Navigating pregnancy and parenthood: Work-family considerations for men and women graduate students in STEM and other disciplines

Ziyu Long  
*Purdue University*, longz@purdue.edu

Patrice M. Buzzanell  
*Purdue University*, buzzanel@purdue.edu

Abigail Selzer King  
*Texas Tech University*, abigailselzerking@gmail.com

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Navigating pregnancy and parenthood: Work-family considerations for men and women graduate students in STEM and other disciplines
Overview

- Rationale
- Literature Review
- Research Questions
- Methods
- Research findings
- Implications
Graduate school is a key location for combating the so-called “leaky pipeline” that diverts women and parents in general out of academic careers (Monosson, 2008).

Existing research indicated that graduate student parents face logistical as well as ideological conflicts because of dominant narratives requiring intense time demands of good parents as well as good graduate students (Mason, 2006; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

This project aims to understand how graduate students navigate pregnancy and parenthood with a goal to contribute to the recruitment and retention of a diverse academic workforce and the transformation of a more inclusionary academic environment.
Negotiations of parenthood and career

- Negotiating policies (e.g., Kirby, 2000; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Liu & Buzzanell, 2006)
- Managing work life demands (e.g., Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson & Andrey, 2008)
- Handling tensions between “reproductive clock” and “tenure clock” (e.g., Konard & Yang, 2012)
- Making sense of multiple identities (e.g., Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Bowers, Liu, & Conn, 2005).

Turner’s (1977, 1982) notion of liminality: a social space that was “betwixt and between the original positions arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony “ (1977, p. 95).

We argue that graduate student parents perceive themselves as situated “betwixt and between,” a position of ambiguity and uncertainty in their negotiations of parenthood and graduate career.
Research Questions

- What are the major challenges faced by graduate student in their transition to parenthood?

- how do graduate parents make sense of their in-betweenness in their negotiations of parenthood and graduate career?
Participants

- **Graduate student** who became parents during their graduate school career (n=30)
- **Gender:** 16 female (53% of the overall sample) and 14 male participations (47%).
- **Nationality:** More than half (n=16, 53%) were U.S. students (citizens and permanent residents) and 14 (47%) were international students.
- **Major:** 19 STEM major (63%)
- **Age:** between 25 and 43 years old, average age = 30.

- 5/16 have taken the official paid maternity leave (6 weeks paid leave).
- None of the fathers took official paternity leave (3 weeks paid leave).
Methods

Data collection

Survey:
- Satisfaction with their parenthood transition experience.

In-depth Interview:
- Average of 50 minutes and about 24 hours in total
- All interviews were professionally transcribed, generating 414 single-spaced pages of transcripts, resulting in approximately 14 single-spaced pages per interview.
## Findings: Satisfaction

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Job satisfaction BEFORE</th>
<th>Job satisfaction AFTER</th>
<th>Perception for advancement BEFORE</th>
<th>Perception for advancement AFTER</th>
<th>Job Security BEFORE</th>
<th>Job Security AFTER</th>
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<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
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<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mother</strong></td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>International</strong></td>
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</table>

*The satisfactions scores between groups were not significantly different.*

[ADVANCE-Purdue Gender and STEM Research Symposium, Event 4](http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/advancegsr/2013/presentations/4)
Findings: Major challenges

- Challenges in transitioning into parenthood:
  - navigating parental leave policies
  - negotiating work arrangement with advisors, key professors and colleagues
  - managing competing expectations and responsibilities as parents and students.
Finding-1

- Navigating parental leave policies

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Kisaj:

- She's not my advisor, but just another faculty member who I really like... She just told me a bunch of stuff and advice, and, "Take power," and just an empowering person..."You have your maternity leave, and you tell them when you want to take off, and you tell them when you can be here." I was like, "Really, I could do that?" She's like, "Yeah."
Negotiating work relationships and flexible work arrangement with advisors, faculty and fellow graduate student

advisee

employee

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Michael:

- She [the professor who’s giving the exam] was very strict about not postponing exams and if you had something come up, it needs to be earlier. I told her my due date was a little bit before the exam and may go longer. She said, "If you are not here, then you're not here" ...

- When I was in the hospital, I was doing a lot of studying. [laughs] I was nervous...They had a whiteboard and I was drawing out chemical structures and things...if my wife needed something or my newborn, I could give it to them, but when I wasn't doing that, I was studying.
Finding 3

- Managing expectations and identities in different whelms of life
Dove

- To me...I don't want to be avoiding my kids so that I can do work. I don't want to be in a bind where I have to get this done and be focusing more on work. Then you get the guilt on the other side is, "I need to get this done, I need time to do this," that kind of stuff. I think you spend more time arguing with yourself than actually getting anything done.
The in-betweenness operates in a complex, contextual and intersectional manner.

- Space for perceived impotence, unsettling feelings, and temporal spatial conflicts.
- Space for opportunities for potential structural transformation, resistance to the dominate ideology, and creation of new identities and practices.

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Practical Implications

- Create a Centralized Information Hub for Graduate Student Parenthood
- Enhance Childcare Services and Facilities on Campus
- Build a More Inclusive and Family-friendly University Culture
Thank you!
Questions?

Ziyu Long  
longz@purdue.edu  
Brian Lamb School of Communication  
Purdue University

Patrice M. Buzzanell  
Buzzanel@purdue.edu  
Brian Lamb School of Communication  
Purdue University


Kirby, E.L., & Krone, K.J. (2002). “The policy exists but you can’t really use it”: Communication and the structuration of work-family policies. Journal of Applied Communication Research, 30, 50-77. DOI: 10.1080/00909880216577


