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Women's Leader-Member Relationships during Pregnancy and the Return to Work

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Julkaisun nimike Esimies-alaissuhteet naisten raskauden ja työhön paluun aikana		
Tiivistelmä <p>Työssäkäyvien naisten raskaus ja siihen liittyvä äitiyslomaprosessi on erityinen työelämätilanne, joka vaikuttaa myös esimies-alaissuhteisiin. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan alaisnäkökulmasta naisten esimies-alaissuhteita raskauden ja työhön paluun aikana. Tutkimuksen tieteenfilosofisena lähtökohtana on sosiaalinen konstruktionismi. Tutkimusaineistoa on analysoitu diskursiivista ja narratiivista lähestymistapaa hyödyntäen. Aineisto kerättiin haastattelemalla 20:ä työssäkäyvää naista, ensimmäisen kerran heidän raskautensa aikana ja uudelleen noin puolentoista vuoden kuluttua.</p> <p>Väitöskirja koostuu neljästä artikkelista. Ensimmäisessä artikkelissa tehdään katsaus johtajuustutkimuksen kahdenvälisiä esimies-alaissuhteita tarkastelemaan (LMX) teoriaan ja raskauden työelämäkontekstin kirjallisuuteen sekä luodaan näitä tutkimustraditioita yhdistävä tutkimusagenda. Toinen artikkeli tutkii puhetta muutoksista, joita raskaus tuottaa esimies-alaissuhteeseen. Kolme diskurssia, jotka tuotetaan positiivisten ja negatiivisten tunneilmaisujen kautta ovat: ”praktinen diskurssi”, ”tulevaisuusorientaatio” ja ”yksilöllinen huomiointi”. Kolmas artikkeli tutkii sitä, kuinka alaiset asemoivat itsensä esimies-alaissuhteessa raskauden aikana ja millaisen puheen kautta he selittävät asemoitumistaan. Naisten puheesta identifioitiin asemoitumiset hyväksyty ja sivuutettu. Puheesta, jossa naiset selittivät asemoitumistaan, tunnistettiin kolme diskurssia: ”samankaltaisuus-”, ”ennakoitavuus-” ja ”kaikella on juurensa-” diskurssit. Neljäs artikkeli tutkii merkityksenantoa tilanteessa, jossa nainen on kokenut raskauden aikana syrjintää tai epäasiallista kohtelua esimiehensä taholta. Tulokset osoittavat, että hyvälaatuinen esimies-alaissuhde ei välttämättä suojaa naista syrjinnältä. Naiset, joilla esimies-alaissuhteen laatu oli korkea, merkityksellistivät tapahtunutta positiivisemmin kuin he, joiden LMX -suhteen laatu oli matala.</p>		
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Abstract <p>A working woman's maternity leave process has been found to be one specific situation in working life, which influences dyadic leader-follower relationships. This study explores women's working lives during and due to pregnancy from the perspective of the leader-follower relationship, focusing on the follower's point of view. The philosophical basis of this study stems from social constructionism and in analysing the data, the study adopts discursive and narrative approaches. The data was collected by interviewing twenty working women; once during their pregnancy and then again around one and half years later.</p> <p>This study comprises four articles. The first provides the theoretical framework for analysing the pregnancy and leader-follower relationships, adopting Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory. The second article explores how change was manifested within leader-follower relationships due to pregnancy, leading to three discourses; the "practical discourse", "future orientation" and "individual attention", the discourses being represented by positive or negative emotions. The third article explores how followers position themselves within the LMX relationship during pregnancy, and analyses the discourses women use to describe why they position themselves in a particular way. In the course of the analysis, the subject positions "accepted" and "dismissed" were identified. Furthermore, the study identifies three discourses concerning "whys": "similarity", "expectations" and "rooting deeper". The fourth article explores how women make sense of pregnancy related discrimination, and presents findings showing that even being a partner in a good quality leader-follower relationship does not protect women from pregnancy-related discrimination. However, the study also finds sensemaking amongst women involved in a high quality LMX relationship to be of a more positive nature than it is for those in a low-quality relationship.</p>		
Keywords Leadership, Leader-Member Exchange, Working women, Pregnancy		

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This is a study about working women who became mothers. Focus is especially on their work life and on their dyadic relationships with their leaders at work. Adopting a social constructionist approach, this study is not trying to gather the “objective truth” of organisational reality but to provide a perspective on how working women reproduce their experiences discursively; how they define themselves; to what discursive practices they relate; and how they make sense of their experiences in their narrations.

