

“I Am a Binary Trans Man and I Love Being Pregnant”: Making Meaning of Pregnancy in
Seahorse Dad Narratives

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Abstract

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Although there are many ways one can start a family, the culture considers pregnancy one of a woman’s most important life achievements. In other words, the culture privileges biological ties above all else. These cultural assumptions stigmatize transmen and nonbinary individuals who become pregnant. Using relational dialectics theory (RDT), this study highlights how marginalized discourses resist dominant discourses to make meaning of a semantic object. RDT’s corresponding method, contrapuntal analysis, revealed three discourses that compete to make meaning of seahorse dads: the discourse of pregnancy as a woman’s burden (DWB), the discourse of pregnancy as a woman’s privilege (DWP), and the discourse of pregnancy as an independent process (DIP). These discourses interacted through contractive practices (i.e., disqualification, naturalization, and neutralization), synchronic interplay (i.e., entertaining, countering, and negating), and dialogic transformation (i.e., hybridization). Findings revealed theoretical implications and practical applications.

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“I am a binary trans man and I love being pregnant”: Making meaning of pregnancy in seahorse dad narratives

For a variety of reasons, women might go to great lengths to become pregnant to start a family (Stephens, 2004; Usadi & Merriam, 2015). One reason for this tremendous effort reflects a culture which lauds becoming pregnant and giving birth as one of women’s most important life achievements. Consequently, when women experience infertility, they might, for example, risk their financial security (NCSL, 2021) and/or health to undergo invitro fertilization (IVF; Sunderam et al., 2018, Tisigdinis, 2021). Research suggests women might even move forward with pregnancies that put themselves at risk (Wiles et al., 2018). Meanwhile, there are about 117,000 children in foster care in the United States awaiting adoption (AdoptUSKids, 2022) and even more internationally (U.S. Department of State). This mismatch suggests that the culture inherently privileges a woman’s pregnancy itself opposed to the act of motherhood alone. Put differently, the meaning of pregnancy carries with it implications for a person’s health, finances, and identity as well as potential consequences for children who need homes.

One reason the act of pregnancy has gained so much importance is the often unspoken value that biological ties play in constituting what a family is and prioritizing what a family should look like (Galvin, 2014). Thus, any family that lacks the presence of a biological mother who has carried a pregnancy to term is discourse dependent. This means, the expectation for women to give birth creates pressure for families formed in alternative ways to construct an identity both inside the family and to the people outside of it (see Baxter et al., 2009; Galvin, 2014). Although not inherently problematic on its face, the pressure and assumption of a woman’s pregnancy makes it difficult of families to form in alternative ways. Indeed, scholars have conducted extensive research on how expectations for women’s pregnancy informs the

experience of adoption (see Baxter et al., 2014; Galvin, 2014) and even mental health diagnoses like prenatal and postpartum depression (e.g., Scharp & Thomas, 2017).

To advance this conversation, we expose how the expectation for women's pregnancy might disenfranchise and have serious health complications for a population of transmen who become pregnant (García-Acosta et al., 2020; Hoffkling et al., 2017). Specifically, transgender and gender-diverse individuals are those whose gender expressions differ from their sex assigned at birth (Bass et al., 2018). During transition, some transmen (female-to-male transgender men) and nonbinary individuals keep their uterus and thus, their ability to become pregnant (García-Acosta et al., 2020; Hoffkling et al., 2017). Because they retain their reproductive organs, these individuals can experience pregnancy during and after they begin hormone replacement therapy (HRT; Light et al., 2018). Transmen and nonbinary individuals who become pregnant often refer to themselves as seahorse dads (Kenigsberg, 2020).¹ When seahorse dads attempt to become pregnant or live as pregnant men, they face a variety of social, legal, and medical barriers (Hoffkling et al., 2017). Not only are seahorse dads denied social and legal visibility (de-Castro-Oeraza et al., 2019), but doctors also can deny transmen who are seeking help with infertility access to IVF because the culture finds pregnant men undesirable (Peterson, 2005).

Yet, despite how “undesirable” the culture might deem a pregnant man, transmen still give birth. In doing so, transmen who give birth challenge what pregnancy means within the culture. This is important considering resistance can provide new avenues for meaning to emerge that create space for groups that the culture stigmatizes and disenfranchises. Given that stigma is a primary reason people do not seek medical treatment (Dury & Louis, 2005), especially for life-threatening issues and pregnancy complications (Stone, 2015), understanding resistance and the

¹ Seahorse dads are transmen and nonbinary individuals who become pregnant. This is a reference to the fact that male seahorses give birth to offspring (Dudley et al., 2021).

potential for new meaning could be an important start to making pre- and postnatal care available to anyone planning to give birth, regardless of their birth-assigned sex or gender.

Given the importance of meaning and the meaning of pregnancy in particular, we turn to relational dialectics theory to frame the present study (RDT; Baxter, 2011; Baxter et al., 2021). RDT is a dialogic theory of meaning-making that exposes cultural ideologies that compete for influence (i.e., power) as they make meaning of a semantic object (i.e., pregnancy; Baxter et al., 2021). In particular, RDT elucidates how marginalized discourses work to resist oppressive meanings and how discourses reproduce dominant ideologies. Toward understanding how discourses both reify and resist the meaning of pregnancy from the perspective of seahorse dads, we begin by historicizing the meaning of pregnancy before providing an overview of RDT.

