicate to students in her

courses or colleagues her role as a mother. In other aspects, women express hesitation to ask for help from others for fear that in expressing a need or assistance, one may inadvertently support the case for women's inability to manage both roles (McBride, 2008).

Both students and professionals fear being perceived entirely as a mother or as an individual who is less committed to their research and/or careers as a result of informing others of their status. Brown and Nichols (2012) report that students' disclosure of their mothering role led, in most cases, to increased marginalization by their peers and stereotyping of their experience. For example, single mothers or student mothers of color are often thought to be recipients of government subsidies, such as welfare, or receiving a full-ride through an assistance program (Brown & Nichols, 2012). In other cases, students felt discriminated by classmates who did not want parenting students to join their study groups in the chance that their child may have to attend meetings or were unwilling to accommodate parenting students' schedule to find a shared time to study (Brown & Nichols, 2012).

Mirroring Butler's (1988) notion of the body as a physical rendering of "certain cultural and historical possibilities" (p. 521), Pillow (1997, 2004) suggests that women's pregnant bodies serve as physical representations of the individual's culture, and, by extension the community's practice and policies. In a setting like higher education in which the presence of pregnant and parenting students has either been absent or rendered invisible, to be pregnant on a college campus may leave a student vulnerable to the assumptions and projections of the campus community. In reaction to real and perceived stigma around student-pregnancy, some women take steps to diminish the presence of their role as a mother when in an academic setting. Although, after a certain point, it is biologically not possible for pregnant students to minimize or hide their role as a mother-to-be and become subject to the scrutiny of observers in the

institutional community. As a result of pregnancy, a woman's body becomes a physical embodiment of "information and practice, of regulation, power, and resistance" (Pillow, 1997, p. 360). It is for this reason, Pillow (1997) suggests that pregnancy establishes the mother as an object of moral concern by outside observers and open to scrutiny over personal decisions such as what to eat, the environment in which the mother operates, and the activities in which mothers participate.

Real and perceived isolation. Women who perceive higher levels of stress and isolation from peers are less likely to persist than their peers with partners and family members to provide emotional support (Lynch, 2008). As such, mothering students are at a greater risk than many other populations within higher education for attrition (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). McLaughlin and Randolph (2011) found that mothering students reported a higher desire to drop out and feelings of incompetency as a result of interactions with faculty and staff who were thought to be "inflexible, discouraging, and condescending" (p. 74). However, mothering students' sense of isolation is either alleviated or increased by multiple sources, not simply graduate faculty and advisors. In addition to faculty and advisors, literature reflects the significant role an external community of support comprised of a partner, family members, and/or friends has upon mothering graduate students.

Faculty and advisor support. Depending on students' community and personal systems of support, faculty and advisors may serve as key sources of support and encouragement. In historically male dominated fields, female faculty with families serve as integral sources of insight and support for pregnant and new mothers (Grenier & Burke, 2008). However, the number of women achieving tenured faculty positions remains similar to that of 1975 despite the increased presence of women in masters and doctoral programs (Mason & Goulden, 2002).

Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2014) found this perceived isolation to be a reality that is consistent across disciplines, but more acutely felt by mothering faculty in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. In the sciences, women who achieve tenure are twice as likely as their male colleagues to be single and without children, a trend that is similarly present in the humanities and social sciences (Mason & Goulden, 2002).

As a consequence of the relative absence of women serving in tenured faculty positions and fewer who are mothers, mothering students report feelings of isolation, the lack of role models, and mixed levels of encouragement from their mentors or advisors (Lynch, 2008; Mason & Goulden, 2002; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014). Lynch (2008) discovered the majority of mothering students in her study felt intellectually supported by their major advisors, yet were divided on emotional support. Of the 30 participants, 28 expressed a desire to receive greater sensitivity from faculty around the difficulty of navigating the competing demands of a graduate program and motherhood (Lynch, 2008). Exemplifying the significance of each of the prior perspectives, co-author Grenier uses her personal experience as a demonstration of the benefits she received as a consequence of her positive relationship with her advisor (Grenier & Burke, 2008). No doubt influenced by dominant narrative around the incompatibility of academic life and parenting, Grenier describes the fear she felt prior informing her advisor about her pregnancy and the anticipation of her advisor's disapproval. Instead, her advisor, also a mother, became an important source of support, encouragement, and flexibility by allowing Grenier to complete portions of her research from home and bring her daughter into the office in some instances.

It is important to note that the research addressing the significance of advisors focus almost entirely upon the significance of female, mothering advisors. While mentors who share

the identity of mother may be well suited to understand the challenges students face in balancing multiple responsibilities, this perspective discounts the ability of non-parenting professionals and male advisors to serve as sources of support and encouragement. However, the omission confirms the necessity for additional training and education for faculty in advising roles and to possess an awareness of the unique demands and challenges facing pregnant and parenting graduate students.

Family and external support. Spouses, partners, and family members are particularly significant in the perceived absence of support or understanding from institutional faculty and staff. The presence of external supporters to provide additional income, assist with childcare and other appointments, as well as serve as sources of encouragement play an instrumental role in students' ability to manage both school responsibilities and parenting (Anaya, 2011; Brown & Nichols, 2012; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Lynch, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). However, pregnant students enter in to an institution with differing levels of support. Students experiencing pregnancy cannot be assumed to have a partner, spouse, or familial community on which to rely for additional support and assistance with matters such as childcare.

Though significant sources of encouragement and assistance to students in the management of familial responsibilities and family care, partners and family members, in particular instances may add stress rather than abate it (Grenier & Burke, 2008; Lynch, 2008). Despite the presence of a partner to assist with the responsibilities of house upkeep and child care, women, more so than men, are expected to put in the hours in a professional position, as well as assume the primary responsibility for the household maintenance and parenting. Hochschild (1989) borrows a term originally used in an industrial context and refers to this pattern as the "second-shift". Although men, too, possess second-shift responsibilities, women

are disproportionately responsible for the care of the home and family members. This is reflected in Mason, Goulden, & Frasch's (2009) quantitative analysis of over eight thousand doctoral students which found that men and women respondents without children spent around seventy-five hours a week between coursework, employment, care for relations, and house upkeep. In contrast, mothering students reported an average of over one hundred hours.

Insufficient resources and policies. Policies and regulations pertaining to pregnant and mothering *adolescent* students arose in the 1970s as a result of the women's movement, which gained political strength following the implementation of Civil Rights legislation (Pillow, 2006). Although the percentage of teenage pregnancies was on the decline during the 1970s, greater attention was directed at the topic of extramarital sex, young mothers, and attempts to police adolescent sexual activity (Pillow, 2006; Rhode, 1993). Pillow (2006) posits it was not until increasing numbers of White middle class unwed teenagers became pregnant in the 1970s that greater attention was paid to the policies and programs for young mothers, particularly pertaining to issues of equal access to education. Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 was introduced as a way to ensure that pregnant and mothering students have access to an education that is equal to that of their non-parenting peers. The law stipulates that no educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance may deny or discriminate against an individual based on their sex (National Women's Law Center [NWLC], 2013). Additionally, Title IX protects pregnant and parenting students by prohibiting schools from discriminating against or excluding any student from educational opportunities based on the "student's pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom" (34 C.F.R. § 106.40(b)(1)). Title IX created the impetus for an increased range of services intended to support parenting students' educational pursuits and persistence, even though there is existing literature

and research to indicate discrepancies remain between what is legally assured and what schools provide (Brown & Nichols, 2012).

Even in the instance that an institution provides a range of services to pregnant and parenting students, Brown and Nichols (2012) report that many students indicate a lack of awareness about the resources available for their use. The lack of awareness of available services extends beyond students; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid (2009) found through their survey of PhD program directors that 40% did not know whether or not their campus had lactation rooms or family-friendly spaces. Regardless of an institution's available opportunities for pregnant and parenting students, Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2014) found that mothering professors felt a lack of support from their respective institutions and continued to rely primarily on their own organization and efforts to coordinate their parenting responsibilities.

While there is a wide range of institutional resources to assist pregnant and mothering students in their educational pursuits, including designated lactation spaces, parking spots reserved closer to campus for pregnant students, and on-campus family housing, these aspects appeared less frequently in the literature. Students cite three campus resources more frequently as important, but insufficient in supporting mothering students: On-campus childcare, financial aid, and class scheduling and attendance policies.

On-campus childcare. Aside from housing and food costs, childcare accounts for a significant portion of out-of-pocket costs for mothering students who do not have home-based care as an option (Lynch, 2008). The difficulty of finding and affording quality childcare is a shared theme across the examined literature, regardless of students' educational status. Although more community colleges and four-year institutions offer on-campus childcare, traditional operating hours, cost, and high demand make on-campus services a less reliable option for

mothers (Institute for Women's Policy Research [IWPR], 2013; Wilsey, 2013). Even though an institution may have an on-campus childcare program, it is not assured that students will have access to the service.

On campus childcare is often as expensive, if not more than off-campus options and operates during the traditional workday, 8AM-5PM, when students are more likely to work off campus or be in class (Lynch, 2008). Moreover, on campus care is often shared between students, staff, and faculty creating a greater demand than is possible to provide (Nichols & Brown, 2012). In some instances, students have a partner or family member who is able to help with childcare, though this is not without cost to the caregiver (Lynch, 2008). Overall, the most flexible option is private daycare, which is often a significant financial burden to mothering students, particularly those who qualify as low-income (Lynch, 2008).

Financial assistance. Title IX prohibits an institution from terminating or reducing students' receipt of athletic, merit, or need-based funding based on a student's pregnancy (NWLC, 2012). However, if a student decides to stop out or take more time away from school than is deemed necessary by a medical professional, graduate students are not assured their original funding and it becomes dependent upon individual school's non-medical leave policies (NWLC, 2011). Thus, students who do not return to their academic course load and any additional work responsibilities in full may run the risk of losing their financial support, whether that be fellowships, assistantships, or research grants, among others.

Even in the case that mothering students acquire and maintain financial support during their program of study in the form of teaching or graduate assistantships, mothering students find that the amount offered does not always adequately cover the living expenses associated with caring for a family. An estimated 40 percent of student parents work full time or more (IWPR,

2013). Whereas, Lynch (2008) reports sixty-one percent of the study's respondents worked either part or full-time in addition to their assistantships in order to afford the costs of childcare, health insurance, and cover education and living expenses. Additionally, eighty-percent of student-mothers who moved to part-time status after the birth of their child relied upon subsidized and unsubsidized loans to cover educational and living expenses after losing institutionally provided financial assistance (Lynch, 2008). While recognizing loans as an initial boon and a way to make pursuing education while parenting a possibility, students acknowledged stress related to the repayment aspect of loans (Brown & Nichols, 2012).

Beyond financial aid, the overall financial burden of balancing both higher education and the costs associated with daily living and family care serve as a significant source of stress for mothering students. In a study of 453 Canadian degree-seeking women balancing education, work, and family responsibilities, Home and Hinds (2000) found limited finances were a greater source of concern than managing coursework, employment, or caring for their families. As a result of the insufficient (or in some cases, withdrawn) institutional funding, students regard their spouses or family members as the most reliable source for economic support (Lynch, 2008). This perspective illustrates the additional challenge faced by single mothers who may not have partners, spouses, or family community to help financially or logistically in such a way that allows students to pursue additional work opportunities. Thus, the convergence of financial limitations, minimal external support, and fulfilling multiple roles complicates students' educational pursuit. The challenge is further complicated for mothering students who experience an acute sense of societal pressure to fulfill a particular societal model of motherhood, which does not necessarily account for the additional responsibilities and stress of being a student (Anaya, 2011).

Class scheduling and attendance policies. Under the purview of Title IX, instructors must excuse absences that pregnant students incur when advised by a medical professional (NWLC, 2011). As such, instructors must provide students with opportunities to recoup class points associated with attendance when missed due to a pregnancy related absence. Additionally, institutional faculty and staff may not encourage students to withdraw from a course or make program changes due to their pregnancy. Despite the legal protections set forth by Title IX, pregnant students continue to report instructor resistance and inconsistent compliance with the excused absence policy (Brown & Nichols, 2012; Pillow, 1997).

After giving birth, the challenge for mothering students becomes balancing academic responsibilities in the face of unexpected circumstances such as a child illness, medical appointments, or the loss of childcare for a day. Unless prescribed by a medical professional as throughout a woman's pregnancy, instructors may not excuse absences. Another significant challenge is presented by traditional course scheduling. Brown and Nichols (2012) found that courses are often scheduled during the daytime and conflict with students' off-campus work responsibilities. Or, in the case that students are able to access evening courses, the challenge then becomes managing childcare needs; a reality that impacts single mothering students more so than those with familial sources of support (Brown & Nichols, 2012).

The information regarding the challenge mothering students face in navigating class timing and attendance policies is the reflection of research focused on high school and undergraduate student populations. While a reoccurring theme in the cited literature, there is seemingly little research available to speak to the transferability of these findings to a graduate student population. Although it seems unlikely that the theme does not apply to a graduate

program setting, the absence may reflect students' perception of other challenges as more significant.

Medical leave. There is little information available on the type of parental leave policies available to parenting graduate students. Mason (2006) found through an examination of institutions belonging to the American Association of Universities that 26% had a maternity or parental leave policy in place for graduate students and only 10% had paid maternity leave policies. In some instances, institutional policies merely abide by the policies contained within the Family Medical Leave Act ([FMLA]; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009). Under FMLA, an individual is granted up to 12 weeks of unpaid medical leave who worked a minimum of 1,250 hours within the year prior to the start of leave (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). For many parenting graduate students, FMLA does not serve as a likely source of support as not all graduate students will have positions where they are able to earn the 24 hours per week to be eligible for coverage. In an effort to encourage mothers' adequate recovery from childbirth and time to adjust to a new way of life, institutions can demonstrate support through the implementation of graduate student parents leave policies.

Concluding Discussion

Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2014) warn against interpreting the growing presence of women in higher education as a reflection of similarity or greater equity between men and women. Although more women have access to graduate programs, more mothering graduate students may withdraw as a result of the established patterns within the graduate education system of women delaying family formation and the additional stress caused by balancing parenthood with educational responsibilities (Kuperberg, 2009). Female students in graduate programs no longer face assertions of being "psychologically disordered" (Lundberg, 1947, as cited by Solomon,

1985, p. 194) for their desire to pursue advanced education and careers as well as motherhood. However, the pattern of women's attrition from graduate programs and tenure-track faculty positions continues to advance the notion that women must choose either family or a career in academics (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009). hooks (2000) advocates for a new conceptualization of mothering, one in which women view motherhood neither as a "compulsory experience...nor an exploitative or oppressive one" (p. 137). In the same way, institutions face the task of disrupting the dominant norms around the incompatibility of motherhood and graduate education through the construction of policies and environments that support women in the management of both roles. The following chapter provides an overview of the methodology by which the study is informed and procedures followed in the data collection process.

Chapter 3: Methods

The aim of this study is to examine the experience of pregnant graduate students and the way in which their access to sources of support impact their persistence and overall wellbeing as individuals renegotiating multiple intensive roles. A comprehensive overview of the research topic was first introduced in Chapter 1 and included the significance of and motivation for the project as well as key terminology. Chapter 2 provided an analysis of relevant background information and research on the subject area as well as theoretical perspective by which this study is framed. The present chapter offers a more comprehensive discussion of the methods used to inform and carry out the study. Beginning with a restatement of the study's research questions, each section attends to crucial aspects of the research design and implementation.