Becoming a mother – being pregnant, giving birth and taking care of the child – is a tremendous experience for a human being, affecting a woman’s body and soul (Miller 2005). Motherhood, biologically, is the basic difference between men and women. Moreover, motherhood is also socially constructed and thus dominant constructions, or discourses, of motherhood exist within the wider society and are recognised by individual women who use them as standards for understanding and against which to evaluate their own experiences and to construct their own ideas of motherhood (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson 2001; Woollet & Phoenix 1991). Work life is commonly construed discursively in a way that, to some extent, excludes women as mothers (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson 2001; Aaltio & Hiillos 2003). However, especially in modern Western societies, becoming a mother is nowadays not only a part of people’s private and family life, but also very commonly part of working life. This part of female workers’ private life becomes displayed in organisations by the visible pregnant body and by women’s absence due to maternity leave (Aaltio-Marjosola & Lehtinen 1998: 125).

Many previous studies have supported the view that family responsibilities are one main reason women in work experience disadvantages or other problems (Gatrell 2004; Wiens Tuers & Hill 2002; de Luis Carnicer et al. 2003). These issues have usually been studied by focusing on situations where women have families and how the number or age of their children are affecting women’s working life (e.g. Mayerhofer et al. 2008) while there are few studies of the maternity leave process reported in the management literature. However, organisations are finding more and more that those with the most competent and qualified personnel are the winners in the world of business. Also, competition for workers in general is getting harder all the time due to demographic developments where the number of retirees is increasing and the number of people participating in the workforce is decreasing, especially in Western societies such as Finland. There-

fore, it is important that organisations recognise that women are valuable employees before, during and after pregnancy (Chester & Kleiner 2001).

About two thirds of working women are expected to become pregnant at some point during their working lives (Lyness, Thompson, Francesco & Judiech 1999; Cleveland, Stockdale & Murphy 2000). It is also noteworthy that motherhood as a phenomenon is part of all women's work life at some level. Not all women are mothers – some are not even willing to become mothers – but still, they are potential mothers, and this is usually at the time when people are also in the active phase of their career (Hiillos 2004). Moreover, masculine models of work are typical in organisations (Schein 2007; Metcalfe & Linstead 2003; Metcalfe & Afanassieva 2005a; 2005b), and pregnancy and childbirth in that context are sometimes perceived as odd or inappropriate, causing discrimination or dismissals (Knights & Richards 2003; Gatrell 2004, Duncan & Loretto 2004; Kugelberg 2006; Masser et al. 2007; Ainsworth & Cutcher 2008). Becoming a mother is also described as a culmination point for women in work (Smithson & Stokoe 2005) and pregnancy as irretrievably affecting women's relationship with paid employment (Gross & Pattison 2007). However, nowadays women are an important part of an organisation's human resource pool and this inevitably raises the question of how organisations can manage these specific situations in the most beneficial way.

The number of studies concerning pregnancy in the context of working life has increased during a few recent years. Interest has been twofold: attitudes towards and evaluations of pregnant women at work, and working women's own perspective on working during pregnancy. Research focusing on other peoples' attitudes towards pregnant workers has shown that pregnancy causes mostly negative attitudes and behaviour towards women but that sometimes a positive side also exists (Corse 1990; Gueutal & Taylor 1991; Halpert, Wilson & Hickman 1993; Callender et al. 1997; Bragger et al. 2002; Hebl et al. 2007; James 2004; Williams 2004; Young & Morrel 2005). When the working woman's own perspective is considered, both positive and negative experiences have been identified, but negative ones, such as discrimination and inappropriate treatment, are unfortunately found to be very common (Adams et al. 2005; Brown et al. 2002; Buzzanell & Liu 2007; Davis et al. 2005; Liu & Buzzanell 2004; McDonald et al. 2008; Major 2004; Millward 2006).

Studies have revealed that the supervisor has an important role during the working woman's pregnancy (Halpert et al. 1993; Thompson & Francesco 1996; Gregory 2001; Brown, Ferrara & Schley 2002; Major 2004; Davis et al. 2005; Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Buzzanell & Liu 2007). Supervisors can be the ones who en-

courage and support women during their pregnancies (Buzzanell & Liu 2007). Regrettably, problems which pregnant women face are also very often related to their interpersonal relationships, one of the most important ones being the relationship between the woman and her immediate supervisor (Adams, McAndrew & Winterbotham 2005; Davis et al. 2005; Gregory 2001; Woodhams & Lupton 2006). However, there has been a lack of empirical research concerning especially these relationships during pregnancy and the maternity leave process. Therefore, the perspective of organisational leadership and the role of the immediate supervisor are essential to consider when studying these questions.