Woman's Subjugation Through Pregnancy

The culture in the U.S. implies that pregnancy and motherhood are an integral part of a 'normal' female identity (Woollett, 1991). Prior to the 20th century, many women spent much of their lives pregnant, often birthing 12 to 25 children with many miscarriages in between (Rich, 1995). Although the average number of children a woman gave birth to dropped to two by 1980 (Tsigdinos, 2021), society still expects women to become pregnant (Bute, 2009). Women who are child free by choice or due to infertility can struggle to challenge these cultural assumptions (Woollett, 1991). In other words, society makes it clear that it is a woman's duty to become pregnant (Moore, 2021).

In addition to being mandatory, the culture also views pregnancy as a rite of passage for women and one of their most important life achievements (Stephens, 2004). When women face infertility, they might feel pressure to undergo complicated, expensive, and dangerous medical procedures to become pregnant (Tsigdinos, 2021). Yet, doctors only provide IVF to women who

fit cultural expectations of motherhood, typically married heterosexual women (Peterson, 2005). Doctors often deny single, LTBTQ, poor, and/or disabled women who wish to become pregnant accesses to IVF. This means when striving for and achieving pregnancy, women can struggle to maintain control over their bodies as physicians decide who gets to become pregnant (Alcade, 2013). In this regard, the culture expects certain women to achieve pregnancy regardless of the financial or medical burden. Then once pregnant, women report feeling uncomfortable and disgusted with their pregnant bodies (Foxcroft et al., 2013; Warren & Brewis, 2004). These expectations constrain peoples' experiences and require sacrifices (e.g., financial and medical).

Pregnancy Reclaimed

Prior to the 1970s, pregnancy and motherhood often relegated women to a subordinate position (Stephens, 2004) and excluded them from the labor market (Rich, 1995). The feminist² revolution introduced an alternative discourse of pregnancy. Feminists worked to reclaim pregnancy from an act of subjugation (Stephens, 2004) to one of empowerment (Alcade, 2013; Sevón, 2005). One logic that helped women shift pregnancy from an obligation resulted from increased access to medical contraception and abortion in the late 20th century (Sevón, 2005). This means that instead of pregnancy being an obligation, women could choose it. After choosing pregnancy, some women reported feeling in control of their bodies and reproductive rights, found the process empowering (Alcade, 2013), enjoyed their changing bodies (Warren & Brewis, 2004), and experiencing positive mood changes (Rúðólfsdóttir, 2000).

Although feminist ideologies challenged the subjugation of pregnancy, they still constructed pregnancy as an experience *women should* have at some point in their lives. Even with a variety of ways to bring children into the family, the culture still valued pregnancy as the

² Feminists work to change systems so that they treat all people equally, regardless of their sex (Delmar, 2001).

best (see Baxter et al., 2014; Galvin, 2014). This oppressed women who faced infertility (Tsigdinos, 2021). By framing pregnancy as a positive experience (Alcade, 2013; Rúdólfsdóttir, 2000; Warren & Brewis, 2004), the feminist reclamation of pregnancy continued to subjugate women who did not find their pregnancy empowering (Diquinzio, 1999). Additionally, the feminist reclamation continued to frame pregnancy as an experience for and by women, ignoring pregnant individuals who do not identify as women (e.g., seahorse dad).

Seahorse Dads

Not only do seahorse dads experience anti-transgender stigma before, during, and after pregnancy, but they also experience pregnancy gender norms, and healthcare institutions that do not recognize pregnant men (de-Castro-Peraza et al., 2019). When seahorse dads become pregnant, they disrupt the gender binary (de-Castro-Peraza et al., 2019). Yet, healthcare institutions often maintain the gender binary, so healthcare workers struggle to classify pregnant men (Hoffkling et al., 2017). When preparing for their child, seahorse dads receive medical literature and teaching materials that focus on women, without alternatives for pregnant men (Adams, 2010). Although most people giving birth are women, the lack of alternatives erases seahorse dads from pregnancy, further marginalizing them. Even though seahorse dads, like women, can conceive their child through a partner's or donor's sperm (Hoffkling et al., 2017); seahorse dads must constantly explain themselves and reaffirm their gender identities during their pregnancies (Riggs, 2013). Thus, it is unsurprising that seahorse dads report feeling isolated during their pregnancies (Light et al., 2014), as they lack support and resources. Pregnant individuals that lack support and resources are more likely to experience postpartum depression after giving birth (Stana & Miller, 2019).

Although seahorse dads can pass as pregnant women or obese men during their pregnancies, fully transitioned seahorse dads are out and visible. These seahorse dads act in a way that informs others that they are a pregnant transman (García-Acosta et al., 2020; Hoffkling et al., 2017). Seahorse dads that are out and visible utilize language that describes themselves as a pregnant man which reaffirms their gender identity. Yet, there are risks for seahorse dads to be out and visible. For example, Seahorse dads reported difficulty listing themselves as their child's father; others have had social services threaten or attempt to remove their children from their care (de-Castro-Peraza et al., 2019). By giving birth to their child, some seahorse dads are denied their identities and others are treated as if their gender harms their child. Such treatment of seahorse dads reinforces the assumptions that queer parents are a danger to their children.