Research Questions

The study is framed by one primary research question: What is the experience of female graduate students who become pregnant during their program of graduate study, whether intended or otherwise, and face the process of re-negotiating an identity that accounts for their dual roles as both student and mother? The secondary questions include: (a) In what ways did the participants' perspective change over the course of their pregnancy, if at all? And (b) From what sources do (or did) students receive support necessary to manage their multiple competing roles? These questions shaped the study's methodological framework, the interview questions, and data analysis process.

Research Perspective

The overarching theoretical framework provided by critical feminism informed all aspects of the research process extending from the research design to the data collection and, ultimately, the analysis of the data. While acknowledging that there are myriad feminist

perspectives, Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) put forward the notion of a critical feminist epistemology by aligning feminist research with a critical research framework. Using this concept, critical feminism offers a valuable framework to help determine and understand what I observed, the questions that I asked participants and, conversely, perspectives that may be missing, questions not asked, or aspects not attended to in the process (Merriam, 2009). Despite the fact that institutions of higher education are now regulated by policies premised on the notion that women ought to have equal access to educational and professional opportunities and have begun to offer resources to support students in the process, critical feminist theories illuminates the persisting inequities present in these systems. The study used critical feminist perspectives, specifically Butler's notion of performativity and the idea of embodiment, to analyze participants' lived experiences in an effort to understand how their educational experiences were influenced by inequitable gendered social constructions and systems of power (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). It is important to note that critical feminist theories (as there is no one set theory) provide a lens from which to examine points of structural inequity, privileging, or silence within the participants' graduate programs or educational environments and the impact these had upon their performance of self in those spaces and sense of support. It was not used to pass any level of judgment or critique on participants' reported experiences.

Methodology

As the research questions indicate, the primary motivation of this study is to understand the experience of pregnant graduate students and the relationship between the academic environment in higher education and their identity negotiation between multiple highly constructed roles. As such, a constructivist paradigm with its emphasis on "understanding and the lived experience" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 75) lends itself to this study. The

constructivist paradigm closely aligns with the study's emphasis on understanding participants' lived experience as both an emerging mother and graduate student and how this influences their conception of support and ability to persist in their graduate program. As introduced in the literature review, widely held notions of *ideal* mother and graduate student roles are societally constructed notions, an ideal that is at the center of a constructivist epistemology.

The study intentionally took the form of a qualitative research analysis. The use of a qualitative approach enables the researcher to co-construct with those involved in the project an understanding of how participants make meaning of experiences and the contexts in which they operate (Merriam, 2009). Thus, for the purpose of this study and examining the experiences of pregnant graduate students, qualitative research is a fitting format through which to gain in-depth understanding of the way participants interpret and construct meaning of their experiences. Qualitative research encompasses a number of different research strategies; this study is structured using a phenomenological approach.

Methodological Design

A phenomenological approach aims to understand and represent the "essence or basic structure" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25) of an individual's "experience of their life-world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25) as it relates to a particular phenomenon. Patton (2002) asserts that the primary pursuit of phenomenological research is discerning the "meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people" (p. 104). Thus, the emphasis on experience in phenomenology lends itself to the study's aim to understand the relationship between the experience of pregnancy and participants' process of dual identity formation as both an emerging mother and graduate student. As a result of the study's phenomenological approach, readers should have a better understanding of the experience of

pregnant graduate students and how the institutional environment interacts with their perceived ability to manage multiple life roles.

There has been some critique by feminist theorists regarding the phenomenological aim to depict a shared understanding or essence of the way in which participants experience a particular phenomenon. As such, some regard phenomenological analyses as essentialist and, thus, counterproductive to feminist research ideals (Fisher, 2000). However, Fisher (2000) proposes that feminist perspectives and phenomenology share the similar, if not complex, task of balancing between efforts to articulate a common set of experiences or themes associated with an experience while recognizing each participant's unique perspectives and lived experiences. Affirming this idea, Butler (1988) writes, "My situation does not cease to be mine just because it is the situation of someone else, and my acts, individual as they are, nevertheless reproduce the situation of my gender, and do that in various ways" (p. 523). Building from this notion, this project integrates both feminist thought and phenomenology in an effort to trace themes and common experiences that may speak to a broader "women's experience" (Fisher, 2000, p. 34) while accounting for individual variation and particularity—or, as Fisher (2000) writes, "the unique subject—generalized" (p. 29).

Researcher Reflexivity

Referring to the researcher as the "key instrument" in qualitative research, Creswell (2014) demonstrates the integral role of the investigator in the collection, analysis, and reporting of the findings. As such, when entering the research process, a researcher must possess an understanding of their identities, experiences, and potential biases that may influence the data collection and analysis (Jones, Torres, and Arminio, 2014). The researcher's process of reflection

is done in an effort to avoid misinterpreting the results and inaccurately representing the participants' perspective (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).

As previously stated in Chapter 1, my interest in this topic and motivation to complete this study is highly derivative of both personal identities that I hold as well as connections that I have made with students who have shared with me stories of discrimination, both explicit and disguised, throughout my experience as a student and professional in higher education. As a result, I acknowledge that I have personal biases and assumptions about the experience of pregnant students in graduate school that likely impact my research design and anticipated results. Additionally, as a student in higher education, I recognize that I continue to receive a number of unearned privileges and opportunities that support my success and allow me to navigate spaces within higher education as a scholar, practitioner, and woman with little questioning around whether or not I *belong*. Knowing that this is not the experience for many women who express a desire or actively choose to pursue both higher education and begin (or expand) their family, prompt my desire to learn from participants who are persisting or have completed their graduate programs in the face of real and perceived challenges of balancing two intensive roles.

My identities undoubtedly impact how I interacted with and was perceived by the research participants, which may have positively impacted the interviews or created challenges in building trust. As a current graduate student and someone who identifies with an *allomothering* role (Hrady, 2009), I possessed, to a limited extent, the ability to empathize and connect with the participants. However, I was acutely conscious of my status as someone not mothering or with plans to become pregnant in the immediate future and was concerned that this may impact or influence the way in which participants shared information or spoke about their

experiences. However, I did feel it was important to disclose this to each participant at the start of the initial interview in an effort to develop an authentic researcher/participant relationship. And while I took efforts to include this in the pre-interview discussion, I found in almost every occasion, participants preempted my disclosure through inquiries in our early communications. Throughout the interview process and other related communication with participants, I was cognizant of my level of participation and personal disclosures to ensure that I was not misrepresenting myself as someone who has experienced the biological process of pregnancy or mothering.

Recognizing the impact that a researcher's biases, opinions, and hypotheses may influence researcher/participant interactions, data collection, and analysis, phenomenology regards the *epoche* process as a way to mitigate the impact of the researcher's preconceived ideas (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) explains that *epoche* is meant to facilitate the researcher's process of setting aside prior held knowledge and experiences in an effort to create space for "a fresh start" (p. 85) and to view the phenomenon purely as it is presented with an open demeanor. While I agree that it is important in my role, as the study's researcher and, to some extent, narrator, to reflect on my positionality and how my identities and experiences influence the research process from its design to the analysis, I diverge from Moustakas' idea that it is possible to set these aside entirely. Mirroring this sentiment, Martin Heidegger regarded meaning making as a process that is integrally connected to an individual's background and prior experiences, positing the individual is "constructed by the world while at the same time...constructing this world from [their] own background and experiences" (Laverty, 2003, p. 8). Regardless of my efforts to remain open and present, I am inherently influenced by my understanding of the highly socialized nature of both motherhood and academia and their influential presence in my own life

as someone who is currently a graduate student and intends to pursue further education as well as serve in a mothering role.

While I did not regard *epoche* as a realistic process, I built in measures to facilitate reflection and note when my predispositions may be impacting or present in my decision making. I employed an “audit trail” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223) approach in order to document the analysis process and demonstrate the decision-making process throughout the study. The use of a research journal provided a tangible representation of my “reflections, [my] questions, and the decisions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223) that I made when faced with challenges throughout the data collection process. The maintenance of a research journal provided a space for me to explore how my social identities and assumptions influence my research design and interactions with participants (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). The record also offered an appropriate space to reflect on the data analysis process and core themes that I determined while constructing the final, collective description of the experience based on the participants’ narratives and reflections.

Procedures

Research sites. Participants were solicited from multiple institutions in an effort to acquire a sufficient number of participants to reach the point of saturation while accounting for a diverse range of perspectives and experiences (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Institutions with a research emphasis were preferred based on research which indicated they would serve as ideal sites from which to solicit participants as the dichotomy between the socialized expectations of mothers and women in academics may be more salient (Lynch, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

Sampling. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling due to the study's focus on students with a specific experience or identification in order to illuminate the nature of a particular phenomenon (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Through the use of a specific set of participant criterion, I hoped to ensure that participants reflected the most information-rich cases (Patton, 2002) and provided the most salient perspective of mothering students' experience in higher education. The specific criteria by which participants were selected included:

- Female
- Enrolled in a masters level graduate program at the time of the interviews or graduated within the past three years
- Currently pregnant during the time of their study (or within the past three years)
- Able to commit to three, 90 minute interviews

Based on the number of participants found in the initial search, I used network sampling as a way to find further participants. Because I did not know the sample population well, I relied upon the relationships and connections of those more familiar with the population to recommend additional individuals who would have offered valuable insight to better understand the phenomenon at the focus of the study (Creswell, 2008).

Participant recruitment and selection. Prior to the start of any formal research or data collection, the study was submitted to the host university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The study received IRB approval in November 2014 and participant recruitment began within the same month. As already stated, I identified potential participants using a version of network sampling. Professional staff and faculty members from the host institution were asked to share the study's recruitment materials with both current and former students who, to the best of their knowledge, met the study's criteria. This initial group of students was recruited using an

email invitation, which provided a brief introduction to the research project, primary criteria to determine eligibility, and the role of participants. A copy of each of this document can be found in Appendix C.

Based on this email, students interested in participating contacted the student researcher at the provided OSU email address. In an effort to protect the confidentiality of potential participants, all students who responded were coded and all documentation or files associated with the study, including those containing the first and last name of participants, in addition to their email addresses, were stored apart from any records pertaining the interviews in a password-protected document. I did not retain any direct identifiers following the conclusion of the interviews. Additionally, each participant self-selected a pseudonym that was used for the entirety of the research process. In two instances, I assigned the participant with a pseudonym because they did not have a name they wished to use.

Upon expressing interest, respondents received an electronic copy of the study's consent form. This enabled potential participants to review the criteria for eligibility associated with the study and confirm their interest in participation. Participants' verbal consent was collected prior to the start of the first interview. Early in the process when I had a limited number of participants gathered through the initial email invitation, I incorporated participants into the network sampling by asking if they were willing to recommend the study and share the invitation with other students who they believed to meet the study's criteria and interested in contributing to the research. In which case, the same procedure was followed. In the end, seven participants expressed interest in the project and completed the series of three interviews.

Data Collection

Interviews. Phenomenological interviewing served as the primary data collection method (Seidman, 2013). In accordance with a phenomenological inquiry, participants were asked to take part in three in-depth, semi-structured interviews in an effort to encourage participants to discuss their experience in an increasingly reflective manner. The intensive phenomenological interview format is structured in a way to allow the participants to reflect on their past and current lived experiences in order to place the phenomenon within the overall context of their life (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Seidman, 2013).

In the first interview, questions asked participants to focus upon reconstructing past experiences in an effort to create a context in which to place their present experiences, the focal point of the second interview (Seidman, 2013). Details, not opinions, regarding students' experiences were the focus of the second interview—although it is important to recognize the interplay between the two, noting the ways in which the details regarding particular situations may influence participants' opinions (Seidman, 2013). The third and final interview provided an opportunity for participants to use their reflections from the prior interviews to make meaning of the way in which past events shaped their present experience and the context in which it occurred (Seidman, 2013). In this way, each of the three interviews sought to scaffold upon one another, using questions that asked each participant to recall moments and conditions that prompted them to reflect on and make meaning of their overall experience.

Participants responded to questions that sought to illuminate the “structure and meaning” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 91) of what it is to be a pregnant student in graduate school. Creswell (2006) notes that two core questions in phenomenological interviewing are: (a) What have you [the participant] experienced in terms of the phenomenon? (b) What contexts or situations have influenced your experience of the phenomenon? (p. 61). While I did not include

these two questions explicitly in the interviews, I used them as a guide when formulating my questions to ensure that I would receive data that addressed those two core concepts. The interviews were semi-structured so as to allow the participant flexibility to refrain from responding if desired as well as able to pursue topics or anecdotes that were of relevance and interest to the participant and/or researcher. However, each participant responded to a core set of questions so as to create a level of consistency across each set of interviews. The full list and set order of the questions is provided in Appendix E. The interviews ranged from 35-60 minutes and the first and third interview typically lasted longer than the second due to the introductory and concluding nature of the two interviews. In two instances, the three interviews were modified and completed in one setting at the request of the participants due to time constraints. While this was not the preferred structure, as Seidman (2013) indicates, “it is almost always better to conduct an interview under less than ideal conditions than not at all” (p. 25).

At the conclusion of each interview, participants received the option to participate in a short debrief following the completion of each interview in order to provide an additional opportunity for participants to reflect upon their interviews and any emotional or psychological repercussions that the experience may have incurred. Additionally, the debrief conversations provided an opportunity to ensure that the participants felt comfortable with the proceedings of the interviews and had an opportunity to address any relevant topic areas that may have been missing from the questions or direction of conversation (Merriam, 2009). In most cases, the participants wanted to discuss the study’s progress, the qualities or trends that I was noting in my interviews with other participants, or to ask about the research process. None of the participants disclosed any emotional, psychological, or other repercussions as a result of the questions, though that is not to say that they were not experienced.

Ensuring the Protection of Participants

The research protocol was designed using a number of measures to ensure participants' safety and confidentiality was protected throughout the research process. It was determined at the recommendation of the host institution's IRB that relevant professional staff, faculty, and current students share recruitment materials with students believed to meet the study's criterion. This was done in an effort to maintain potential participants' confidentiality. In most cases, I only began to communicate with participants after receiving a message from interested participants for more information or indicate their interest in participation. This limited my awareness of students who may not have wanted to disclose a pregnant or parenting status.

As outlined in the approved protocol, once it was determined that the participant met the research criterion, each participant provided verbal consent to participate in the study prior to the start of the first interview. The use of a verbal agreement helped prevent the creation of an electronic or paper trail between participants and the study. The verbal consent guide that was read in advance and again at the start of the initial interview with each participant is included in Appendix D. By providing verbal consent, participants gave approval for each of their three interviews to be audio-recorded using a digital recorder. Audio recording, as indicated in the verbal consent guide, was a mandatory component of the study and potential participants were advised to withdraw if they could not consent to this requirement. Recording the interviews enabled the interviewer to take notes, if necessary, during the interview process as well as remain an active, present participant in the process. The semi-structured format of the interviews required that I be able to remain engaged in the conversation and better able to determine when follow up questions were warranted or would possibly contribute relevant data. Any notes taken during the interview were written up in to memos following the completion of interviews and

included as a part of the audit trail, which contributes to the documentation of the research process (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).