In organisations the dynamic between leader and follower is one of its basic elements, and an important aspect of the leadership process is the dyadic relationship that leaders have with their individual followers (Boyd & Taylor 1998; Vatanen 2003). These leader-follower dyads consist of individuals and are characterised by individual differences and thus the different phases of life are also part of the phenomenon under study. Leadership research suggests that relationships between leaders and followers, for example, leader-member exchanges (LMX), may have significance in the pregnancy and maternity leave situation in organisations (Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Buzzanell & Liu 2007).

Leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau, Graen & Haga 1975; Graen & Cashman 1975; Graen, Novak & Sommerkamp 1982), mentioned above, has a long history, originating in researchers' desire in the mid-1970s to withdraw from traditional, supervisor-oriented leadership research. Until then, leadership research was interested in the traits which made some people good leaders, or in the special behavioural styles which good leaders cultivated. This research was also called "average leadership style" research due to the basic assumption that leaders behave in similar ways towards their followers. Challenging that view, LMX focused on dyadic relationships in organisations and on the question of how leadership occurs between two organisationally related individuals, the leader and the follower.

LMX is based on the argument that leaders and their followers create dyadic working relationships which differ from each other in quality. The status of these dyadic relationships is seen as a continuum with high quality (in-group) relationships at one end and low quality leader-follower dyads (out-group) at the other (Liden & Maslyn 1998; for a review, see also Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser 1999). In general, relationships between leaders and their followers are supposed to develop rather quickly and then remain stable. However, some authors have suggested that new circumstances or situations of conflicts have an effect on the relationship (Bauer & Green 1996; Dienesch & Liden 1986; Liden et al. 1993;

Johnson & Huwe 2002). Recent studies have defined pregnancy as one such “conflict” in organisations which may affect relationships between leaders and followers (Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Buzzanell & Liu 2007). Another approach to study these relationships has been to explore what kind of background issues affect the nature of these LMX dyads. Such issues that have been found are commonly linked to similarity attraction (Byrne 1971). Others have also been proposed to be important, for example, gender and age, which moves this issue closely to questions about pregnancy and motherhood in organisations. Similarly, studies focusing on outcome level, organisational efficacy aspects and individual well-being found these issues to be related to the quality of such dyadic work relationships (McCuiston, Wooldridge & Pierce 2004; Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995).

Even though the LMX approach to leader-follower relationships in organisations has been dominated by a very realistic ontological view of science and is usually studied using quantitative methods, the narrative roots of studying leader-member exchange relationships do exist (Fairhurst & Hamlett 2003; Fairhurst 2007:120). Rediscovering the value of a more constructionist view in understanding LMX relationships provides an opportunity to gain more in-depth understanding of the relationship than a snapshot given by a quantitative measurement scale usually does (see, e.g., Fairhurst 2007). For instance, narratives and storytelling enable individuals committed to LMX to discursively reflect upon their experiences and make sense of the relationship in communication (Fairhurst 2007:122). Recently, LMX has been studied through discourse analysis in this way (see, e.g., Leponiemi 2008). Moreover, this kind of research tradition has been much more common in studies of pregnancy and the maternity leave process.

All in all, LMX offers a novel and helpful approach to get an in-depth understanding of what happens in working life when a female employee becomes pregnant, takes maternity leave and eventually returns to work. Combining these two research fields provides a deeper understanding of women’s LMX relationships during pregnancy and the maternity leave process. This advances working women’s situation in general but also as individuals, supporting them being treated ethically and fairly in their working life, and through that, enhancing their career development, work-life balance and general well-being.

1.2 Key concepts of the study

In this section the key concepts of the study are defined to clarify the meanings given to them in the present research.

Pregnancy and maternity leave process

Pregnancy is physically a time period when a woman carries a foetus in her uterus. Pregnancy lasts about nine months and is divided into three phases or trimesters, the first trimester lasting weeks 0–12, the second trimester weeks 13–24 and the third from week 24 to the day of delivery. Pregnancy is also a psychological process and a personal transition, with both social and cultural elements (Gross & Pattison 2007).