Seahorse dads challenge the cultural assumptions of pregnancy (de-Castro-Peraza et al., 2019). This ideological resistance might allow for the emergence of new and inclusive meanings of pregnancy. New meanings of pregnancy might create safer cultural and medical environments for infertile women (Woollett, 1991), alternative family formations (Galvin, 2014), and regardless of one's birth assigned sex or gender (Bass et al., 2018). With the meaning of pregnancy in flux, we turn to RDT, a theory of meaning making, to examine the meaning of pregnancy from the perspective of seahorse dads.

Relational Dialectics Theory

Based on the writings of Bakhtin (1981, 1984), RDT is a dialogic theory that explains how discourses with differing levels of power compete to make meaning of a particular semantic object (Baxter, 2011). Some discourses, or ideologies, are dominant (i.e., centripetal) whereas others are marginal (i.e., centrifugal). Dominant discourses circulate through the culture creating

social norms that guide people's everyday lives. Yet, marginalized discourses can resist these social norms, creating space for alternative ideas and ways of being.

Identifying how discourses compete requires an understanding of the utterance. An utterance is a turn in talk; when linked together, utterances form a chain of what has been said before (i.e., already spoken links) and anticipates future responses (i.e., not-yet-spoken links). Proximal links of the utterance chain are specific to idiosyncratic relationships. Alternatively, distal links of the utterance chain reflect cultural ideologies. Utterances reflect cultural discourses both explicitly (in talk) or implicitly (implied via unfolding). Unfolding is essential when trying to understand an utterance's implicit meaning (Baxter, 2011). During unfolding, researchers interpret the links of the utterance chain. Unfolding allows the researcher to interrogate what an utterance might be responding to (i.e., the already spoken links) or what it is anticipating (i.e., the not-yet-spoken links; Baxter, et al., 2021). Through unfolding, researchers can interpret the unspoken meanings that influence utterances.

A Continuum of Discursive Interplay

Beyond identifying discourses, researchers must examine they interplay using RDT's corresponding method, contrapuntal analysis (Baxter, 2011). Baxter and colleagues (2021) argue that identifying discursive interplay is an integral part of understanding how competing discourses construct meaning. Interplay occurs across a continuum from monologue (i.e., one discourse or meaning calcification) to the development of new meaning (Baxter, 2011). *Monologue* appears when only one discourse exists, in other words, meaning has calcified or set. Next, *discursive closure* (i.e., dialogic contraction) is the process where dominant discourses work to invalidate marginal discourses. Baxter (2011) outlined six contractive practices (a) disqualification, (b) naturalization, (c) neutralization, (d) topical avoidance, (e) subjectification,

and (f) pacification. When the dominant discourse denies the marginalized discourse because the speaker lacks expertise or the right of expression, disqualification occurs. Naturalization occurs when the dominant discourse behaves as a given. When the value-laden dominant discourse acts as if it is objective, neutralization occurs. Topical avoidance occurs when the dominant discourse constructs the marginalized discourse as off-limits. Using subjectification, the dominant discourse treats the differences between it and the marginalized discourse as a matter of individual opinion. When the dominant discourse treats the differences between it and the marginalized discourse as trivial, pacification occurs (Baxter, 2011). Ideal violation occurs when the dominant discourse laments that something is not the way it should be (Scharp et al., 2018). Next on the continuum is *diachronic separation*. Diachronic separation occurs when discourses demonstrate a change in dominance over time (Baxter, 2011). In other words, the utterance reveals how the dominant discourse has shifted to be marginal or vice versa. Discourses compete to expand meaning through *synchronic interplay*. Synchronic interplay often takes the forms of (a) entertaining, (b) countering, and (c) negating. Entertaining occurs when the dominant discourse alludes to the possibility of an alternative while maintaining authority. Countering occurs when the marginalized discourse acknowledges the dominant discourse only to refute it. Negating is the outright rejection of the dominant discourse. Finally, at the end of the continuum is *dialogic transformation*. There are two forms of dialogic transformation (a) hybrid meanings and (b) aesthetic moments. Hybrid meanings occur when two or more discourses combine to make a new both/and meaning (Scharp & Thomas, 2021). For example, Discourse X and Discourse Y combine to make the new meaning XY (Scharp et al., 2022). Aesthetic moments occur when the interaction of discourses completely reconstructs existing discourses to make entirely new meanings (Baxter, 2011). For example, discourse A and discourse B combine to

make the new meaning of C (Scharp et al., 2022). Given what is at stake for what pregnancy means and with this overview of RDT in mind, we ask the following research questions:

RQ1: What discourses construct the meaning of pregnancy in seahorse dad posts?

RQ2: How, if at all, do discourses interplay to make meaning of pregnancy from the perspectives of seahorse dads?