Ultimately, seven participants representing six distinct universities and Masters programs were enrolled in the study. Participants were enrolled in the study according to the order in which they indicated interest. The interviews were conducted using methods based on availability, proximity, and participant preference. Two participants were in programs at the host institution and as such, in-person interviews were held in the participant's home and a private study room respectively. In the case of another participant, the initial interview was conducted over the phone with follow up interviews in-person. The remainder of the interviews took place over the phone at the request of the participants and due to the participants' being out-of-state (in relation to the host university). Phone was used rather than online communication platforms such as Skype because it was an accessible medium for all participants and mitigated interruptions (such as poor or intermittent internet connectivity) that may have occurred.

Throughout the research process all documentation associated with the study was coded and stored in password-protected files on an external hard drive that was also password-protected. The first and last name of the participants, in addition to their email addresses will be stored apart from any records pertaining the interviews in a password-protected document. No direct identifiers were retained following the conclusion of the interviews. I replaced any potential identifiers with broad description to avoid linking the participant to the study while transcribing each interview. This included the names of participants' infants, family members, graduate programs, and institutions among other information that may have been disclosed during the interviews. All materials associated with the study, including my notes and research journal were locked in a personal location and password protected when stored digitally. In compliance with

the host institution's IRB regulations, data associated with the study will be stored on the hard drive for seven years following its completion.

Data analysis

Coding. Following the initial completion and transcription of participants' interviews, I followed an open coding approach in order to explore the available ideas and themes contained within the data. Open coding, also referred to as initial coding (Charmaz, 2006, as cited in Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014) "breaks data into manageable pieces" (p. 165) in order for the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the information contained within the collected data. Creswell (2006) draws upon the model of psychologist Moustakas (1994) to describe the process of "horizontalization" (p. 61) by which the researcher performs a line-by-line reading of the data to cull important ideas, statements, and patterns. Following this model, I underwent the process of horizontalization in an effort to determine the initial themes or concepts that reflect elements of the study's primary and secondary research questions.

After the initial process of grouping together key ideas and statements, Creswell (2006) explains that the researcher must use the information garnered from research to develop "essential themes" (p. 59) that demonstrate the "nature of the [lived] experience" (p. 59). The identified themes will provide the material to write both a textural and structural description of the phenomena as depicted by the participants (Creswell, 2006). According to Creswell (2006) a textural description represents the participants' experience while a structural description analyzes the way in which an environment influences the participants' experience of the phenomena. Both the textural and structural descriptions were instrumental in the process of writing a collective description that represents the essential nature of what it is to be both a graduate student and pregnant based on the data provided by the participants (Creswell, 2006). Ultimately, the aim for

the final, detailed description of the phenomena is to provide readers with a clear understanding of the experience and context in which it takes place (Creswell, 2006).

Member checks served as the primary method to ensure the accuracy of the data collected from participant interviews (Merriam, 2009). As such, participants were provided with an opportunity to review the transcripts from their interviews and offer corrections or suggestions to ensure that the records and interpretations accurately reflected their perspective. Although the member checking process provides an opportunity for participants to provide input regarding the representation and analysis of the data collected during interviews, Lather (2003, as cited in Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014) cautions against relying upon member checking as the primary method of verification. Instead, I chose to view respondent validation as an extension of the “emerging findings and [regarded] as additional data” (Lather, 2003, as cited in Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 36). In addition to serving as an initial method to assess the accuracy of the interpretations, I considered any corrections or feedback received from participants as additional contributions to the study’s data, which were subsequently included in the analysis process.

Concluding Discussion

A phenomenological approach lends itself to the study’s aim to understand the relationship between the participants’ experience as both emerging mothers and graduate students and how this influenced their conceptualization of support. Using three semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews, participants were asked to reflect on and explore their experiences as pregnant graduate students from a number of different perspectives. It is the hope that the research findings may provide insight as to the challenges pregnant students face in graduate programs and ways in which institutional policies and practices carried out by professional staff, advisors, and instructors may offer support to students. The following chapter

presents the results culled from the series of interviews conducted with the seven participants and the overarching themes that emerged from the insight and reflections that each offered about their experience.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

As described in Chapter 2 in the overview of existing scholarship, current scholarship primarily considers the impact of children and mothering roles upon women's experience as students ranging from high school, undergraduates, and doctoral students to those in professional roles. However, there is little consideration given to the specific experience of pregnancy in educational environments. This study specifically aims to contribute to a limited body of scholarship by examining the lived experience of students who become pregnant while in a master's level graduate program. The following primary and secondary research questions guided the study:

1. What is the experience of female graduate students who become pregnant during their program of graduate study, whether intended or otherwise, and face the process of re-negotiating an identity that accounts for their dual roles as both student and parent?
 - (a) In what ways did the participants' perspectives change over the course of their pregnancy, if at all?
 - (b) From what sources do (or did) students receive the support necessary to manage their multiple competing roles?

As described in Chapter 3, data were collected through a series of three, semi-structured phenomenological interviews. As will be described, the series of interviews and questions asked during each were arranged loosely according to the chronological order of past, present, and future. Overall, the questions focused on specific aspects of the participant's experience. The first interview was focused primarily on the participants' past and gathering key information regarding the participants' background, their motivation for pursuing a master's degree, their consideration of family formation, and any other introductory information they felt was

important to discuss. The second interview sought to move participants' reflection into their present situations though some of the question built upon the discussion of the first and remained rooted in reflection on the past. The questions focused on aspects of the participants' graduate program in greater detail, including their relationships with their advisors and faculty and classroom experiences and how these changed over the course of their pregnancy. It was during this interview, more so than the other two, that participants expanded their responses to include both their experiences while pregnant as well as the way that their relationships and academic experiences changed post-partum. The third, and final interview was an opportunity for participants to bring the prior two interviews together and examine the way in which their pregnancy and the interactions and relationships in their graduate program came together and shaped their overall experience. The participants were also asked to engage in acts of imagination or re-visioning in order to identify guidance they wish they had received prior to their experience, advice they would offer to another student in their position, as well as changes or considerations they would like to see made in the future for pregnant students. Questions about sources of support and strategies they used to succeed were woven throughout each of the three interviews.

Each interview was transcribed and analyzed in accordance with an open or initial coding process to pull out key ideas, stories, or patterns that may have emerged from the interview (Charmaz, 2006). After this was done for each series of interviews, the initial codes were grouped together, as much as possible, based upon similar patterns or relationships between the data provided by each participant. While accounting for a level of difference and individuality, the experiences or reflections that were repeated by multiple participants were narrowed again from the initial groupings. These core groups of patterns or shared experiences constitute the five

themes examined in detail in this chapter. I assigned titles to each theme using language (when possible) directly from participant interviews that I felt best represented the aspect being described. The following five themes emerged as reflective of the participants' lived experiences:

- Managing the physiological effects of pregnancy
- Private made public
- Conceptualization of support
- Re-prioritization
- Navigating the graduate experience

Building from the study's two sub-questions, the first four themes contribute to and influence the final theme, which aims to respond to the primary question, illuminating integral factors that influence the overall experience of pregnant graduate students. These primary themes as well as subthemes contained within the discussion of each are detailed and analyzed using direct language and passages selected from the participants' interviews. This is done in an effort to use participants' own language to give voice to their lived experiences and reflections. The resulting themes are additionally analyzed in relationship to the critical feminist theoretical framework and themes and trends discussed in Chapter 2.

Participant profiles

Chapter 3 concluded with a cursory overview of the participants' demographics as a group. The following section provides a more in-depth description of each participant based on information they chose to disclose in the introductory interview regarding their personal and family lives, motivation for pursuing a master's degree, and any additional information they thought to be relevant. It is important to better understand the contexts and roles from which

each participant operated and how these influence the larger themes and inferences that are drawn regarding the experience of combining pregnancy and graduate school. The names of each participant are pseudonyms as a part of the study's confidentiality measures. Additionally, references to the names of their family members, graduate programs and institutions, instructors and peers, as well as any other possible identifying information have been removed.

Anne. Anne was 29 when she began a master's program in marriage, couple, and family counseling at a small, private, religiously affiliated institution in the Pacific Northwest. She chose her program to prepare her to work with young couples and support them in the process of intentional life planning. Anne knew when beginning her program that she and her husband, who had been together for eight years, intended to begin a family. Despite the encouragement of several faculty members to extend her program to a four-year timeline after she became pregnant, she opted to remain a full-time student on the traditional three-year track (the "traditional" timeline for full-time students in this program) in order to graduate with her classmates, avoid incurring additional student debt, and simply not prolong the program longer than absolutely necessary. Anne was a student in the same program as another of the study's participant, Rose, although she entered the program at a later point and did not make specific references or allusions to Rose.

Corinne. The youngest of the seven participants at 24, Corinne earned a master's degree in Academic Advising, with a dual specialization in administration and athletics in the summer of 2014 from a prominent public university in the Mid-West. Corinne was enrolled in distance education program while concurrently working full time as an admissions recruiter. She decided to pursue a graduate education for career purposes in order to be able to work as an academic advisor. She hopes, in the future to serve in a dean of student affairs position. She learned of her

pregnancy prior to the start of the first term of her graduate program. According to Corinne, her pregnancy was a “total surprise” and “game changer.” Although she and her husband of nearly five years always intended to begin a family, they were not actively trying at the time. After learning of her pregnancy, Corinne expressed that the idea of her burgeoning family provided additional motivation to complete her program and “really keep moving up.” Although she acknowledged that her program would take more time to complete than she initially intended, she never entertained the idea of quitting.

Francesca. After eight years of teaching “English as a second language to international students” Francesca decided to return to graduate school in order to do research pertaining to her “old job” as well as pursue work outside of a corporate organization. She matriculated into an applied anthropology master’s program at a large, public research institution in the Pacific Northwest where she was a full time student with a graduate teaching assistantship. In the process of considering and applying to graduate programs, Francesca and her husband began to discuss the timing around having a baby and beginning their family, something that was a priority for both. At 31, Francesca was conscious of her age in relationship to fertility and medical standards of “advanced maternal age.” The decision to begin a family, according to Francesca, albeit an “easy” one, required that she decide whether or not she was “going to be a crazy career person or [have] a family.” While moving away from her initial desire to pursue a career in academia, she is considering the possibility of teaching at the community college level or non-faculty positions in international education that allow her to remain in a higher education setting with a level of flexibility to care for her family. At the time of the interviews, Francesca’s son was almost three months old. For the fall term, her department transitioned her teaching

assignment to an online class, which enabled her to stay at home with her infant while completing her thesis, which she hoped to finish before the start of the winter term.

Irene. Irene works full-time in the corporate healthcare industry while earning her MBA from a prestigious business program at a large, public mid-western institution. After working for five years at an advertising agency, Irene decided the intensive nature of her role was unsustainable and incompatible with her desire to begin a family and transitioned to her current position and began to apply to MBA programs. At the time of the interviews, Irene described her year as “an absolute whirlwind” as she found out about her pregnancy, married her now-husband, gave birth to her daughter, and subsequently returned to work and her graduate program. While acknowledging that she and her husband did not “plan for this timing for when we got our daughter” and the many responsibilities she has to juggle at one time, Irene expressed that the pregnancy and changes to her family “felt really right and really okay.”

Michelle. Michelle graduated with a master’s of public administration with an emphasis in student affairs at a Southwestern medium sized, public university. Michelle described her decision to go immediately into a graduate program as motivated by a desire to further her education she knew that if she waited or took a break she would not likely go back; she did not want to combine graduate school while raising children. She was able to attend her program because her husband worked for the university at which she attended while also completing a master’s program. She expressed very little connection with the public administration focus of the program, as she was interested in student affairs, although that was not a specific program offered at the institution. She served as a graduate assistant in the institution’s career center during her first year of the program before transitioning to a full time position in a residential treatment center while she finished her final year.

Rachel. Trained as a doula and a midwife, Rachel worked in the maternal health field for a number of years before returning to higher education. She and her husband have been together for ten years and married for five of them and began trying to start their family almost immediately following their wedding. After several years of unsuccessful medical treatments, Rachel decided that because of her own experience she could not remain in a profession entirely focused on pregnancy and decided to return to higher education in order to have something over which she “could have some control and feel good about” and pursue “other goals that [she] had because this one wasn’t working out so well.” At the time of the interview, Rachel was in her second year of a medical anthropology program at a large, public research institution. Both Rachel and Francesca attended the same institution and academic program though students in different programs. In responding to questions around program climate and mothering students, both participants expressed an awareness of one another though did not appear to know one another extensively due to the structure of the department. Rachel was pregnant for a large portion of the fall term before experiencing a miscarriage.

Rose. Rose is unique among the seven participants in that she was the only participant to experience multiple pregnancies during the span of her graduate program. She was 36 at the time of her pregnancy. This was Rose’s first pregnancy that she carried to full term. She experienced a miscarriage prior to the pregnancy with her daughter. At this time, she was concurrently enrolled in a marriage, couple, and family counseling master’s program at a small, private, religiously affiliated institution in the Pacific Northwest. She transitioned to graduate school from prior careers supporting survivors of sexual violence as well as in the business sector in order to pursue a career in counseling, a profession that aligned with her natural strengths and would

enable her to closely support individuals and couples. At the time of the interview, Rose's daughter was three years old and her son was nearing ten months.

Narratives of pregnancy. None of the participants were pregnant at the time of their interviews. Thus, the data collected from the participants is the product of their *reflections* on their experience as pregnant graduate students. As the participants reflected on their pregnancies and the intersection with their academic and personal lives during this period, it was difficult for them to address their pregnancies in isolation. Instead, as the themes and the narrative examples provided as illustration of each demonstrate, the experience of pregnancy was conflated by many of the participants with their transition to mothering graduate students, or more broadly, the experience of transitioning back into classes and their academic responsibilities after such a momentous experience. Although pregnancy remains the focal point of the discussion and findings, the participants' responses point to the finite nature of pregnancy during which they build and must prepare, with some exceptions, to take on a far more enduring role, namely that of a mother.

This unanticipated observation results from the study's phenomenological methodology and the reflective nature of the three interviews, which asked the participants to describe their experience repeatedly, and from a number of perspectives, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their experience. Moustakas (1994) posits that in the process of examining and reflecting on a phenomenon, "there are acts of memory relevant to a phenomenon that reawaken feelings and images and bring past meanings and qualities in the present" (p. 53). In order to respond to the interview questions and describe their graduate experience as pregnant students, the participants had to engage in processes of remembering, calling forward past experiences and relationships and the meaning they made of these encounters. Knowledge, according to

Moustakas (1994), is deepened in the process of joining together perspectives from the past, present, and future over an extended period of time and intentional consideration.