In working life, the concept of maternity leave process is related to pregnancy. It has been defined as consisting of five sequential stages: “announcement, preparation (for leave), leave, preparation for return and re-entry” (Miller et al. 1996; Buzzanell 2003: 55; Liu & Buzzanell 2004: 326).

Leader-member exchange

The exchange relationship between leader and the (group) member is in this study understood as an interpersonal process occurring within a hierarchically constructed organisational unit, the dyad, which is mainly controlled by the leader (a term here used interchangeably with supervisor) and the member (a follower or subordinate) (Liden & Maslyn 1998; Schriesheim et al. 1999). As a theoretical framework, leader-member exchange theory is found useful in this study because it considers dyadic relationships in organisations between supervisors and their subordinates. Leader-member exchange is defined as “(a) a system of components and their relationships, (b) involving both members of a dyad, (c) involving interdependent patterns of behaviour, and (d) sharing mutual outcome instrumentalities and (e) producing conceptions of environments, cause maps, and value” (Scandura, Graen & Novak 1986: 580).

While the focus of this investigation is the relationship, the level of analysis can vary as the relationships can be examined at the level of the group, the dyad or the individuals within the dyad (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995). In this study, the interest is on followers’ representations of these relationships, which are understood to be socially constructed discursive practices. Furthermore, relationships are studied

from the follower's perspective and thus the relationship is examined from the perspective of the individual within the dyad.

1.3 Research gaps

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of leader-follower relationships during the pregnancy and maternity leave process (Thompson & Francesco 1996; Gregory 2001; Brown, Ferrara & Schley 2002; Major 2004; Davis et al. 2005; Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Buzzanell & Liu 2007). Significant changes in superiors' attitudes and behaviour towards his pregnant follower are found (Bistline 1985; see also Halpert et al. 1993). Since LMX theory is based on the argument that leader-follower dyads differ from each other in quality (Liden & Maslyn 1998; for a review, see also Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser 1999), it can be assumed that the quality of LMX before pregnancy might affect pregnant females' experiences at work and that the pregnancy, in turn, might affect the relationship between leader and follower.

Pregnancy-related studies have argued that the treatment, both positive and negative, of working women during pregnancy and their return to work needs further research (Halpert et al. 1993; Gross & Pattison 2001; Buzzanell & Liu 2007). Previous research has very much stressed the negative side of the pregnancy at work (Gueutal & Taylor 1991; Halpert et al. 1993; Longhurst 2000; Bragger et al. 2002; Hebl et al. 2007). This study aims to fill this research gap by taking account of both the positive and the negative aspects of the period when a working woman is becoming a mother. Articles two and three shed light on both perspectives through positive and negative emotional experiences (article two) and subject positions (article three). A negative side of the phenomenon, namely discrimination, has previously mostly been studied by exploring different kinds of discrimination practices in organisations and their extent (Adams et al. 2005; Gregory 2001; Hebl et al. 2007; McDonald et al. 2008). The situations where women's immediate supervisors have been behaving inappropriately, or have been carrying out discriminatory acts, have not previously studied in-depth how women have experienced and made sense of these situations. This study aims to narrow this gap in article four.

In LMX research the basic assumption of relationship stability is hardly ever challenged (Lee & Jablin 1995; Fairhurst 2007). Furthermore, only a few studies have investigated relationship development in its early phases (Bauer & Green 1996; Graen & Uhl-Bien 1991; Uhl-Bien & Graen 1993; Nahrgang, Morgeson & Ilies 2009) of these studies has focused on a situation when something may happen

within the LMX dynamics, for example, in a conflict situation. These research gaps in LMX studies are duly noted, and this study will therefore provide perspectives on change and development over time within leader-follower relationships in all empirical articles.

Studies of the pregnancy and maternity leave process have, for example, been concerned with how gender is related to behaviour towards pregnant women, and how women's own characteristics affect their working life experiences. Several examples of this have been studied and men are reported to be more biased than females (Halpert et al. 1993). A pregnant woman's age, her income level and her length of time in employment are found to be related to discrimination, but also a woman's willingness to return to work from maternity leave (Halpert et al. 1993; James 2004; Adams et al. 2005). LMX studies have provided a variety of examples related to LMX quality, but few studies are specifically concerned with how people themselves attribute reasons for something happening within the leader-follower relationship due to special circumstances, for example, pregnancy. This gap within existing research is considered in the article three.