Method

After IRB determined that this public domain data did not classify as Human Subjects research, we sampled the posts from the subreddit r/Seahorse_Dads. r/Seahorse_Dads is an online space for transmen and nonbinary individuals (i.e., seahorse dads) with biological children. We included posts in the sample if posters (a) identified as a transman or nonbinary individual and (b) currently were or had previously been pregnant at the time of writing. We eliminated posters who were planning on getting pregnant in the future. On March 16, 2022, we reviewed all the posts on r/Seahorse dads. During collection, we retained the posters' screen names. This allowed me to collate multiple posts by the same user into a collection of utterances. Although we retained screen names, to maintain the confidentiality of posters, we assigned posters pseudonyms. Of all the posts, 74 distinct posters met the inclusion criteria resulting in 99 pages of single-spaced English text.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, we used RDT's corresponding method contrapuntal analysis (Baxter, 2011). Contrapuntal analysis is a type of critical discourse analysis. The first author conducted a modified reflexive thematic analysis by (a) familiarizing herself with the data, (b) systematically coding the data in response to our analytical question, "what does pregnancy mean?" (c)

generating initial themes, (d) developing and reviewing themes, (e) refining, defining, and naming themes, and (f) defining and labeling discourses (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

After we developed, defined, and named the discourses, the first author analyzed the data for discursive interplay beginning with *dialogic contraction* (Baxter, 2011; Scharp et al., 2018). Next, she examined the text for *diachronic separation* (the changing of the dominance of discourses over time) and *synchronic interplay* (i.e., entertaining, countering, and negating). Baxter (2011) explained that utterances mark the possibility of alternatives in entertaining through words, like “it might be” or “it’s possible that.” Words such as “but,” “surprisingly,” and “though,” are markers of countering. Words and phrases like “no” or “its’ not like that” imply negating. These are helpful markers of competition; however, they are not exhaustive. Therefore, she examined the text for instances in which utterances alluded to the possibility of a marginalized discourse, an alternative to a dominant discourse, or a rejection of the dominant discourse. Finally, she examined the narratives for *dialogic transformation* (i.e., hybrid meanings or aesthetic moments).

Data Verification

To provide evidence of confirmability, dependability, and transferability, we engaged in five verification procedures: (a) referential adequacy, (b) peer debriefing, (c) negative case analysis, (d) the audit trail, and (e) exemplar identification (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, we split the data in half. We reached saturation in the first half of the data corpus at poser 29 (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Second, the first author met with the second author, an RDT expert, over six separate meetings where she reviewed the data and findings. In these peer debriefing meetings, we argued through differences and came to a consensus. Next, we refined the themes and discourses to account for 100% of the data, achieving negative case analysis. We then

analyzed the second half of the data and compared the findings to the first half. No new themes or discourses emerged, thus we achieved referential adequacy. Throughout the process, we maintained an audit trail through detailed records of notes and decisions, which finally, aided in my selection of evocative exemplars.

Findings

In response to RQ1, three discourses constructed the meaning of pregnancy. First, the *discourse of pregnancy as a woman's burden* (DWB) framed pregnancy as a woman's expected affliction. Next, the *discourse of pregnancy as a woman's privilege* (DWP) focused on how pregnancy was an empowering experience for women. Finally, the *discourse of pregnancy as an independent process* (DIP) established pregnancy as a different experience for everyone.

Discourse of Pregnancy as a Woman's Burden (DWB)

The DWB framed pregnancy as a woman's arduous experience. The patriarchy expects women to endure pregnancy because it is a part of womanhood (Stephens, 2004). The DWB established pregnancy as (a) a woman's duty, (b) a challenge, and (c) a sacrifice.

Woman's Duty

The DWB established that women become pregnant. Because women have the reproductive organs to become pregnant, it is their duty to conceive, carry, and birth a child. Wyatt, a nonbinary individual explained, "I don't think it is every uterus's job to create a baby." Through unfolding, I was able to attend to the already spoken meaning that this utterance was referring to. This utterance illustrates the cultural expectation that because women have uteruses, they should become pregnant. In other words, this utterance is a direct response to the unspoken expectation that women become pregnant. Similarly, Ethan a transman with a cis wife stated:

We both really wanted kids of our own... When we went to the doctor we found out she could not get pregnant through IVF because of an accident she had an injury as a child which damaged her reproductive organs. They tried treatment but it failed. We knew about this but didn't know it basically made it near impossible to get pregnant. After an emotional and sad week. Lots of crying together. I had an idea what if I got pregnant? We knew it would be untraditional but I didn't care. I wanted to do something special... I went through the whole IVF process and it happened! I am 22 weeks pregnant with our daughter... my wife struggled with the baby not being from her pregnancy sometimes.

This illustrates the DWB's expectation that Ethan's wife should be carrying their child because she is a woman and that is what women do. Initially, Ethan and his wife planned to meet this expectation through IVF and her pregnancy. Yet, due to the circumstances Ethan became pregnant and his wife struggled with not meeting the expectations of the DWB. Ethan's utterance illustrates the hegemonic nature of the DWB. There were many options that Ethan and his wife could have taken to become pregnant. Yet, the DWB's focus on pregnancy led Ethan to become pregnant rather than the couple choosing another form of parenthood, such as adoption.