As will become more evident through the discussion of the study's results, the participants' natural proclivity to blend their experience as pregnant with the period immediately following, whether it was the resulting birth of their child or miscarriage, seems to point to a larger understanding. Particularly, to study pregnancy is to study the transition that follows immediately into motherhood or grappling with emotional and physiological effects if the pregnancy is lost. It is for that reason that the analysis includes participant dialogue and reflections about their experiences pre- and post- pregnancy. The study's phenomenological methodology encouraged participants' reflection on and acknowledgement of the way in which their experiences and the support (or absence thereof) they received is inherently connected to their lives and roles beyond the specific periods associated with their pregnancy.

Results

Theme 1: Managing the physiological effects of pregnancy. In some respects, participants regarded the management of the physical changes and symptoms associated with pregnancy as the easiest part of their experience. Although the physical changes of pregnancy certainly impacted students' functioning in their academic, professional, and personal roles, participants' responses indicate that this seemed to be the most manageable aspect of their experience once they became accustomed to the changing nature of their physical state and developed strategies to cope. In discussing the challenges of balancing her work, academic, and family responsibilities, Irene was careful to distinguish between the period during which she was pregnant from the time of our interview when she was managing the care of her daughter in addition to her other roles and responsibilities. From the physical aspect, according to Irene,

pregnancy is “not as challenging because there’s really not a whole lot that you have to do. You just have to like exist.” This was a reoccurring idea expressed to differing extents by other participants. However, while acknowledging a level of stasis once they adjusted to the physical changes, the participants were careful not to discount the significant changes and challenges presented by the physiological aspect of and changes as they progressed in their pregnancies.

On a basic (though not inconsequential) level, the physical exhaustion caused by pregnancy was a significant change that participants had to learn to accommodate. Corinne described feeling more tired than she had ever felt at any point in her life. Each participant responded to this change using different methods depending on the level of flexibility their academic and/or work schedules allowed. Francesca described leaving campus and completing her academic work earlier in the day because she could no longer stay up as late, whereas Corinne had enough flexibility to be able to take naps mid-way through her day which helped her complete a full work day and her homework after work. Rachel speaks to the difficulty that she had concentrating and remaining present in class and group spaces when, physically, she felt “really gross” and was experiencing nausea, heightened sensitivity to scents, and mentally feeling “super foggy.”

The themes and discussion that follow unpack the decision making and accommodations that participants described making in order to manage both the physical changes they were undergoing in addition to their academic responsibilities, among others in greater detail. Yet, the physical impact and changes participants began to experience necessitated, in some instances, dramatic changes to their academic schedule and lifestyle in order to care for themselves and their pregnancy. For those to whom the notions of model graduate students as intensively focused on academics in both time and energy were present (Lynch, 2008), the need to step back

or change their level of focus was something that was initially difficult to manage and not always supported by members of their academic program.

Theme 2: Private made public. Closely connected to the first theme, the physical embodiment of pregnancy meant that at a certain point the participants were no longer able to keep their pregnancies private. Participants' discussion focused on strategies that were employed regarding the timing and nature of others learning about their pregnancy and, once others knew, the process of reestablishing relationships. In some instances, multiple participants spoke to the perceived need to show their peers that they remained committed and reliable members of the learning communities. In addition, once the pregnancy was unquestionably perceptible to others, participants discussed how they managed the additional attention directed at them, in some cases, by individuals they did not know.

Disclosure. The process by which participants chose to disclose, if at all, their pregnancy was a point of serious consideration for many and required a level of strategy and compromise. Discussion focused on the timing of disclosure and when the participants felt comfortable to inform others that they were expecting and the order in which they inform members of their program. The timing and nature of disclosure was closely connected to the extent to which participants' wanted to keep their pregnancy private. Although Rachel's primary impetus for not telling others was a sense that it was not relevant or something that she wanted to share at the time, she also expressed that she had feared losing her teaching position because her due date fell in the middle of the spring term. Even though she had no specific reason for this fear and had observed other pregnant students in the program thrive, she did not tell others about her pregnancy, including her advisor with whom she had an existing relationship before entering the program and regarded as highly supportive. Francesca, similarly, wanted to keep her pregnancy

but knew that she would not be able to keep it from her cohort for very long and wanted to tell her advisor directly before informing others. The process of disclosing her pregnancy to her advisor was described as a significant source of stress that was further compounded by the advisor's mixed reaction of (perceived) frustration and congratulatory words. The nature of the advisor-advisee relationship is examined in greater depth in the discussion of the fifth theme.

Consciousness of visibility. Although the participants focused on different aspects or manifestations of the way in which they were made to feel hyper-visible by others' attention to their pregnancy, each of the participants called upon encounters in which they perceived additional attention directed at them as the result of the physical representation of their pregnancy or more subtle. Illustrating Pillow's (1997) paradoxical notion of pregnancy as something that is both the subject of heightened "social attention and avoidance" (p. 351) these moments ranged from outright comments and gestures directed at participants to more subtle indications inferred through others' body language, conversation choice, or overall demeanor. It is important to note that the participants expressed differing levels of comfort with the additional attention they received once their pregnancy was physically noticeable. Rose described pregnancy as the "ultimate ice breaker" in that it always provided an easy conversation topic, whether that was something she instigated or inquiries from others. While recognizing the need to set boundaries and consider the limit to which she was willing to entertain questions, she did not appear to regard questions or inquiries as inappropriately intrusive. In contrast, Francesca spoke to the hyper-visible nature of simply navigating campus, Francesca stated, "it's crazy being pregnant, um, on a college campus...there's just this assumption that you are 19, even though you don't look it, you know...and you're pregnant on a campus it's like the constant 'oh my god, check her out' *feeling* all the time." As a result of the additional attention, even if in

more passive forms, Francesca intentionally avoided certain locations on campus that she regarded as “undergrad spaces” because of the assumptions she perceived others directing at her specifically because of her pregnancy.

The participants’ respective contexts and contrasting experiences provide an indication of the spaces in which students face, perhaps, the greatest scrutiny for the codes their bodies “speak” (Pillow, 1997). Francesca’s class schedule and role as a graduate teaching assistant required that she spend time on campus during the day where she was interacting closely with undergraduates as well as graduate students in contrast to Rose’s program where classes were held in the evenings and on weekends and primarily attended by graduate students. Additionally, Rose’s campus was a satellite campus, located apart from the main campus where the majority of undergraduate students live and attend classes. Francesca’s heightened sense of visibility and scrutiny by campus community members in an environment where she blends with the undergraduate student population illustrates the contradictory standards applied to women and the way in which pregnancy becomes a site of “moral concern” (Pillow, 1997, p. 351). Women are expected to fulfill their reproductive responsibilities and pursue family, but only as it aligns with notions of who is morally, economically, and physically appropriate to care for a child (Lawson & Rhode, 1993 cited in Pillow, 1997). Thus, on a large, public campus where visitors and community members cannot or may not know Francesca’s age, family context, or motivation, she perceived others as monitoring and applying assumptions to her body in the same way that they might of a pregnant youth or an individual who defies the notions of appropriate pregnancy. Conversely, Rose’s smaller campus community that was localized primarily to graduate students where a greater range of life experience is assumed likely contributed to her overall positive perception of her interactions with others. Rose’s responses

indicate that she was not any less visible on her campus than Francesca, simply that because she was surrounded predominantly by other graduate students who held multiple life roles outside of that of student or could understand the timing, she did not perceive others as concerned or critical about the appropriateness of her pregnancy.

In addition to more passive forms of attention, participants called upon experiences when others, ranging from members of their immediate family to complete strangers, would offer unsolicited advice or encouragement. While some certainly regarded this with a level of frustration, these moments were also a source of humor. Laughing at the encounter, Irene recalled, “it was just so funny and probably because like, well, we’re in...just like white, Norwegian state and he’s like ‘yeah, you go mamma!’” Like...total...It was just so funny. Yeah, I still smile about that.” While able to laugh or find humor in these moments, these encounters nonetheless illustrate the way in which pregnancy opens up the individual and the decisions one makes while pregnant to public scrutiny (Pillow, 1997). Confirming this reality, Participants’ detailed problematic encounters in which instructors made comments about their post-partum body weight or espoused opinions regarding the appropriate timing of pregnancy and women’s priorities. Young (1990) suggests the ambiguity around where “the pregnant body ends and the world begins” (p. 116) prompts outside observers to feel comfortable making comments or offering their perspective regarding aspects of pregnancy. None of the participants seemed to have an idea of how to successfully interrupt unsolicited comments or attention (even when well intended) from others. In response to both positive and frustrating experiences, numerous participants spoke to a tendency to either laugh these moments off or quickly move past it, rather than risk the appearance of “being that person” as Corinne articulated.

Managing others' perceptions. The participants' hyper-awareness of and attempts to read and manage the perceptions of outside observers is reflective of Butler's notion of performativity. Whether or not it was explicitly articulated, participants understood the generalizations and stereotypes attributed to pregnancy and actively adjusted their behavior in an effort to mitigate negative or presumptive messaging others might apply to them. This was particularly evident in participants' discussion of working in academic settings, such as the classroom or group projects. Although Irene was initially resistant to the idea that her behavior or interactions changed, she acknowledged that she was more attentive to the roles she took on and demonstrating to her peers that she could be trusted to follow through on her assigned tasks. Irene described the way in which she changed her behaviors when in an academic setting with her peers as follows:

it wasn't a major adjustment, it was more just being upfront with who was doing what work and when is it going to be done...Kind of to reassure people you know, "I know what I have to do and I know when I have to do it by." Um, but I did find that when I was obviously, visibly pregnant and placed in a group with a team, I did make it a point to make it known that I am aware of what I need to do for the group and when it'll be done by. And, therefore, they don't, you know, need to worry that it's going to get done.

This behavior was something that she indicated was unique to the school setting. In her professional setting, she felt less need to delineate roles and responsibilities so explicitly as she had longer standing relationships and felt less need to build rapport or assuage concerns regarding her commitment or ability to follow through with her tasks. Recognizing the stereotypes and tropes that are commonly ascribed to pregnant women, Irene adjusted her language and behavior, namely the way in which she performed in academic, group settings as a way to resist the narratives or assumptions that others may have inherently applied to her. Corinne spoke to a similar pattern of "overcompensation", though perhaps to a heightened

extent, because of her self-consciousness related to her status as a young, married woman and the assumptions that others typically attribute to women in her region.

This is perhaps the most direct connection to the notion of embodiment in that several participants describe interactions or, at the least, an awareness of outside attention directed at their pregnancy and judgments being made regarding both their own experiences as well as the context of their pregnancy (Pillow, 1997). The gaze of outside observers, as interpreted by several participants, carries societal notions and critique regarding propriety and who is permitted to experience pregnancy and at what stage of life (Pillow, 1997). This had a direct impact upon the way in which the participants *performed* their pregnancy depending on the space and the messaging or assumption they felt they might need to subvert or, at the least, clarify through the use of different language and behavior.

Theme 3: Conceptualization of support. In order to address the study's third research sub question, participants were asked at multiple points throughout each of the three interviews to identify and reflect on the sources from which they received support or, conversely, felt the absence of support. While other forms of support are interwoven in each of themes in various ways, the following subthemes reflect specific individuals or communities who took on a significant role both positively or otherwise, based on the consistency between the participants' responses and discussion of each. It is evident through the examples offered and explanation of the ways by which others' helped that support assumes myriad forms, ranging from emotional outreach, words of encouragement, or more tangible services, such as childcare.

Husbands and immediate family. Unanimously, each of the participants identified their husbands as their most significant source of emotional and tangible support. Due to the nature of pregnancy, the participants emphasized the emotional support their spouses offered by listening

to their complaints and offering encouragement, helping with the maintenance of their home and personal lives, as well as making small adjustments that enabled the participants to prioritize their personal care. While acknowledging a level of chaos inherent in managing academics, pregnancy and their family lives, as well as work in many instances, their husbands were viewed as instrumental in being able to manage it all.

Additionally, the majority of participants received some form of tangible help and support from members of their immediate families, most often in the form of childcare, as well as encouragement and emotional support. Multiple participants lived within a short distance from their parents or in-laws and relied closely on them to help with childcare on days or evenings when they were in class and their husband had to work or prior commitments. For example, Rose's in-laws drove almost an hour once a week to spend time with their grandchildren and give her time to work on coursework while she was in school. She described this as a gesture that she knew they wanted to do simply to see their grandchildren, but continued to do with such consistency because that was a way they could help while she was finishing her program.

While there is value in this shared perspective of the necessity of supportive and empathetic partners and family members, this offers a limited scope of mothering and family structures. The perspective of single pregnant and mothering students is one that remains unrepresented in this study as well as the larger body of scholarship examining the experience of mothering students at any educational level. Given that each of the participants' closely connected family formation with their marriages, this study upholds a dominant, heteronormative framework of marriage and family formation (O'Reilly, 2008). Similar to the discussion pertaining to the importance of their partners' as sources of support, the presence of immediate family may be seen as both a strength and limitation in the context of the study. While

demonstrating the significant role that family members played in the emotional and tangible support of the participants during their pregnancies and post-partum, the current discussion lacks an understanding of the strategies or methods employed by which those who are pregnant and/or mothering with limited to no presence of their immediate family meet similar needs.

Classmates. Participants' frequently identified their peers as a basic source of emotional support, particularly those who shared a parenting role and could relate to the frenetic nature of trying to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities. It is evident that participants' relationships and perception of support from their peers was highly contingent on the nature of the program. Francesca, Rachel, Rose, and Anne were highly connected to their classmates as a product of being in programs with a loose cohort model which made considerations around disclosure and maintaining the privacy of their pregnant more acute. Whereas participants who were in part-time or distance programs such as Irene and Corinne had greater freedom and control regarding the timing of their disclosure, although they still had to negotiate their relationships with their peers. As a student in a distance program, the online-based structure enabled Corinne to only ever discuss her pregnancy if it was relevant to a comment or post in a discussion board or a shared status with a classmate. In contrast to family members who more frequently provided direct support such as childcare, peers were perceived almost entirely as sources of emotional support and encouragement. Participants pointed to the kindness of their peers for taking interest in their wellbeing and frequently asking questions about how they were feeling and extending offers of support.

Co-workers. For the participants working or interning in professional environments outside of their institutions, work colleagues and supervisors were regarded as significant contributors to whether participants felt supported or otherwise. Work communities also

appeared to be the area in which participants' experiences differed the most in their experience of support. Irene pointed out that in contrast to her academic peers, her co-workers interacted with her on a daily basis and had long(er) standing relationships and knowledge of her work ethic and drive. Thus, in moments that she perceived her colleagues were critical of her work or the implications of her pregnancy and multiple commitments, she regarded those as greater personal insult rather than if it had come from a classmate. As a group, participants emphasized the value that they placed on having a community of work or intern colleagues who made efforts to check in with them about their pregnancy and how they were doing among other small gestures of kindness. Similar to classmates, the participants did not regard their work colleagues as sources of tangible support in the same way that they discussed their husbands and family members. However, they were careful not to discount the significance of the emotional support and encouragement that they received from their class and work colleagues.

Theme 4: Re-prioritization. The theme of re-prioritization speaks to the way in which participants began to reconsider and adjust their academic expectations or goals in favor of self-care and consideration of their wellbeing and that of their family members. For some participants this was an easy process and one that fell in place naturally, whereas for others it was something that took place over time and came with a level of resistance. To a certain extent, the physical changes and limitations of their pregnancy, particularly finding that they were no longer able to sustain the pace and hours at which they were accustomed, required that the participants make adjustments in order to manage their numerous roles and responsibilities. The process of re-prioritization most often took the form of finding areas in their lives where small concessions made their experience more manageable as well as adjusting their academic standards and expectations.