Previous research has been concerned with the consequences of pregnancy, i.e. women's willingness to return to work (Lyness et al. 1999), career development (Buzzanell & Liu 2007; Houston & Gillian 2003) and job satisfaction (Brown et al. 2002); however, no studies have been concerned with individuals' emotions or sensemaking. The quality of leader-follower relationships has been found to have an effect on, for example, followers' intentions and perceptions and also their actual behaviour (see Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995; Vatanen 2003; van Breukelen et al. 2006), based on quantitative measures, not letting people themselves tell of their experiences. There is also evidence that emotional aspects of LMX relationships are significant, and further research is needed to explore this (Dasborough 2006). Articles two and four aim to fill this research gap.

The first article of this dissertation sets out a research agenda, identifying several areas for further research which are discussed in some detail. Since the publication of the first article of this dissertation in 2005, several authors (Buzzanell & Liu 2007; Gross & Pattison 2007; Hebl et al. 2007) have discussed pregnancy in the context of working life from a management perspective, thus demonstrating that this theme has also been found important and topical by other researchers. The significance of the supervisor and the dyadic relationship has also emerged in these more recent studies, but only one, Buzzanell and Liu (2007) has, to some extent, focused on the relationship and the related dynamics. These scholars also identified the lack of pregnancy-related research in the LMX perspective.

1.4 Aim of the study and research questions

The aim of this dissertation is to make a contribution to the current understanding of women's working life during and due to pregnancy as seen from the leader-follower relationship perspective. To achieve this aim, current literature was reviewed to provide a theoretical framework and identify the research gaps in the first article. The empirical part of the study addressed the following question:

How do women discursively construct their working life and their leader-follower relationships during their pregnancy and their maternity leave process?

This main question is addressed through more detailed follow-up questions:

- (i) *How do women construct the nature of their leader-follower relationships due to their pregnancy in their talk?*
- (ii) *What kind of “why’s” do women construct in their talk that is related to pregnancy and nature of their leader-follower relationships?*
- (iii) *How do women make sense of their negative experiences during the process of maternity leave and how do they relate the long-term quality of leader-follower relationships to those experiences?*

The present thesis is structured in four articles, which are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of articles

	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3	Article 4
Focus of study	Theoretical framework for analysing the pregnancy and LMX	Change discourses and related emotional experiences due to pregnancy within LMX relationship	Subject positions in the context of LMX and discourses of why's the relationship with their leader developed the way it did during their pregnancy	Sense-making of discrimination by immediate supervisor and how quality of LMX is related
Source of data and method of data collection	Literature	Interviews with pregnant women (n=20)	Interviews (n=40) conducted with working women (n=20): first interview during their pregnancy and second interview about one and half years later	Pregnancy-related discrimination stories (n=5) in two rounds of interviews conducted with women (n=20) during their pregnancy and about one and half years later
Methods of data analysis	–	Discourse analysis	Discourse analysis	Narrative analysis

1.5 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is organised into five chapters and four articles. After this first chapter, in which the background, main objectives and key concepts of the dissertation are presented, the relevant literature is reviewed. After reviewing the literature concerning a process of maternity leave in organisations and interpersonal work relationships, especially the ones between leader and follower, LMX perspective on pregnancy and maternity leave process is presented. Chapter 3 discusses methodological approaches adopted in this dissertation, and chapter 4 summaries the four individual articles of this study. Chapter 5 draws the main conclusions from the study. Final part of this dissertation consists of four individual articles.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, the theoretical background of this study is presented. I start by reviewing the literature on motherhood and pregnancy in worklife and organisations. Then I present a brief account of leadership theories concerning leader-follower relationships, followed by a detailed review of LMX theory. The chapter ends with a presentation of the LMX perspective on pregnancy and the maternity leave process.

2.1 Maternity leave process in working life

To become a mother is a psychological and physical transition phase for a woman (Gatrell 2005; Miller 2005). It is also culturally and biologically one basic element in a woman's life, even though women nowadays have more freedom to choose whether she wants to become a mother or not (Bondas & Eriksson 2001). Discussion about maternity, especially in an organisational context, is inevitably related to the issues of sex and gender. Whereas pregnancy and childbirth are biologically only possible for women, socially constructed gender and related cultural roles as parents are much more diverse concepts.