Challenging

The DWB established that women experience many challenging symptoms during pregnancy such as fatigue and pain (see Foxcroft et al., 2013). Tommy, a transman, described, "having kids is hard. Hard on the body. Hard on my mental state. It's rough." The DWB permeates Tommy's utterance to reinforce the difficulty of pregnancy explicitly. Thus, women endure the affliction of pregnancy. Vaughn, nonbinary, explained:

Is it normal around 5 months along to get pain in your back and hips too [sic] the point it hurts standing up and makes it so it makes your legs lock in place ever so often. I have

woken up quite a few times now from this pain and medication hasn't helped and heat pads also have not much effect. My partner has expressed concern a few time from me waking up crying or coming in the room in agony, is there anyway which could possibly help the pain or is it something I would have to deal with?

Vaughn's utterance illustrated the DWB by listing painful symptoms that pregnancy has caused them. When Vaughn asked if they would have to deal with the pain they are experiencing, the DWB established that women endure the pains of pregnancy to bring a child into the world.

A Sacrifice

By establishing that pregnancy is a woman's challenging duty, the DWB framed pregnancy as a sacrifice women make for children from conception. Thus, the DWB extended the discourse of intensive mothering (see Hays, 1994) into pregnancy. A woman sacrifices her wants and needs for her child from conception. For example, Owen, a transman expressed:

I also caught something I have been doing lately too. I have been hiding my depression a lot more. I laugh and smile, but half the time I am super down because I am so young (19 years old) and everyone just sees me as a parent now or sees me as just being a pregnant person now. Like this is all I am now. I don't want to be seen or to feel that way. I can still be fun and I can still go out and hang. I feel kinda uncool to my younger friends.

Through the DWB when some individuals become pregnant, their social networks start to generalize them as parents, rather than individual people. In the DWB, social networks treat mothers as if they cannot be fun. Instead, society established that a mother's sole purpose is to produce and care for their child at the expense of her own wants and needs.

Discourse of Pregnancy as a Woman's Privilege (DWP)

The DWP emerged as a feminist reframing of pregnancy as a pleasurable experience that women *get* to have. The DWP consisted of three interrelated themes of pregnancy as (a) chosen by women, (b) beautiful, and (c) a joyous experience.

Chosen by Women

The DWP framed pregnancy as a woman's choice. As Ben a transman stated:

The entire [birthing process] terrifies me and makes me feel horrible about my identity and sick with anxiety (and physically sick at the thought...). I can't help thinking that I'm going to get called 'mom' and generally misgendered (and then have that person promptly removed, I don't care how many people I have to tell to leave), but the process itself is far beyond anything that I want to happen to my body. I didn't realize this when we made the choice to conceive and I made the choice to carry, but I'm not sure how to handle it.

The DWP focused on how Ben made the choice to get pregnant. Although Ben struggled with thoughts of giving birth, he returns to the fact that his conception and pregnancy were his choice. The DWP established women have the agency to choose when, if, and how they get pregnant.

Beautiful

The DWP constructed pregnancy as an experience that makes women physically beautiful, both inside and out. For example, Yale, a transman pointed out:

[My mom] doesn't even call me a man anymore...She's called me a beautiful pregnant person many times. I despise it so much and I've told her more than once before that I hate being called beautiful. Even worse she just seems to have this disgustingly sexual view of me anytime I try to just wear comfortable clothes. I unbuttoned a shirt and she went to talking about how big my chest is and blah blah blah, you look so good, every woman would be so jealous, yada yada.

The DWP focused on how Yale's pregnancy has physically changed his body and made him beautiful. Yet, the DWP holds pregnant individuals to feminine beauty standards that women desire. In other words, pregnancy makes women physically beautiful.

Joyous

In addition to the physical experience of pregnancy, the DWP focused on the emotional delight women feel while being pregnant. This suggested that women are happy because they are pregnant and find pleasure in their pregnancy. Liam, a transman explained, "I love the feeling of having my little one grow inside me." Through the DWP, women enjoy being pregnant.

Similarly, Quentin, a transman stated:

It feels really surreal to even write this. I know it is a privilege and miracle that after many years steadily on T and being just shy of a week off testosterone that I would get pregnant on the first try--my first time having unprotected sex. I am lucky and also blessed because I thought it would take me much longer.

The DWP established that pregnancy is a joyous experience for Quentin who feels lucky and blessed to be pregnant. This utterance demonstrates how the DWP's themes are interrelated. For example, Quentin feels joy in his planned pregnancy.

Discourse of Pregnancy as an Independent Process (DIP)

The DIP established pregnancy is a different for everyone. Two themes comprise the DIP: pregnancy is (a) a personal experience and (b) a challenge to individual identities.