Making concessions. Mirroring the idea of “satisficing” which originated as an economic term and refers to a mentality of “good enough” as opposed to perfection (Simon, 1981; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012), Rachel spoke to the need of finding areas in which there was space to “make concessions” that helped her manage her work and academic responsibilities in addition to the physical effects of pregnancy, all the while acknowledging that others may not have found those decisions preferable. Because maintaining the wellbeing of her pregnancy was of such significance, there were areas in which she was willing to be a little more lenient, even if it was not standard practice.

...[teaching] wasn't the thing that mattered to me the most. And so, having to make concessions and having to like, you know, I'd let my class out a little early, um, I knew that probably if my supervisor found out that I was doing that, they'd be unhappy with me, but I just didn't care. Cause I just needed to make room for what I was going through, and that was the way I handled it, you know, those sorts of things that um just become, they just were all of a sudden not as high of a priority. And, being pregnant was.

Unlike Corinne who felt compelled to overcompensate so as to avoid being interpreted as using her pregnancy as an excuse, Rachel recognized the possibility of this perception though demonstrated a willingness to push on rules or preferences that she regarded as lower-risk if it supported her wellbeing and that of her pregnancy. The dilemma between complying with the expectations of their instructors, advisors, or supervisors despite their physical and emotional limits or transgressing those expectations in favor of self-care was an acute challenge for the participants. More often than not, the participants attested to the process as something that took place fairly intuitively after they considered the wellbeing of their unborn child. The changes that participants made to their schedules, academic commitments, and participation in an attempt to achieve balance and make their pregnancies more manageable reflect one way in which the participants became sites of resistance (Pillow, 1997), adding nuance to the idealized notions and messaging regarding successful graduate students as those who are singularly devoted to their

academic pursuits. As discussed in the following sub-theme, the decision to find areas where it was appropriate to concede or spend less time on aspects of their academic responsibilities did not sacrifice their overall success or performance in their program. In fact, multiple participants indicated that they became stronger and more discerning students.

Changing academic standards. As a result of the physical exhaustion and bodily changes caused by pregnancy coupled with an increased focus on their health and wellbeing, participants experienced a change in their approach to their academic coursework and standards. For some participants, it is evident that this required a dramatic attitudinal change. While others seemed to approach this shift as more of a necessity if they were going to be succeed in managing all of their responsibilities.

Rose described herself as “the classic, overachiever person” who, throughout her education experience “*always* want[ed] the accolades from the professors, want[ed] them to acknowledge that [she] was doing it right.” It was a difficult transition at first, but she feels that it was “better for [her] as a person in the end” to learn to let go (to some extent) of her desire to do things perfectly or at maximum effort all of the time if that meant she was making time to be with and care for her child(ren) and marriage. Irene shared a similar sentiment, noting that in order to meet her responsibilities she had to learn to prioritize and maximize her efforts when she did have time for her coursework.

You just maximize your time...before I was more of perfectionist and I would be like, you know “I’m going to read every word and, whatever, take great notes.” And, um, now it’s just like “okay, what’s like the most heavy hitting impact?” That’s where I’ll start and, um, kind of expand from there. So, it’s interesting, I found that I feel just as prepared when it is time for class using both methods. So, it’s just a different way to think about things.

In some ways the participants’ changing attitudes and priorities may be regarded as connected to the first subtheme, making concessions in that it was a significant change for many from their

pre-pregnancy characteristics as well as divergent from the intensive, singular devotion expected of model graduate students (Lynch, 2008). Yet as both Rose and Irene demonstrate, they came to view this as a positive change. Each of the participants spoke to their efficiency and ability to maximize the time they had for their coursework. Irene also felt that after going through the birth process, she was a more participatory and engaged student with a higher tolerance for taking academic risks and less fearful of contributing a wrong answer. This strengths-focused perspective offers a poignant counter-narrative to common held stereotypes or assumptions that frame pregnant and mothering women as distracted or less committed (Brown & Nichols, 2008; Lynch, 2008). The participants' responses indicate that they were cognizant of these tropes of pregnant women, yet responded in differing ways. In some cases, participants actively adjusted their behaviors and academic performances so as to avoid being connected to them whereas others, in the process of adjusting their expectations, became more comfortable with others seeing that they were going to pursue both, but ultimately would put the wellbeing of their pregnancy above their academic responsibilities and fulfilling the image of the ideal graduate student.

Theme 5: Navigating the graduate experience. Each of the prior themes influence the fifth, culminating theme which focuses upon participants' experience of navigating their graduate program while simultaneously pregnant. In describing the aspects of their graduate program which were especially influential to their sense of support and ability to maintain momentum in their program while pregnant and, in some instances, mothering subthemes of the advisor-participant relationship, accommodations, institutional policies and resources, as well as campus spaces and lactation rooms were identified as significant.

The advisor relationship. Mirroring Lovitts' (2001) findings regarding the integral role of advisors in graduate student socialization and feeling of belonging, the role of program-specific advisors emerged as an important contributing factor in the participants' experience navigating their programs. The participants relayed complex relationships with their advisors that fluctuated between rigid expectations to meet academic deadlines and efforts to celebrate participants' mothering responsibilities. It is evident that participants' mixed perceptions of support were further compounded by the expectations that they carried into the relationship regarding what the advisor-advisee relationship entails at the graduate level. In several instances, participants indicated a need to adjust their initial expectations after finding that their advisor's function was more of a program resource, primarily available to answer questions about class scheduling or procedures, rather than a mentor. The advisor-advisee relationship was regarded by the majority of the participants as one of the most significant aspects in their overall satisfaction with their program and sense of support, though it was also an area in which the participants' reported experiences were most at odds from one another, regardless of the advisor's gender, parenting status, or whether advisors were assigned or chosen by the students.

The participants' responses indicate that points of commonality or shared identities with their advisors did not change or influence their perception of support. The participants' reported interactions that were a complex balance between expression of congratulations and excitement coupled with stringent adherence to academic deadlines and program policies. Participants focused less upon the gender or parenting status of their advisors as a shared identity or status did not always translate to the participant feeling supported. In fact, several of the participants pointed to interactions with female instructors and advisors who, in some cases had children, and were critical of the participants' decision to begin a family as well as complete their program. As

discussed in the second theme regarding disclosure, Francesca experienced an acute sense of anxiety regarding telling her advisor about her pregnancy. A fear that, to some extent was confirmed by her advisor's mixed reaction and subsequent inflexibility regarding academic deadlines. Interestingly, after disclosing her pregnancy, Francesca's advisor shared her own experience of notifying her advisor regarding her pregnancy while completing her doctoral program. At the same time that Francesca's advisor shared that her own advisor had "put her down" for her pregnancy and made her feel "so bad about herself", her own mixed reaction and subtle pressures on Francesca to resume her academic responsibilities repeated a similar process. However, Francesca was quick to emphasize the kindness her advisor demonstrated and efforts to check in with her after she gave birth.

While acknowledging that her advisor was likely "a lot more supportive than most academic advisors" supporting graduate students, Rachel expressed a consciousness that her advisor's support had a limit, it was not "indefinite." Due to her specialized training and research in the field of maternal health care, Rachel's advisor was perhaps better suited to understand and empathize with what she was experiencing as a result of her miscarriage, yet remained bound, to some extent, by the formal structure and policies of the academic department. A reality of which Rachel was conscious noting that after a certain point, "there's only so much she can do to like...you know, help the program conform to my needs and then it's like, 'well, this is how things work.'" Francesca shared a similar experience with her advisor who she described as "very very sweet but very inflexible at the same time." For example, her advisor made efforts to accommodate her after the birth of her son by visiting her home twice to meet her infant, yet when Francesca expressed concern regarding the ability to meet an academic deadline, her advisor's response was to find a way to meet the deadline. Recognizing the limits of their

advisors' support and encouragement and influenced by their re-negotiated priorities, Francesca and Rachel described making decisions that they knew their advisors would not have approved of and may limit future opportunities, however served the needs of their family in that moment.

Accommodations. Notions of advocacy were closely tied to academic accommodations as in the majority of instances participants were required to set boundaries or seek out their instructor and explicitly request a change or alteration from their instructor. When discussing accommodations, participants' were quick to point to the flexibility and support offered by their instructors *after* participants brought an issue or request to their attention. Rachel was the only participant who had an instructor (the faculty member who also served as her advisor) that explicitly included a note on accommodations for student mothers and those breastfeeding in her syllabus. In most instances, the participants were put in a position where they either had to resolve the issue on their own or bring it to the attention of their instructor, a conversation that some participants indicated they were uncomfortable to facilitate, though recognized as a necessity.

As a part of their program, Anne and Rose had monthly class sessions that would take place over the course of a weekend during which they were in class for the entirety of the class. During these days, the instructor would give the class the option to build in a lunch break or work through the break in order to leave early. Both spoke to the importance of self-advocacy, as they had to approach the instructor and request a break in order to be able to pump in spite of the majority vote to work through the break. Anne specifically spoke to the awkward nature of having this conversation with her male professor, but the importance of the break to her wellbeing and that of her infant outweighed her discomfort. Examples such as those provided by Anne and Rose speak to the inequitable structure commonly found in academic classrooms,

particularly for mothering students. Even though the instructor's intention in proposing the class format was not malevolent or purposefully intended to isolate the participants, the impact had an isolating effect.

Based on the participants' responses, accommodations remain primarily up to the instructor, advisor, and program director's discretion (depending on the environment and nature of the accommodation needed) and often only if the student is willing to bring it to their attention. In the case of the participants who were willing to request short breaks in class, a private room to breastfeed, or flexibility on an assignment deadline, their advocacy reflects a form of resistance, pushing against the silence or others' unwillingness to acknowledge their pregnancy (despite the physical visibility) (Pillow, 1997).

Physical space and lactation rooms. Negotiating physical campus spaces and resources emerged as a significant aspect of participants' experience, more so post-partum than during their pregnancy. Four of the participants explicitly attended to their experience breastfeeding and the difficulty of finding spaces in which they felt safe and comfortable to either pump or breastfeed their infants. It is important to note that the issue was not finding a space, although sometimes limited in options each participant identified a space that was set aside by their institution for mothers. However, the spaces that were identified as lactation rooms were often difficult to access, located in obscure or peripheral spaces that did not feel safe, or multipurpose spaces that were not always available when needed.

In describing the "frazzled" process of trying to find a private space on campus to feed her infant, Francesca's language turned to absolutes, stating "there's nowhere on campus to breastfeed." Although she called to specific locations such as study rooms in the library and several lactation rooms around campus, their locations in basements and the procedures required

to gain access to these rooms were significant enough to perceive these spaces as inaccessible and non-options. Irene described a similar perception regarding the procedures required by her institution to gain access to the lactation room in the building in which her classes took place. She ultimately opted to pump in the restroom located on the same floor as her class because of the isolated location of the room given that her classes took place in the evenings and it was on a floor with restricted access. The room designated for breastfeeding mothers in Anne's program was the same restroom that was designated as gender neutral and, in several cases, in use during the class break when she needed to pump. She had to work with a staff member in the building to find an alternative, makeshift space that she could use.

The participants' experiences point to a difference between access and accessibility. From an institutional compliance perspective, spaces have certainly been designated for mothering students, however the participants rarely perceived these spaces as accessible. Yet, the physical location of the spaces themselves, hidden and difficult to access seemingly exemplify institutional efforts to accommodate pregnant and parenting students' on campus (Pillow, 1997), present though regulated and often hidden in policy manuals and technical language posted on institutional websites not readily accessible.

Policies and resources. When talking about campus policies and resources, structures that constitute formal methods by which institutions intend to support students, participants' responses reflected a distant regard. In multiple instances, participants made a point to acknowledge that they were *aware* policies existed that may be helpful to them during their pregnancy as well as during their post-partum transition back into their academic program, yet did not opt to pursue these formal channels of support. Unlike Brown and Nichols' (2012) findings, which pointed to students' lack of knowledge of policies and resources, participants

were, even if only at a basic level, aware of policies and resources available to them. Instead, there was a sense that the time required to find the documentation or more information regarding the process was too time and energy intensive. Irene captured this sentiment when asked about resources available to her as a graduate student. She responded, "I'm sure there are [resources], but for me I, I just don't have the, I don't have the time to figure out what my problem is and then to seek out what resources are available to me." The inclination to resolve an issue or challenge using individual efforts and support networks rather than pursue institutional resources is in accordance with that reported by Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2014) in their study of mothering faculty members.

Rachel's experience of a miscarriage, though not shared by other participants in a similar setting, serves as a poignant counterspective, illustrating the necessity of comprehensive policies that encompass all aspects of pregnancy, extending to miscarriage. Rachel expressed frustration regarding her experience and the absence of formal policies or procedures that may have helped assuage the stress of negotiating the aftereffects of her miscarriage and her on-campus responsibilities.

It'd be really helpful to know that I could have taken the time off and not jeopardized my job, and not jeopardized my income or my health insurance and not had to force myself to [return to campus]...I started miscarrying, I thought the miscarriage had ended, but it hadn't. I continued to have bleeding and everything for three additional weeks and then I actually...So, there was a full three-week period where I was having a miscarriage and I was forcing myself to be back on campus!...it wasn't even over yet, when I came back to campus and started teaching again and going back to class and...cause I just had to not get any further behind. And I and I imagine that you know if I had stayed pregnant and had a baby, that it would have been the same kind of pressure.

While Rachel's advisor and other supporting faculty with whom she worked following her miscarriage seem to have provided what accommodations were available to them at the time, her description illustrates the ways in which their support simply could not meet the extent of the

needs of her situation. As Rachel points out, she could have taken a leave of absence, though to do so would have required she give up her teaching position and, subsequently, her access to health insurance, which was an immediate need during this experience.

The experience of miscarrying a pregnancy was an area that I did not anticipate or prepare to address in my study. If pregnancy is an area around which many are silent or unwilling to acknowledge (Pillow, 1997), miscarriage appears to be a source of greater discomfort and avoidance. While I now recognize this as a significant oversight in my preparation and perhaps a reflection of my status as someone who has not experienced pregnancy and had to consider the possibility of a miscarriage, my oversight aligns with a larger absence of research or conversation around the support of students who experience the loss of their pregnancy. Rachel's depiction of her experience emphasizes that in addition to the difficult emotional and mental aspects of this experience, there are significant physical implications of miscarriage that she was experiencing at the same time that she had to return to her academic responsibilities. While recognizing the sensitivity of this experience and the traumatic impact miscarrying a pregnancy can have upon the individual, the continued silence around the experience perpetuates the notion that it is not something that is appropriate to discuss or, perhaps the more dangerous misconception that they do not happen to students.