Gender refers not only to the two opposite sexes, men and women, but also to societies and culture where people become socialized, and learn and develop ideas of men and women, masculinity and femininity (Aaltio-Marjosola 2001; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Therefore, it can be said that gender is actively produced and reproduced in everyday life situations as well as in organisations (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 249).

The traditional gender roles place caring and family responsibilities on females and the work domain and breadwinner role on males (see eg. Aaltio-Marjosola 2001). In fact, women still carry the majority of responsibilities for home, family and child care (Gatrell 2004). However, as more women have entered the workforce in the past few decades, more men have assumed more responsibility for taking care of the family (see Butler & Skattebo 2004). The increase in the number of fathers actively involved in parenting (de Luis Carnicer, Sánchez, Pérez Pérez & Vela Jiménez, 2003; Gatrell 2004) has enabled family responsibilities to be shared better than ever before, but still organisations are mainly characterized by masculinity and the distinction between work and non-work domains is typical (Poggio 2003; Aaltio & Hiillos 2003).

Masculine and patriarchal representations of organisations tend to exclude the feminine (Höpfl & Kostera 2003) and it is argued that 'traditional masculine he-

gemony' is being replaced by images of competitive, performative, skill-based employees who do not have an overload of family responsibilities (Gatrell 2004, citing Halford et al. 1997). In contrast, the metaphor of mother in the organizational context – referring to uniting, nourishing and caring activities (Aaltio & Hiillos 2003: 36) may be signalling the recently strengthened role of the discussion about values, ethical issues and social responsibility in business. Even though some change and development has occurred, traditional views of men's role in caring responsibilities still tend to hold (Waner, Winter, & Breshears, 2005) and very commonly the female image is associated with maternity and related commitments. Therefore, female workers' are not just women, but they are potential mothers as well (Poggio 2003, 15). Maternity is often seen as a barrier to career advancement, and also to the so-called "glass ceiling" (see Ashcraft 1999), but also as a burden, a "maternal wall", in worklife in general (Williams 2004). Sometimes employers have described themselves as 'risk-takers' when hiring a woman (Gatrell 2004; Poggio 2003)

In addition to the discussion about gender and parental roles, discourses of 'human resources' of organisations usually refer to the employees' cognitive processes and minds, forgetting the fact that a human being is also an embodied self, as having feelings, senses and also one's own visual image (Koivunen 2003). In the context of embodiment and gender in organisations, female bodies are argued to be marginalized and subordinated, and discussion has been related, for instance, to issues such as sexuality and harassment (Dale & Pierce 2001). Maternity, at least pregnancy and breast feeding, makes women's bodies highly visible, and it also provides public and visually salient evidence of femininity in places of work (Gatrell 2007; Gross & Pattison 2007). Not only visible changes of women due to their pregnancies, but also hormonal changes that occur, or are assumed to be occurring, due to pregnancy are salient features of female workers' embodied selves (Gross & Pattison 2007). These issues are also discussed later in this chapter.

Moreover, in all Western societies women's participation in the work force has grown during the last two decades. At the same time, women have gained higher and more responsible positions in organisations (Gross & Pattison 2007), and through increased education, they have become a qualified and important part of organisations' human resources. In Finland, where this study was conducted, 48.9% of the labour force is female. There was 58 008 deliveries in Finland in 2007 and number of children born was 58 729 (Stakes 2008). As these numbers show, pregnancies and childbirth are rather common among female employees in organisations, even though statistics of that were not found. It has been argued

that about three thirds of working women become pregnant at some point of their careers (Lyness et al. 1999).

On the other hand, the number of children per women has decreased, being 1.83 in Finland in 2007 and even less in some other EU countries. The average age for women giving birth in Finland is 30 years, and the average age for women giving birth for the first time is 28 years (Stakes 2008). It can be assumed that the experiences women faces during their maternity leave process are very important. Women are not pregnant very many times during their lives and when they are, it is in many cases planned and hoped-for and other people's reactions are taken very personally. This view is supported also by my own notions during this research process. When I have presented my findings about this topic at different conferences, in meetings and in organisational training sessions, usually after my presentations someone from audience has come to talk with me. Often I have been told stories relating events that happened over fifteen to twenty years ago. These experiences are important for women and stick in women's minds.