Personal Experience

The DIP framed pregnancy as personal and distinct for each person. How one comes to be pregnant and experiences pregnancy is individual to themselves and cannot generalize to

other individuals. In other words, no two pregnancy experiences are alike. For example, Julian, a transman explained:

So, I, trans man, am currently 35 weeks pregnant, with twins. My girlfriend is 33 weeks, just the one. I've never met another person in a similar predicament. Though kind of planned, we are really very happy! It just comes with it's fair share of surprises and difficulties. Being trans and pregnant is one thing, having a pregnant partner is another, doing both at the same time is a whole new thing

In Julian's utterance, the DIP established that his experience was entirely his own. By referencing how Julian has never met someone else in a similar situation, the DIP framed pregnancy as an experience that is different for everyone. Thus, the DIP made all pregnancies normal regardless of gender or medical assistance.

Challenges Individual Identities

Pregnant individuals might feel as if pregnancy is challenging their previously established identities. Pregnancy is a time of change for individuals and their families that can impact how individuals see themselves. Ryan, a transman pointed out:

I feel so grossly dysphoric because of my body, I can't wear my binder, and now none of my clothes fit me. I need new maternity clothes but their all super duper feminine. Please tell me there's some brand out there that makes masculine maternity clothes I can wear in an office setting. If I have to get told "we'll you're dressed like a girl so I'm gonna call you a girl" one more time by a coworker I'm gonna cry.

The DIP revealed how pregnancy challenged Ryan's identity as a man. The realities of pregnancy made Ryan feel more like a woman. Similarly, others viewed him as more of a

woman. Unlike the DWB and DWP in which one's identities are formed through pregnancy; the DIP allows pregnancy to challenge one's identity without changing it.

Discursive Interplay

For RQ2, we examined the full spectrum of discursive interplay by including contractive and expansive practices (Baxter, 2011). The contractive practices of (a) disqualification, (b) naturalization, and (c) neutralization, and the expansive practices of (a) synchronic interplay and (b) dialogic transformation were present in seahorse dad posts.

Contractive Practices

Disqualification. DWB and DWP retained dominance when they stated that seahorse dads lacked the right to express the DIP. After a miscarriage Derek, a transman stated:

Part of me feels like I don't deserve to feel this way since there are people who have lost their children at 20 weeks and up. Part of me feels like this is my fault for being trans and wanting to have children. Most of me just wants his baby back.

The DWP reinforced that pregnancy is a *woman's* desire through Derek's statement that the miscarriage was his fault for being trans and wanting children. Thus, the DWP prevented Derek from expressing the DIP and viewing pregnancy as a personal experience.

Naturalization. The DWB and DWP maintained dominance when they focused on how it was a given in nature that *only* women experience pregnancy. When experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, Grant, a transman explained, "If a man being pregnant was socially acceptable I would do it, for this little thing inside me...it makes me feel bad, it's not it's fault it got stuck with a trans guy as a host." By explaining that it is not socially acceptable to be a pregnant man, the DWB established that it is only natural for women to become pregnant. Thus, pregnancy is a universal experience for women, rather than individual experience for anyone.

Neutralization. When the DWB and DWP presented their value-laden positions as if they were objective or value-free, neutralization occurred. Xavier, a transman explained:

I just found out I'm pregnant a week ago... That being said, I never got my period back (not complaining). It stopped completely within two months of me starting T, and I'd been on T for nearly three years without missing a single shot up till September. Again, I'm glad I don't have to deal with that, but this presented a problem when I called to make my initial appointment. The first thing they asked was when my last period was, to which I honestly answered March of 2019, but quickly explained I knew when I had ovulated last, as I'd been taking ovulation tests in the previous month, as they were the only way to track my cycle. Apparently, this wasn't a good answer. I was put on hold for several minutes, then asked several times over if I was sure I was pregnant. Even after explaining I was trans and had been on T, and that was why I hadn't had a period in so long, the person on the phone didn't seem fully convinced. They finally put me down for an appointment, but not till December 27th. (I'll be ~10w by then. From what I've read online, they normally try to get you in around 6-8.)

Although the assumptions of the DWB are value-laden, the DWB used a medical perspective to present itself as objective, and thus value free. In sum, the contractive practices of (a) disqualification, (b) naturalization, and (c) neutralization worked to reify of the DWB and DWP.

Synchronic Interplay

Diachronic separation did not emerge from the data. One reason for this might be the presence of three competing discourses, two of which are dominant. With two dominant discourses competing, the marginalized discourse might not have been strong enough to demonstrate how discourses have changed over time. Yet, separation, synchronic interplay

emerged in which the discourses competed both dyadically (two discourses) and triadically (three discourses) through (a) entertaining, (b) countering, and (c) negating.

Entertaining. Entertaining occurred when the DWB and/or the DWP acknowledged the possibility of the DIP despite maintaining authority. The DWP entertained the DIP dyadically when Bryce a transman wrote, “I was really nervous when I decided to get pregnant that my wife would find me unattractive being a pregnant transman. I am really surprised and grateful that my wife finds me attractive still.” According to the DWP, pregnant women are beautiful, thus pregnant men are not. In Bryce’s utterance the DWP entertained the possibility that a pregnant man could be attractive in his individual experience, and thus the DIP. Yet, as Bryce was surprised by the DIP, the DWP maintained dominance.