Concluding Discussion

The findings of this study reflect the complexity of the participants' lives as they balanced numerous roles and navigated conflicting expectations and messaging from family members, coworkers, academic instructors and advisors, and peers among others all the while experiencing dramatic physiological changes. Even though the inherently unique nature of each participant's experience presented distinct challenges and perceived barriers, all were able to

identify specific sources of support and coping strategies that contributed to their sense of resiliency in the face of real and perceived challenges or barriers. Although vocalized explicitly by Irene, each of the participants expressed the idea that they did not allow themselves to seriously entertain the idea of quitting. In the moments when they faced incongruent messaging around motherhood and academia or structural challenges present in their academic program and higher education, each participant spoke to skill sets, internal strength, external sources of encouragement, and new perspectives that they relied upon or developed as a result of their experience. The chapter that follows draws upon the themes and findings discussed to explore recommendations and implications based upon my own reflections and analysis as well as those identified by the participants at the conclusion of their interviews.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

In the final chapter, I continue to build upon the understanding of the experiences of pregnant and mothering students developed over the course of the first four chapters. To begin, I provide an overview of the study's findings and additional discussion regarding the analysis presented in Chapter 4. Following this discussion, I explore the study's implications within the scope of higher education and graduate student support. Finally, drawing upon the study's key themes and findings, I offer recommendations specific to higher education practice and the support of pregnant and mothering students, particularly at the master's level, as well as suggestions for continued research.

Discussion

Over the course of multiple interviews (ranging from one extended interview with intermittent breaks to three individual, hour long interviews based on the participant's scheduling availability and preference) Anne, Corinne, Francesca, Irene, Michelle, Rachel, and Rose carefully reflected on and described their lived experience as pregnant graduate students. In their responses, the participants explored myriad aspects of their graduate program ranging from their relationship with their advisor to in-class environment created by instructors, challenges they faced, and the sources of support and encouragement that helped them persist. The participants' responses were rooted in reflection, as none of participants were pregnant at the time of their interviews. Additionally, two of the participants were as far removed as two years from their pregnancies and graduated while others were only three or four months post-partum and current students. As such, the themes and discussion around each move fluidly between participants' experience of navigating their master's programs while pregnant as well as post-partum.

Given the relatively limited research available on students experiencing pregnancy and the predominant focus on pregnant youth in a K-12 setting (Pillow, 1997, 2004, 2006), the findings pertaining to the embodied experience of pregnancy specifically by master's level students are distinct in some ways. The behaviors and expectations that graduate students are taught through processes of socialization as the markers of successful students (Lovitts, 2001; Sallee, 2011). In contrast the findings regarding more tangible, resource-specific sources of support and challenges as identified by participants were consistent with scholarship pertaining to parenting students in higher education (Brown & Nichols, 2012). In bringing together these findings, a more comprehensive understanding of the experience of pregnant graduate students emerged and the complexity of managing multiple, intensive roles in an environment where the visibility of their pregnancy was, in some instances, at odds with others' expectations or values making them the target of scrutinizing gazes, intrusive comments, and unsolicited advice (Pillow, 1997).

In order to prolong disclosing their pregnancy and avoid additional attention or changed interactions with others on campus or in their programs as a result of their pregnancy, multiple participants spoke to carefully managing the timing of their announcement and the order in which they notified individuals. Rachel, in particular, intentionally selected a limited number of friends outside of her academic discipline and her institution as a whole to inform of her pregnancy and relied closely upon this core group for guidance, encouragement, and overall support as opposed to those in her program or on-campus. Closely tied to the third theme of support, Rachel had told one close colleague outside of her program about her pregnancy and spoke to the importance of having someone on campus to whom she could turn when she was feeling especially unwell and knew would empathize with her situation. In contrast, not all of the

participants were as reticent to disclose their pregnancies and may have, as a result, had more people to check in and inquire about their wellbeing. Regardless, each participant expressed the significance to their overall sense of support of having a partner, friend, or work colleague to check in or turn to when they were feeling poorly or especially tired as a result of their pregnancy.

The participants' discussion of sources of support confirmed findings reported in current scholarship related to pregnant and parents students' experiences and challenges in higher education, specifically the importance of having access to supporters and resources not connected to their institution (Anaya, 2011; Brown & Nichols, 2012; Grenier & Burke, 2008; Lynch, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Both a strength and limitation to this study, each participant identified as being in a committed relationship and identified their husband as an integral, if not the most important source of emotional and logistical support in managing their academic, vocational, and personal responsibilities. Each of the participants affirmed the expectation that their husband would support the care for their child as well as additional tasks pertaining to the upkeep of their home and daily functions. For many, this was a formal conversation that they had prior to the birth of their infant whereas others spoke to relying on the history of their marriage and the fact that their husband had, prior to the start of their family, contributed to the household upkeep and other related chores. In contrast to prior research in which partners and family members were identified as sources of potential stress as well as support, participants identified outside communities, particularly work colleagues, as significant stressors, particularly in instances when they felt critiqued or perceived as less committed for their additional commitments, ironically, a perception also indicated by mothering doctoral students and faculty (Lynch, 2009; McBride, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012).

In all instances that participants recalled receiving an academic or programmatic accommodation it was an informal process at the behest of an individual instructor, advisor, or department rather than a formal, institutional policy or process. Francesca's program enabled her to move her teaching responsibilities to an online platform, which made it possible for her to remain home with her infant while completing her thesis. Francesca emphasized that this was not an accommodation that her department had to make, although it would likely be the last that she would receive. In a similar effort to support and accommodate Rachel after learning of the complications and subsequently the loss of her pregnancy, her advisor worked with her to ensure that she was able to withdraw from her non-mandatory courses while maintaining the necessary credit load to keep her graduate teaching assistantship and, subsequently, her health insurance. This was closely tied to the subtheme related to policies and resources as Rachel's experience was highly related to the absence of policies that may have pertained to or supported her.

The participants expressed a level of awareness of various policies and resources available to them through their institution yet, in most instances, spoke to relying on their own resources and communities of support to balance their academic, professional (for several), and familial responsibilities. This tendency noted by the participants affirmed the notion that despite increasing efforts to create more family friendly campuses and provide resources for *parenting* (less so related to pregnancy) students, mothering students and professionals continue to predominantly rely on their own organizational efforts and networks (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014). Rather than investing time and energy into the process of navigating obscure institutional web pages or trying to get in contact with the appropriate staff member, participants relied upon informal resources or support persons such as immediate family members and friends or less than ideal situations. As a part of her teaching assistantship, Francesca was required to come to

campus for staff meetings once she had given birth. She was confident that there would have been a way to request a temporary parking permit that would allow her to park closer to the academic building where the meetings were held and ease some of the distance that she had to carry her infant and additional bags (in violation of the physical limits recommended by her physician postpartum). However, the additional time that it would require to locate the appropriate department, make the request, and pick up the permit was not deemed worthwhile and she continued to park in the available lots on the perimeter of campus.

Implications

Given the findings presented in Chapter 4 and above, I believe this study has implications for faculty, advisors, and professionals who work closely with and support graduate students as well as the campus administrators with the ability to shape student policies and graduate program structures that impact the messaging, ideals, and perceived pressures placed upon graduate students, particularly women. In describing what she regards as important to the enhancement of institutional support of graduate students fulfilling myriad life roles outside of the scope of student, Rachel expressed the need for “institution-wide changes in culture like being able to have space...for women to exist...I don’t even know how else to say that. Just like...just for a fundamental shift in expectations around...parenthood and motherhood in particular.” In considering Rachel’s idea of a “fundamental shift” and the need for institutions to create space for women and students carrying a multitude of roles and identities, there is a need for ongoing awareness and efforts. The study’s findings drawn from the seven participants’ lived experiences indicate that despite the growing presence of women who are resisting the notion of higher education and motherhood as incompatible (Lynch, 2008) and opting (or willing) to combine pregnancy with graduate school, their perception of being hypervisible and the subject of others’

critical regard indicates that women's experiences remain distinctly gendered and impacted the way in which they chose to navigate campus and classroom environments.

Building upon the model of socialization promoted by Van Maanen & Schein (1979), graduate students enter into their academic programs and institutions with expectations of the experience that have been shaped by popular messaging or images, undergraduate mentors, instructors, and staff, as well as interactions with the program prior to their matriculation (Lovitts, 2001). With this in mind, educators and staff members in positions that interact with and support graduate students have an opportunity to promote students' sense of belonging and ability to manage their pregnancy and program of study in the midst of a larger campus environment in which students may feel critiqued or out of place because of their pregnancy. The challenges or areas in which participants identified as aspects of their program that were at times difficult to manage, ranging from intensive procedures to the absence of policies and varying interpretations of reasonable accommodations, point to the aspects of higher education not necessarily designed with pregnant and/or mothering students in mind and areas in which programs and staff need to attend in helping students manage their expectations and lived experiences if (or when) they are at odds. Mindful of the study's implications and drawing upon the findings and discussion as well as recommendations offered at the conclusion of their interviews, I offer the following recommendations as a starting point to enhancing the support of pregnant, graduate students.

Recommendations

The function of research in higher education is, ultimately, to enhance practice (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). With that in mind, I offer the following recommendations with the hope that supporting staff and campus officials might give greater consideration to the way in

which institutional policies, resources, and supporting staff encourage and support students, even if not in direct or tangible ways. The recommendations are drawn, in part, from personal observations based on my repeated interactions with the participants and the resulting findings as well as suggestions offered by the participants at the conclusion of their final interview.

Review and simplify institutional processes where possible. This recommendation indicates, first, it is an institution's responsibility to invest in a review process to ensure that the available resources, policies, and programming are shaped by national best practices, current research, as well as direct student feedback and insight in order to deliver the best services and resources possible to the institution's pregnant and parenting community. For example, the graduate school at one of the participants' institution collaborated with campus partners including the office responsible for providing childcare and family resources as well as its department tasked with responding to inclusion and equity concerns to conduct focus groups with graduate student mothers for direct insight into their experiences on campus and recommendations to improve the structures and resources available (or missing) to students.

As highlighted in the fifth theme pertaining to navigating campus spaces and resources, if the procedural requirements to access campus services designed to assist pregnant students are difficult to find on websites or the campus itself or appear to require an intensive amount of time or additional energy, students turn to their own limited resources and communities of support to find a solution. It is evident from participants' responses that the problem was not the *absence* of services or resources; in fact, the majority of participants expressed an awareness of a number of policies, staff members, and departments that provide services pertinent to pregnant and parenting students. Instead, accessing additional information about the resources or the procedures to use the services themselves were cumbersome and not conducive to students'

campus commitments and familial responsibilities. Additionally, given that students' socialization process begins before they even apply to a graduate program (Lovitts, 2001), it is imperative that departmental and institutional-wide websites and materials provide clear, concise materials for students (both matriculated or otherwise) regarding the resources, policies, and initiatives taking place on campus to support pregnant students or those with families.

With this in mind, it seems of mutual benefit to students and campus constituents trying to outreach to and support students to simplify, where possible, the procedures and steps students must complete to access resources. One example that was repeatedly offered by the participants was the creation of an online reservation system for lactation rooms. It was uncomfortable for some participants to work with office administrators or specialists who they did not know to request access to the private rooms designated for nursing mothers. Additionally, participants were often trying to access these rooms during class breaks as limited as 15 minutes in length during which to access private rooms. Thus, to know that there was a room reserved that they could go directly to use and have a PIN or access code to enter was recommended by several participants. Although access to private spaces was specifically referenced by a number of participants, attention was also given to other procedures such as collecting approval signatures and submitting forms, purchasing required texts, and picking up temporary parking permits that, if simplified (and able to complete online) would have been resources that participants would have pursued rather than trying to resolve independently or foregoing entirely.

Identify reasonable program accommodations. Aspects of the program ranging from course syllabi and policies, class organization, and schedules communicate to students whether or not they are designed (or sufficiently adaptable) to accommodate students with responsibilities outside of academia or reinforce expectations of intensive commitment. For example, Anne

emphasized that seemingly small accommodations such as a fifteen-minute break in the middle of an extended class period can have a significant impact on mothering students. However, she noted that this was something that she had to request from her instructor who had originally planned to work through the lunch hour to let her classmates leave earlier in the afternoon.

In contrast, Rachel noted the significant precedent that was set by a faculty member in her department who included an accommodation statement enabling mothering students to pre-arrange with her to bring their infants to class if and when needed. Even if mothering students did not always use this option, the presence of the statement contributed to a more inclusive classroom from her perspective by making space for students to perform their multiple life roles when needed without compromising their academic commitment or ability. The instructor, in a sense, by supporting and encouraging mothering students in this way actively resists notions of the incompatibility of higher education and mothering. The text of the accommodation statement created by this professor has been made available with her permission for other instructors' use on the institutional website. In doing so, instructors can directly pull the text and incorporate into their syllabus. That said, I would recommend making this information available on a prominent website or one that faculty are likely to consult frequently in the process of course development rather than a more specialized website for parent and family services as was the case at Rachel's institution. When advisors and faculty with the ability to control or direct the structure of their course and any accompanying materials, most significantly the course syllabus and classroom policies, account for the experiences of those with families, they create learning environments in which students who may be pregnant or newly post-partum feel supported or, at the least, recognized for all that they are managing.

Participants received a wide array of accommodations at varying points in their programs that ranged from smaller changes such as flexible deadlines as their due dates approached to more significant adjustments such as schedule change approvals or changing the format of an assistantship to allow for greater scheduling flexibility. In each of these instances, the level to which participants were accommodated was determined at the instructor or program level based on the nature of the request. In most instances (though certainly not all), participants were given an opportunity to contribute their perspective or idea of what seemed reasonable and the staff member responsible for the decision made the final determination.

While not always feasible, this format and the inclusion of the student in the determination process appeared to be a productive collaboration and achieve an ideal outcome for both. Recognizing that pregnant students may try to avoid requesting an accommodation so as to avoid the perception of being needy or unable to manage (McBride, 2008), I would encourage instructors, after finding about a student's pregnancy, to be upfront and express a willingness to work with the individual to establish appropriate and reasonable accommodations if needed at a point during the course or their program. Additionally, although the participants did not speak specifically to their instructors or advisors consulting with campus professionals or resources in the process of determining accommodations, it is to the benefit of professionals advising or working with a pregnant student to consult with their campus' Title IX coordinator or specialist to ensure that an appropriate and equitable solution is set for both the student and the supporting program staff.

Education of faculty and advisors. In discussing their interactions with instructors and advisors, participants pointed to two aspects of their relationships with their advisors that indicate a need for ongoing education and awareness building for those advising and supporting

graduate students who are pregnant or mothering. The first area identified relates to the knowledge staff members serving in supporting roles have about program-specific and institutional policies and resources in place to support students who are pregnant or parenting and ability to help students access these resources. The second aspect pertained to building awareness around the significance that the language and implicit messaging used by advisors and instructors had upon students' sense of support and the feasibility of balancing multiple intensive life roles.

Despite the presence of a supportive and highly skilled advisor in the realm of maternal health, Rachel's experience of miscarriage illustrates the potential strain placed upon students when formal structures or procedures to protect students are either not present or readily accessible. Although the specific policies that bound Rachel's access to health care to her remaining in her teaching assistantship which required her status as a full-time student may be specific to her institution, it is imperative that advisors and instructors know the policies and possible options in the instance that unexpected complications arise or know the campus staff and resources who will be better suited to assist. Building upon the implications garnered from the discussion and results of the study's core themes, I offer the following recommendations to departmental and institutional staff members whose work pertains directly to the support of graduate students and the higher education structures that shape their experience.

In multiple instances, participants described interactions with a faculty member or departmental staff whose language and/or messaging significantly impacted their sense of belonging and support by the program. In hiring processes, training, and ongoing staff education, it is imperative that academic units and university representatives reinforce the significance of establishing and sustaining inclusive relationships and environments in line with institutional

missions and values. Although the participants did not disclose experiencing outright discrimination based on their pregnant status, seemingly small cues such as Francesca's advisor's sigh after she disclosed her pregnancy had a profound impact on her, communicating, from her perspective, that her pregnancy was a source of disappointment or frustration. Both Anne and Rose discussed a series of awards given at commencement to several "outstanding" students in the respective programs determined by the faculty and their internal desire as students to be honored by their programs for their work and academic performances. Rose recalled a member of the program presenting the award and, in the process of listing the award recipient's achievements and characteristics, mentioned that the student was a mother of three children and balanced her various responsibilities without ever requesting an accommodation. Though it is likely that the speaker's comments were said with the best of intentions, from Rose's perspective, she described this moment as "as punch in the stomach" because of the message conveyed, particularly, to be a successful candidate in the program, she needed to maintain a high level of academic achievement and internship performance, all without requesting help or accommodation. Even when well intended, passing comments as well as programmatic messaging and features can have a powerful impact on pregnant and mothering students and their sense of support in the program. While it is appropriate for an advisor or instructor to set boundaries around their relationship with a student and the level to which they are involved in their personal lives, staff must be mindful of the impact that their language and physical cues have upon students and their sense of support, particularly after sharing news related to the status of their pregnancy, which, depending on the individual may be an uncomfortable process. Based on the participants' responses, their desire to complete the program and earn the degree enables them to endure through interactions, courses, or relationships in which they feel unsupported or

isolated because of their pregnancy, though it does impact their overall satisfaction with the program.

Continued research. Although the present study can be situated within a body of scholarship that examines the educational experience and challenges faced by mothering students from K-12 to PhD programs, it is unique in its specific focus on the embodied experience of master's students who are simultaneously pregnant and pursuing a graduate education. As such, in order to expand the base of knowledge of pregnant and parenting students' experiences from a number of perspectives, I offer the following areas as suggested beginning points from which to continue examining this topic. As with the preceding recommendations, these ideas stem from personal observations and topics that arose during the participant interviews though did not pertain specifically to the topic at hand as well as, in some cases, at the recommendation of participants.

The focus on pregnant and parenting students pursuing master's degrees specifically is not present, to my knowledge, in research or literature yet remains an area, in my opinion, warranting attention as the number of women matriculating into master's level graduate program continues to grow. Additionally, based on passing comments made by several participants, I am confident that mothering students' resiliency and approach to balancing both their academic and maternal role is different than that of doctoral student mothers. For example, Francesca noted that she may have sought out more guidance from other pregnant and/or mothering students and had deliberate conversations with her advisor regarding timing and family formation had she been in a PhD program. Instead, when asked about the relationships she developed with women in her cohort who were pregnant while in a master's program, Francesca indicated that she did not ask them questions or use them as resources intentionally. Although, Francesca noted, "if I

were in a PhD program I would definitely ask questions about it. But now, I'm just kind of like, 'alright, let's get done.'" In this sense, the two or three year time commitment of a master's program, from the perspective of the participants, was something that they felt could be endured for the limited duration of the program. This was reflected by each of the participants who, despite using different language or phrases, each expressed at differing points in their interviews that they did not allow themselves to entertain the idea of quitting; it was not something they regarded as an option. Findings regarding this distinction between master's and PhD students' approach to balancing multiple life roles may bring forward additional insight for those responsible for supporting students through their transition into and experience in graduate programs.

As was mentioned in Chapter 4, the absence of discussion or inquiry pertaining to miscarriage and the experience of students who miscarry creates a significant void in the larger academic conversation around supporting and encouraging pregnant and parenting students' academic achievements in higher education. Additionally, due to the number of shared identities and experiences among the seven participants, there are significant perspectives that were not represented in this study. Further examination into the experiences of pregnant students of color, single mothers pursuing a graduate degree, and student mothers in STEM or otherwise historically male-dominated fields (Mason & Goulden, 2002) remain important, yet significantly underrepresented areas of study. Racial identity, among other personal factors, was not something that this study explicitly requested from participants and was included only as participants felt fitting or important to disclose. Thus, building from a small body of literature that indicates student mothers of color face additional obstacles and feelings of marginalization, a more explicit inquiry into their experiences can impact the services and support available to

promote students' academic success and overall wellbeing. Finally, reframing this project and approaching the topic from another perspective, particularly an advisor or departmental focus, may also contribute valuable insight into challenges advisors perceive in advising and supporting pregnant advisees and effective strategies or methods that may help them feel more prepared and effective in their advising role. Finally, a comprehensive, policy focused analysis in conjunction with student interviews may provide a more direct illustration or understanding of the way in which institutional and departmental policies and structures impact graduate students' educational experience after becoming pregnant.

Conclusion

Effective qualitative research, according to Arminio and Hultgren (2002, cited in Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014) brings "voice and insight forward for all constituents living complex phenomena" (p. 53). It is my hope that as a result of this study and the perspectives shared by each of the participants, readers better understand and appreciate the undoubted complexity of graduate students' experiences navigating both the expectations and responsibilities of both a master's program and pregnancy, in addition to other life roles they may hold. While the challenges and barriers faced by pregnant graduate students were not insignificant, the ways in which the participants described their embodied experiences of pregnancy as making them more determined, efficient, and resilient students, mothers, family members, and colleagues presents a unique reframing of mothering experiences in higher education. In spite of the socialization and competing messages regarding the intensive focus and devotion expected of both graduate students and mothers, the participants pointed to resources and communities instrumental in their ability to make sense of and negotiate environments in which these competing ideologies were most salient. As the number of women matriculating into master's programs continues to

increase (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) bringing with them myriad identities, life experiences, and personal aspirations as much as academic, it is imperative that institutional policies, procedures, and resources reflect comprehensive strategies to support students' multiple life roles, not simply their academic pursuits.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval



**EXEMPT
 DETERMINATION**

Date of Notification	10/29/2014		
Study ID	6540		
Study Title	Pregnancy and the Academy: Exploring the Experience of Pregnant Graduate Students		
Principal Investigator	Dr. Daniel Newhart		
Study Team Members	Emma Larkins		
Submission Type	Initial Application	Date Acknowledged	10/29/2014
Level	Exempt	Category(ies)	2
Funding Source	None	Proposal #	N/A
PI on Grant or Contract	N/A	Cayuse #	N/A

The above referenced study was reviewed by the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and determined to be exempt from full board review.

EXPIRATION DATE: 10/28/2019
The exemption is valid for 5 years from the date of approval.

Annual renewals are not required. If the research extends beyond the expiration date, the Investigator must request a new exemption. Investigators should submit a final report to the IRB if the project is completed prior to the 5 year term.

Documents included in this review:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Protocol | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recruiting tools | <input type="checkbox"/> External IRB approvals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consent forms | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Test instruments | <input type="checkbox"/> Translated documents & |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alternative consent & | <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative assent | <input type="checkbox"/> Grant/contract & |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letters of support & | <input type="checkbox"/> Project revision(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

Comments:

Principal Investigator responsibilities:

- Certain amendments to this study must be submitted to the IRB for review prior to initiating the change. These amendments may include, but are not limited to, changes in funding, , study population, study instruments, consent documents, recruitment material, sites of research, etc. For more information about the types of changes that require submission of a project revision to the IRB, please see: http://oregonstate.edu/research/irb/sites/default/files/website_guidancedocuments.pdf
- All study team members should be kept informed of the status of the research. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that all study team members have completed the online ethics training requirement, even if they do not need to be added to the study team via project revision.
- Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others must be submitted to the IRB within three calendar days.
- The Principal Investigator is required to securely store all study related documents on the OSU campus for a minimum of seven years post study termination.

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Research Protocol**RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

29 October 2014

1. Protocol Title: Pregnancy and the academy: Exploring the experience of pregnant graduate students

PERSONNEL

2. Principal Investigator: Dr. Daniel W. Newhart
3. Student Researcher: Emma L. Larkins
4. Investigator Qualifications

Dr. Daniel W. Newhart currently serves as the Director of Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Planning. As a product of Dr. Newhart's educational preparation, current position at OSU, and participation with the Institutional Review Board, he is well trained in the process of conducting ethical research in alignment with the expectations set forth by OSU.

5. Training and Oversight

The PI and student researcher will meet frequently in the preparatory stages to ensure that the research methodology and all associated materials and plans follow best practices. The PI will work closely with the student researcher throughout the study's process and provide insight and guidance throughout the process to ensure that the process is executed in accordance with the methods outlined.

In addition to frequent communication with the PI, the student researcher will draw upon knowledge gained from a course on research methods and assessment.

FUNDING

6. Sources of Support for this project (unfunded, pending, or awarded): This project is unfunded.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

7. Description of Research

This study aims to explore the experience of female identified students in Masters-level graduate programs and their use (or non-use) of institutionally provided resources offered with the intent of enabling students to balance their dual responsibilities as students and mothers-to-be. The research will be informed by a phenomenological methodology and, as a consequence, focus on developing an understanding of the experience of pregnant graduate students and the influence that institutions of higher education have in shaping their experience (Creswell, 2006). Student participants will take part in three individual interviews where they will be asked to reflect on and respond to questions around their educational experiences and interactions with their institution. The project and its findings

based on the data collected from the interviews will contribute to the student researcher's master's thesis in the College Student Services and Administration program.

8. Background Justification

Although the number of women pursuing graduate level degrees has increased, women remain more likely than their male counterparts to have their education pursuits interrupted by their responsibilities in the formation of their family (Lynch, 2008). As a consequence, graduate students who are pregnant or mothering experience higher rates of attrition than their male or non-parenting peers (Lynch, 2008). Yet, studies exploring the experience of women in tenure-track positions indicate that increased numbers of women pursuing careers in higher education are beginning families while in graduate school and early in the tenure process in an effort to balance the competing responsibilities of both (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014). As more women complete graduate programs while pregnant, it is the responsibility of institutions to ensure that students have access to appropriate services and that professional staff and faculty have the knowledge to support students who are serving multiple life roles (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014).

Building upon research that explores the experiences of pregnant students in high school (Pillow, 1997, 2006), undergraduate (Brown & Nichols, 2012), and doctoral (Mason & Goulden, 2002; Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008) level educational settings, this research will address a population that has been largely absent from educational research. Additionally, analyses of the experiences of women with children who simultaneously have careers from a critical feminist theory lens provide context as to the historical challenges faced by women pursuing professional roles in addition to their parenting responsibilities (Lynch, 2008; Solomon, 1985; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012).

The study intends to enhance the quality of services and outreach available to graduate students who are pregnant, whether it is planned or otherwise, while simultaneously pursuing a graduate degree. Regardless of the availability of services in place to offer assistance, research indicates that women tend to rely on their own efforts to manage their responsibilities as both mothers and students or professionals in higher education (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2014). Thus, the study aims to enhance current understanding of the experience of pregnant graduate students and their use (or non-use) of institutional resources in an effort to discern how institutions of higher education can encourage students' academic persistence and wellbeing.

9. Subject Population

- A description of participant characteristics: Due to the focus of the research, the participant population will be limited to female identified students who are currently or have been pregnant in the past three years while simultaneously enrolled in a master's level graduate program. Participants will be solicited from multiple institutions in an effort to acquire a sufficient number of participants to reach the point of saturation (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).
- Total target enrollment number: No more than 15 participants will be interviewed as a

part of this study.

- **Description of any vulnerable population(s):** Although pregnant women are classified as a vulnerable population, the study's focus and methodology aim to minimize any potential undue harm to participants and their fetus. This is discussed at greater length in section 18, which addresses the study's potential for risk and management plan.
- **Inclusion and exclusion criteria:** To be eligible for enrollment in this study, participants must be current, female identified master's level graduate students and pregnant or met each of the criterion and graduated within the past three years. Additionally, participants will be selected according to their availability to attend two interview sessions.
- **Recruitment:** Participants will be recruited using snowball sampling. As a part of this, potential participants will be identified using recommendations from Oregon State University professional staff and faculty members of students who, to the best of their knowledge, meet the study's criteria. Faculty and staff will be asked to forward the email to students. This initial group of students will be recruited using an email invitation, which will provide a brief introduction to the research project and the role of participants. The initial group of students will also be asked to forward along the email to other students who meet the study's criteria. More specifically, the email that participants will receive will include:
 - a) Title of the study
 - b) Name of the PI as well as the student researcher
 - c) Clear statement that this is research
 - d) Contact information for interested individuals
 - e) Primary criteria that will be used to determine eligibility for the study
 - f) Time or other commitment required of the subjects

Based on this email, students interested in participating will be asked to contact the student researcher at the provided OSU email address. In an effort to protect the confidentiality of potential participants, all students who respond will be coded and any documentation or files associated with the study will be stored on the student researcher's private computer and password protected.

Upon expressing interest, respondents will receive an electronic copy of the study's consent guide. The consent guide enables potential participants to review the criteria for eligibility associated with the study and confirm their interest in participation. Verbal consent will be acquired prior to the start of the first interview. Based on the number of participants acquired through the initial email invitation, participants may be asked to identify and recommend other students who meet the study's criteria and may be interested in contributing to the research. In which case, the same procedure would be followed.

Chronological Sequence:

- Recruit interview participants
- Conduct first set of audio-recorded interviews with participants
- Code audio interviews to maintain privacy of participants
- Conduct second set of audio-recorded interviews with participants
- Code audio interviews from the second round to maintain privacy of participants
- Conduct third (and final) set of audio-recorded interviews with participants
- Code final audio interviews from the interviews

10. Consent Process

- **Verbal consent.** Because the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required, participants will indicate their consent verbally.
- **Describe where and when consent will be obtained.** Participants will receive an electronic copy of a statement regarding the research for their review via email upon indicating their interest in participating in the study. Verbal consent will be acquired and documented in the student researcher's notes prior to the start of the first interview in a private setting.
- **Assessment of comprehension.** Participants will receive an electronic copy of a written statement regarding the research to review in advance and will be encouraged to follow up with any questions or concerns they may have about participating.

Students will have a second opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns with the researcher prior to obtaining verbal consent. At this time, the student researcher will reiterate that participants have the option to withdraw from the project. Additionally, participants will be notified that, with their consent, audio recording and notes will be collected throughout the interview. All documents and recordings collected will be stored as password protected files using pseudonyms. Any information with personal identification will be stored in a different file and location.

Participants will be notified that they have the freedom to not respond to a question if they do not wish and may withdraw from the study at any time. The student researcher will inform participants that if they choose to withdraw from the study at any point, the researcher may retain the information they provided and this information may be used in the analysis or reporting of the study.

11. Eligibility Screening

- Initially, eligibility requirement will be indicated within the email outreach sent to potential participants. After obtaining verbal consent, the researcher will review the study's eligibility criteria with the participants to ensure that they meet each of the requirements and are able to participate in three interviews.