The DWP and the DWB entertained the DIP triadically when Zane, a transman stated: The bottom line is, i could terminate but I am having some serious feelings. Now that I am pregnant, I think I would like to be a dad. If I do terminate, I don't know if I can get pregnant again and now that i know that I can I feel like it would be one of my biggest regrets. I am not young anymore (at-least on the spectrum of having a baby) and due to medical history things are complicated. I feel financially I need to start and finish school, and this seems insanely stressful especially while being pregnant etc. On top of all that, theres the fact that I am a (mostly) passing trans man who is pregnant. Fuck.

Entertaining occurred during two instances in this utterance. First, the DWP entertained the DIP when Zane discussed his desire to be a dad through his personal experience of pregnancy. Yet, the DWP maintained dominance through the acknowledgement that Zane might choose termination. Second, the DWB entertained the DIP through acknowledging Zane’s personal

experience of being a mostly passing trans man. The DWB maintained dominance through Zane's acknowledgement that he might regret not staying pregnant and using his uterus.

Countering. Countering occurred when the DIP brought up the DWB and/or the DWP to refute them. The DIP countered the DWP when transman Cooper experienced a miscarriage:

I'm grateful for all the women who have supported me and truly empathized with me, but I just feel so alone to be trans masc at the same time I'm going through this. A small minority of people are trans. A small minority of trans people get pregnant. A not-so-small minority of pregnant people have a miscarriage. I know I'm not the only one but I sure as hell feel like it right now.

The DWP establishes that women experience joy during pregnancy, and therefore pain during a miscarriage. The DWP acknowledged the women who have shared Cooper's pain and helped him through his miscarriage. Yet, the DIP counters the DWP by discussing how pregnancy, and in this case miscarriage, are individual experiences that can make one feel like no one can understand what it is they are feeling.

The DIP countered both the DWP and DWB when Russell a transman explained:

So I wanna start by saying, I am THRILLED to be pregnant! I am so happy to be growing our family....but.....I really miss my binder and my packer. I wanna pass again so badly. I'm at 22 weeks, so I still have a while to go, plus nursing after baby is born. I've already decided to do it for 6 months (or until baby starts teething), then be done. But yeah. I wanna be seen as a MAN! And finding gender neutral or masculine maternity clothes is almost impossible! I'm lucky that I like plain, button down, plaid shirts cuz that's basically all I can find anyway. (punctuation in original)

Initially, the DIP brought up Russell's joy about the pregnancy through the DWP to counter it by explaining his struggle with his identity as a man. Next, the DIP acknowledged the sacrifice that Russell is making for his child and the DWB before again stating how pregnancy can challenge one's identity. Thus, the DIP countered both the DWB and DWP in this utterance.

Negating. Negating only occurred triadically when the DIP outright rejected both the DWB and DWP. Avery, a nonbinary individual stated:

Fuck all the fem centric language in all these apps. I want week by week updates and ways to keep track of all my pregnancy related stuff, but none of them even have the option for gender neutral language. Even the most progressive apps I've seen only use neutral language for partners and interchange baby pronouns. IM NOT A FEMININE POWERHOUSE. I am an enby expecting twins and my resources feel limited

The DIP outright rejected the DWB's assumption that all those who give birth are women and the DWP's assertion that women finding pregnancy empowering. Rather the DIP established that pregnancy is an individual process and resources, such as apps, should allow individuals to customize setting to their circumstances.

Dialogic Transformation

Dialogic transformation occurred when two or more of the discourses combined to make new meanings of pregnancy. Both (a) discursive hybridization and (b) an aesthetic moment occurred when all three discourses combined to make new meanings of pregnancy.

Discursive Hybridization

The DWB, DWP, and DIP combined to reframe pregnancy as an ambivalent experience. Pregnant individuals can find pregnancy difficult and rewarding in their own personal context. For example, Jesse a nonbinary individual explained:

My reproductive system is the part of me that gives me the most dysphoria... [I] get dysphoric around periods, and it freaks me out that I have ovaries and a uterus. I have been really ambivalent about this journey, but also really want a baby related to us, and my husband and I have been trying for 4 years...I think I had gotten to the point where I thought it just wouldn't ever work and I was simultaneously super disappointed and secretly relieved, and then on top of that guilty for being relieved and magically thinking that somehow my emotional hesitancy was what kept me from getting pregnant (I know that's not how it works) and mad at myself for that. And did I mention disappointed? And then I started to make peace with not having biological children. Now that's all over and I am very excited and also freaked out. I'm 39. I have never been on HRT. I'm trying not to be too excited or too freaked out yet, this pregnancy is barely real at this point.

In this utterance, the DWB communicated the gendered assumptions and difficulty of pregnancy, the DWP established choice and excitement to have children, and DIP framed Jesse's experience as personal. Through the combination of all three discourses, a new meaning emerged: pregnancy is an ambivalent experience.

Aesthetic Moment

An aesthetic moment reconstructed the three previously existing discourses into an entirely new and affective meaning. Kaiden, a transman, explained:

Pregnancy was the least amount of dysphoria I felt in my body, surprisingly. It became so much less about me and more about the mission; growing the baby. I felt like a machine (in a good way). And I was really focused on the science of it all, so I spent a lot of my pregnancy reading up on fetal development. We elected not to know the sex, I didn't do an Ultrasound of any kind, and we didn't share on social media that we were pregnant.