- Prior to the start of the interview, the student researcher will explain the purpose of the study, the method of the interview, the approximate duration of the interview, and that audio recorded and hand-written notes will be taken during the interview.
- In the case that a participant does not meet the requirements, all electronic or paper communication will be removed. Electronic forms or communication will be deleted permanently from the student researcher's computer. Any paper forms or evidence will be shredded and disposed of using a confidential disposal site at OSU.

12. Methods and Procedures

- The study will take the form of a qualitative analysis and will be informed using a phenomenological methodology, which aims to understand and represent the "essence or basic structure" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25) of an individual's experience as it relates to a particular phenomenon. Patton (2002) asserts that the primary pursuit of phenomenological research is discerning the "meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people" (p. 104). Thus, a phenomenological approach was selected because of the emphasis on experience. This approach lends itself to the study's aim to understand the relationship between the participants' experience as both an emerging mother and graduate student and how this influenced their use of resources and support provided by their institution (or absence thereof). As a result of the study's phenomenological approach, readers should have a better understanding of the experience of pregnant graduate students and how the institutional environment interacts with their pursuits.
- The following procedure will be followed in the data collection process:
 - As detailed in question 9, the subsection titled "recruitment", a preliminary email invitation will be sent to a group of students recommended by OSU professional staff and faculty. No more than 15 participants who meet the required criteria will be selected to participate in three semi-structured interviews. It is not anticipated that any of the interviews will exceed sixty minutes.
 - Upon confirming participants' eligibility and obtaining verbal consent, the student researcher will facilitate three semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews where participants will be asked to explore their experience as pregnant graduate students and their relationship with institutional resources. Resources will remain undefined by the researchers and participants will be asked to determine and self-select resources based on their own experiences and knowledge.
 - For confidentiality purposes, participants will self-select a pseudonym as a part of the consent process. This will be used for the remainder of the research process.
 - The initial interview will consist of questions that prompt participants' reflection

on their background and experiences thus far. The second interview remains rooted in the participants' current status and self-identified sources from which they receive (or lack) support, particularly those provided by their respective institutions, if at all. The third interview will build on the discussion and reflections introduced in the first and second interviews.

It is the hope that the use of three interviews will offer participants an opportunity to continue reflecting on their experience after the completion of their first two interviews and provide any additional information that may arise in between each session. Based on participants' responses to the initial questions, the researchers will determine if follow up questions are necessary. Students will have the freedom to decline responding to any of the questions asked.

- The following procedure will be followed in the data analysis process:
 - Upon the completion of each interview, the student researcher will transcribe the audio-recordings to Word document files. After the transcriptions have been completed, participants will be asked to review the transcripts and confirm that the documents reflect their contribution to the interview and suggest changes or feedback as necessary. As suggested by Lather (2003), as cited in Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, any feedback that the researchers receive as a result of member checking will be treated as additional data and considered in the data analysis process. If participants do not respond, the data will be used as recorded.
 - The student researcher will use an open coding approach to identify the initial ideas and themes contained within the data. The initial reading of the data will assist the student researcher in determining the "essential themes" (Creswell, 2004, p. 59) that illustrate students' lived experience. The information and details contained within the essential themes will be used to write a collective description of students' experience as pregnant graduate students and their interactions with their institution as a result.

13. Compensation

Participants will not be compensated for their participation.

14. Costs

There are no costs associated with this project.

15. Anonymity or Confidentiality

- Throughout the research process all documentation associated with the study will be coded and stored in password-protected files on an external hard drive that is also password-protected. The external hard drive will be stored in a locked cabinet in the PI's university office. In compliance with the regulations, data associated with the study will be stored on the hard drive for seven years following its completion.

- The first and last name of the participants, in addition to their email addresses will be stored apart from any records pertaining the interviews in a password-protected document. No direct identifiers will be retained following the conclusion of the interviews. Aside from those listed, no outside researchers will have access to participants' information or the identifiers used to code participants.
- Participants will self-select a pseudonym to assist with the protection of students' confidentiality. The student researcher, in the process of transcribing the audio files from the recorded interviews to Word document files, will use these pseudonyms. Transcription will take place in a private room, using headphones to reduce the risk of information disclosed during the interview being overheard. Once transcribed, the Word documents will be saved as password-protected files and stored on the hard drive associated with the study. The PI and student researcher will have sole access to the passwords associated with the study's files and hard drive.
- The researchers will access all data files and documentation and conduct any email communication using private, password protected computers or OSU computers requiring password logins. No public computers will be used to access any materials pertaining to the project.

16. Risks

The following items emerge as potential risks to students as a result of their participation in the study:

- The potential physical, psychological, legal, economic, or social risk to participants as a consequence of their participation in this study is minimal. Attention has been given to the structure and methods of the study to ensure the protection of participants' wellbeing. Depending on individual participants' experiences, there is a potential risk that the interviews may bring forward personal reflections that cause emotional reactions or discomfort. As such, the interviews will be limited to no more than sixty minutes per session and participants will have an opportunity to debrief with the student researcher following their interview if necessary or desired. The researcher will have information on relevant resources available to students following the interviews in case a participant desires continued support from a professional source. These resources will be provided to all participants during the consent process. Additionally, participants may choose not to respond to any of the questions posed and have the ability to withdraw from the study at any point in the study's process.
- Considering participants will all be graduate students, pursuing a master's degree, potentially at Oregon State University (among others) and either pregnant at the time of the research or within the past three years, there is a moderate level of risk that they may be identifiable by their interview responses. In an effort to reduce this risk, all participants will select pseudonyms that will be used throughout the research process and all subsequent analyses and discussion of results.
- As a part of the recruitment process, the researcher will be using email to communicate

with prospective participants. Although measures will be taken to minimize the risk, there is a chance that information disclosed through an electronic format may be intercepted, lost, or destroyed. Thus, no private information will be exchanged between the researchers and prospective participants. Email will only be used to solicit participants, send consent forms, and schedule initial interviews.

17. Benefits

- An immediate benefit of this research is that it will contribute to a gap in the existing literature around the relationship between institutions of higher education and pregnant master's level graduate students. Additionally, this study may provide professional staff, major advisors, and instructors with insight as to the challenges facing pregnant students in graduate programs and ways in which to offer support.
- The study is not intended to directly benefit participants.

18. Assessment of Risk: Benefit ratio

- While there are potential risks to participants as a result of their involvement in this study, the probability of harm or injury to the participant or the fetus is minimal. Participants will never be asked to participate in ways that place them in positions of undue risk. Additionally, participants have the option to withdraw their participation at any point. Due to the qualitative, exploratory nature of the research, participants' perspective is highly valued. As such, while students may experience emotional distress in the process of reflecting on their experience, their ideas are reflective of their own experience and will not be judged critically or negatively by the researchers.

The risks inherent to the study have been minimized for the protection of participants' wellbeing. The potential implications that results from this research can have upon the support and resources that institutions of higher education provide to pregnant women simultaneously pursuing graduate degrees indicates that the benefits of this research outweigh the risks.

Appendix C: Initial Recruitment Email

Subject: Invitation to Participate: Research on Graduate Students & Pregnancy

Dear Student:

My name is Emma Larkins and I am a graduate student in the College of Education at Oregon State University. This academic year, I am conducting research on the experiences of pregnant or recently pregnant graduate students who are simultaneously pursuing a Masters degree.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study as you have been recommended to me as someone who aligns with the study's focus and may be interested in sharing your experience. Participants in this study will be asked to complete three individual interviews with the student researcher (Emma Larkins); each of which will not require more than one hour of your time. The interviews will be audio-recorded with your consent.

The results of this study will be used in the completion of a Master of Science thesis in partial completion of a Master of Science (M.S.) degree in College Student Services Administration at Oregon State University.

To be eligible for enrollment in this study, participants must be:

1. A female identified student
2. Currently pregnant, or have been pregnant in the past three years while simultaneously enrolled in a Masters-level graduate program

If you meet the qualifications for participating in this study, and wish to do so, please email me at Emma.Larkins@oregonstate.edu. I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your consideration of this request.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Emma L. Larkins

This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Daniel W. Newhart, Director, Student Affairs Research, Evaluation, and Planning. Title of study: Pregnancy and the Academy: Exploring the experience of pregnant graduate students

Appendix D: Verbal Consent Guide

Verbal Consent Guide

Pregnancy and the academy: Exploring the experience of pregnant graduate students

Purpose. This study aims to explore the experience of female identified students in master's-level graduate programs and their use (or non-use) of institutionally provided resources to prepare to balance the dual responsibilities of students and mothers-to-be. The research will be informed by a phenomenological methodology and, as a consequence, focus on developing an understanding of the experience of pregnant graduate students and the influence that institutions of higher education have in shaping their experience (Creswell, 2006). The project and its findings based on the data collected from the interviews will contribute to the student researcher's master's thesis in the College Student Services and Administration program.

You are being invited to take part in this study because you meet the following requirements:

- You are a female identified student
- You are currently, or have been pregnant in the past three years while simultaneously enrolled in a master's-level graduate program.

Activities. The study consists of three individual interviews facilitated by the student researcher in which you will respond to a series of questions aimed at asked to reflect on your experiences with both pregnancy and your program of study. The questions and content of each interview will build upon the content presented in the preceding interview in an effort to build a robust, cohesive understanding of your experience.

Each of the three individual interviews will take no more than an hour each. You will have the ability to select times in partnership with the student researcher when you have sufficient time to complete the required interviews. Following each interview, you will receive the option to review a transcribed copy of your responses and provide changes or feedback as necessary.

Audio recordings are a required aspect of this study. You should not enroll in this study if you do not wish to be recorded. Please indicate that you agree to be audio recorded.

Time. Each of the three individual interviews will take no more than an hour each. You will have the ability to select times in partnership with the student researcher when you have sufficient time to complete the required interviews. Following each interview, you will receive the option to review a transcribed copy of your responses and provide changes or feedback as necessary.

Risks. There is a potential risk that the interviews may bring forward personal reflections that cause emotional reactions or discomfort. Additionally, there is a minimal risk that you may be identified based on your interview responses. First, all participants will select a pseudonym that will be used during the study from this point forward. Please choose a pseudonym for the

records of this study. We will minimize the risks by maintaining confidentiality.

Benefits. An immediate benefit of this research is that it will contribute to a gap in the existing literature around the relationship between institutions of higher education and pregnant master's level graduate students. Additionally, this study may provide professional staff, advisers, and instructors with insight as to the challenges facing pregnant students in graduate programs and ways in which to offer support.

Although the study has foreseeable benefits in understanding and supporting graduate students who are also pregnant, this study is not designed to benefit you directly.

Payment. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

Confidentiality. The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

If the results of this project are published your identity will not be made public.

To help ensure confidentiality, you are giving verbal consent so that no signatures or unnecessary documentation exists to associate you with the research. Additionally, the pseudonym that you selected will be used from this point forward throughout the research process. All documents and materials associated with the interviews, including audio recordings from interviews and notes, will be securely stored and only accessible by the researchers. Digital information will, similarly, be secured using passwords only accessible by the researchers. No public computers will be used to access any materials pertaining to the project.

Voluntariness. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

If you choose to fully participate in the study, all questions included in the interviews are optional. If at any point you are asked a question that you do not want to answer, you are free to skip the question.

Your decision to take part or not take part in this study will not affect your grades, your relationship with the researchers, or your standing in the University.

Contact information. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Dr. Daniel W. Newhart, Daniel.Newhart@oregonstate.edu or Emma Larkins,

Emma.Larkins@oregonstate.edu

If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Interview 1:

1. Please introduce yourself.
 - a. What is your academic program and/or area of study?
 - b. How is your program structured?
2. What are your educational and/or professional goals?
3. Is this your first pregnancy?
 - a. If not, how many children do you have?
4. Do you consider yourself to be in a committed relationship?
5. How does (did) being pregnant (and a soon-to-be mother) fit with your educational pursuits?
6. Do you have peers or colleagues who are pregnant or mothering?
 - a. If so, have they offered you any insight or advice about balancing both roles?
 - b. If so, what has that advice been?
7. How do you imagine that pregnancy will shape your academic pursuits, if at all?
 - a. If you do not consider the two to be connected, please explain.
8. At the present, is there anything about your situation that causes you concern? Please explain.
9. Thus far in your experience, what have been sources of support to you (both informal and formal) as you prepare to balance motherhood with your graduate program?
10. Is there anything that you would like to add? Is there anything that you feel is important to include?

Interview 2:

1. In the last interview, you introduced your program of study. In looking more closely at your experience thus far, please tell me more about your relationship with your major advisor.
 - a. How much of your life, outside the realm of your academic program, do you share or discuss with your advisor?
 - b. Do you think that your relationship is at all impacted by your pregnancy?
 - i. If so, please explain.
2. Have you received guidance from a mentor or advisor about the timing and/or other aspects of having a family while in graduate school?

- a. If so, what advice did you receive?
 - b. Does your major advisor have children?
 - c. If not, is there advice or guidance that you wish someone had told you prior to beginning this process?
3. From your perspective, how do your peers regard your pregnancy?
- a. Have you made any adjustments to the way in which you interact with others based on how you perceive your interactions with them?
 - b. Do you think that the environment has any impact on how you interact with others?
4. How have you prioritized your changing role and future responsibilities as a parent (if at all)?
- a. Are their times or environments in which you prioritize one role over the other? If so, please explain.
5. **For those who identified as being in a committed relationship:** Do you discuss or make plans with your partner regarding how you will share parenting responsibilities after your child is born?
6. Is there an expectation that your partner will help with the childrearing and home life (i.e. household chores and upkeep)?
7. **For those with additional children:** How have your prior pregnancies influenced your current experience? Do you feel more equipped to balance your multiple roles?
8. In the first interview, you described sources of support you have used thus far. Are there additional resources that are available to you through your institution to help you as both a student and future-parent?
- a. How did you learn about these resources?
 - b. How do you envision you will use these resources (if at all) from this point forward?
9. Is there anything that you would like to add? Is there anything that you feel is important to include?

Interview 3:

1. Given your response in the first interview around your academic and professional goals, how do you imagine that pregnancy (and your subsequent status as a mother) will impact your academic pursuits, if at all?
 - a. If you do not consider the two to be connected, please explain. OR If you do not envision that your pregnancy will enhance your pursuits, please explain.
2. Have there been any situations that have impacted your perception of support while a student?

3. Do you feel that you have sufficient support to manage both roles through the completion of your program?
4. In the first and second interviews you mentioned [**fill with identified resources**] as sources of support to you thus far; does this remain true for you? Do have additions to include?
 - a. If not, why do you think that is?
 - b. What would you like to see?
5. Given your experiences thus far and your use of the resources you identified, do you feel that you are developing the skills that will enable you to balance your multiple roles?
 - a. If so, what are these skills? How do you envision that you will use them in the future?
 - b. If not, how do you think this will impact you in the future?
6. After reflecting on your experience from multiple perspectives in your first two interviews, what insight or guidance do you wish you had known before you began this process?
7. Given your experience thus far, what advice or insight would you pass along to another in your present situation?
8. Is there anything that you would like to add? Is there anything that you feel is important to include before we conclude?