Very low-key, very granola. And when I delivered, I did it quietly without any medicines and felt like a total badass. Baby came out healthy and perfect. I was adamant about chest feeding my kiddo—my chest as it was only served a single purpose and that was nourishment for this kid and that's why I didn't get rid of them sooner. Nursing to me was a critical part of the process I wasn't willing to forfeit. I think the reason it didn't cause dysphoria is because my chest wasn't seen or used as sexual objectification any longer. It was simply a tool, the same way my body was a machine. I enjoyed the bonding and the intimacy of chest feeding my kiddo and didn't feel less of a man for it. And it helped my kid stay healthy.

In this aesthetic moment, a new meaning emerged: pregnancy is about growing a child. Whereas the DWB, DWP, and DIP focused on the identities individuals expressed about and during pregnancy, this aesthetic moment focused entirely on the process of pregnancy. Pregnancy is a process an individual undergoes to grow a child.

Discussion

In this study, three discourses competed to make meaning of pregnancy. First, the *discourse of pregnancy as a woman's burden* (DWB) constructed pregnancy as (a) a woman's duty, (b) challenging, and (c) a sacrifice. Next, the *discourse of pregnancy as a woman's privilege* (DWP) constructed pregnancy as (a) chosen by a woman, (b) beautiful, and (c) joyous. Finally, the *discourse of pregnancy as an independent process* constructed pregnancy as (a) a personal experience and (b) a challenge to individual identity. These discourses competed through both contractive and expansive practices to make meaning of pregnancy. We will now address theoretical implications and practical applications of these findings.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers contributions to the existing literature and RDT theorizing. This study illustrated how multiple competing discourses can be dominant, and thus, oppressive, simultaneously. Although Scharp and Thomas (2020) have identified three competing discourses in previous research, their study revealed two marginalized discourses that resisted a single dominant discourse. This is the first study to my knowledge in which a single marginalized discourse competed against two dominant discourses. Indeed, the DWP did not displace the DWB overtime through diachronic separation (Baxter, 2011). Instead, the DWP joined the DWB as a culturally dominant discourse. This finding is evidence of how competing discourses can both be dominant and further oppress alternative discourses.

Next, the DWB illustrates how the discourse of intensive mothering (see Hayes, 1994) has co-opted the meaning of pregnancy which further marginalizes women who become mothers through means other than pregnancy, such as adoption (see Baxter et al., 2014). The culturally dominant discourse of intensive mothering framed good mothers as those that sacrifice their own wants and needs for those of their child (Hayes, 1994). The DWB extended intensive mothering into pregnancy when it established pregnancy was a sacrifice women make. This is an instance of mobbing (Names Withheld). Mobbing is a contractive practice in which the dominant discourse teams up with other cultural ideologies to maintain dominance. Therefore, women who become mothers without undergoing pregnancy will struggle to adopt the discourse of intensive mothering. In other words, these women are not good mothers because they did not sacrifice for their child through pregnancy.

Practical Applications

This research offers practical applications. The DIP is a call for individual representations of pregnancy. Current birthing materials are female focused without options for inclusive

language (Adams, 2010). Birthing classes and pregnancy apps treat all pregnant individuals as women who experience pregnancy the same way. Those who attend these classes or use these apps, do not have the option to individualize their pregnancy experiences. For example, many posters on rSeahorseDads lamented that when using pregnancy apps, they could individualize their partners or their child, but not themselves. Seahorse dads struggle to find educational materials that help them understand their pregnancy and prepare for birth because everything is female centric. The DIP framed pregnancy as an individual experience, pregnancy materials should have an option for individuals to customize information based on their personal experiences. Even if most individuals using these materials are women, they should still have options that reflect the individuality of their pregnancy. For seahorse dads, such materials might help them feel affirmed in their pregnancy experience (García-Acosta et al., 2020; Hoffkling et al., 2017).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study should be interpreted considering a few limitations. As this was online publicly available data, we lacked access to certain information. Most notably, we did not know how or why the seahorse dads became pregnant. Some posters provided specifics about how they became pregnant citing both planned and unplanned pregnancies. Yet, many other posters did not include this information. Additionally, we lacked access to the poster's demographic information. Most notably, the lack of geographic information was problematic as seahorse dad might have different experiences depending on where they lived. For example, seahorse dads might experience differing access to healthcare based on their geographic location. In the future, researchers should collect the demographic information of seahorse dads to understand how such factors influence their experiences. Additionally, researchers should utilize

interviews to further investigate the experiences of seahorse dads. In particular, they should analyze how seahorse dads experience pre- and post-natal care. Such research will identify how the healthcare system can provide care and resources for pregnant seahorse dads.

This study examined the meaning of pregnancy from the perspective of seahorse dads. Analysis revealed two culturally dominant discourses, the *discourse of pregnancy as a woman's burden* (DWB) and the *discourse of pregnancy as a woman's privilege* (DWP), oppressed the marginalized *discourse of pregnancy as an independent process* (DIP). Additionally, the DWB extended the discourse of intensive mothering into pregnancy through the contractive practice of mobbing.

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