Studies relating working life and the process of maternity leave have been focused very much on the psychological transitions, or development, which women go through during that time period (Smith 1999; Bailey 1999; Miller 2005). These changes relates also to women's working life and working identities (Bailey 2000; Major 2004; Millward 2006). Studies which have been interested in how women discursively reproduce their motherhood and working life have found that usually these life spheres are separated and sometimes working life is defined as "women's own time" (Bailey 2000; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson 2001). Motherhood itself can create dilemmas for women when returning to work, for example, anxiety about being a good mother and a good employee is found to emerge (Millward 2006) and incompatible goals between organisational and personal needs are also reported (Buzzanell & Liu 2007). The nature of the psychological contract has also been found to change. The primary contractual issue for women returning to work was about trying to re-establish themselves as committed employees in the eyes of others but also expecting that their new status as mother (and its related responsibilities) was noticed (Millward 2006).

Beside the immense life change in general, maternity may lead women to re-evaluate and sometimes also to re-organise their working life. In any case, women are involved in a more or less complex decision-making process regarding paid work (see Cartwright 2004). When organisational commitment and the return to work after maternity leave has been in focus, it is found that women who had guaranteed jobs after childbirth planned to work later into their pregnancies and to return to work sooner after childbirth than women without guaranteed jobs. Other

benefits (paid maternity leave and childcare services) had no significant relationship either with the timing of maternity leave, return to work or organisational commitment. Moreover, pregnant women were more committed to their employer if they perceived the organisation's culture to be supportive for work-life balancing and they also planned to return to work sooner after childbirth (Lyness et al. 1999).

However, the maternity leave process is argued to be a signal of working women's unreliability and differentiating them from the ideal worker when promotions are considered (Liu & Buzzanell 2004). It is also reported that women who did not return to work as intended were differentiated from those who did return to work by the amount of planning they had done in pregnancy, as well as having lower pre-natal income and less anticipated support within the workplace. Almost one third of those who returned to work part-time reported reduced job status (Houston & Gillian 2003).

Studies have shown that when maternity leave was considered as a negotiation or conflict management process working women perceived themselves as unable, or unwilling to negotiate their roles and work conditions with their bosses (Buzzanell & Liu 2007; Liu & Buzzanell 2004). In a very recent study, two opposite groups of participants were studied, i.e. those who reported being discouraged and those who reported being encouraged concerning their employment status and career opportunities during their maternity leave. These groups diverged in perceptions, for example, of their interdependent relationships with leaders or organisations. In particular, leader-follower relationships were perceived to be problematic among women who felt discouraged. In contrast, women who felt encouraged perceived the pregnancy period as sustaining positive relationships with their leaders (Buzzanell & Liu 2007).

Furthermore, one interesting perspective on working women and their participation in the labour force is Hakim's (2000; 2002) description of preference theory, which is adopted and supported in several studies concerning motherhood in working life (McDonald, Bradley & Guthrie 2006; Marks & Houston 2002). She argues that women vary in their preferences for work, being either home-centred, adaptive or work-centred. Home-centred women, comprising about 20% of women, prioritise children and family and are not willing to participate in the labour force. Adaptive women, comprising about 60% of women, are committed to both family and work and want to work but are not totally committed to a career. Work-centred women, comprising about 20% of women, are usually childless and if they have children, are very likely to return to work after their maternity leave. In addition to this view, a critique of the Hakim's model has been presented

(Cartwright 2004; James 2008). Women's work orientation is suggested to be complicated and multi-layered (James 2008). Different external circumstances, for example, what kind of opportunities (availability of jobs) or constraints (availability of day care), are said to be part of these women's labour force participation decisions (Houston & Gillian 2003; see Millward 2006: 317). Also socio-economic class women belong to or the line of business women are in are suggested to make a difference to women's attitudes towards work and parenthood (Blackwell & Glover 2008; James 2008; Wood & Newton 2006).

When maternity leave is considered a negotiated process, whose successful completion is crucial not only to working women but also to organisations, several antecedent and outcomes has been presented. The quality of the Leader-Member Exchange has been presented both as antecedent and as outcome (Liu & Buzzanell 2004:326; Miller et al. 1996). Moreover, regarding a return to work and thus to participating in the labour force, family leave takers are also recommended to be understood that they differ from each other, and not as a homogeneous group of mothers of small children. For instance, a highly educated female manager taking family leave is not more likely to resign from her company than a highly educated female manager not taking family leave (Lyness & Judiesh 2001).

All in all, studies concerning the whole process of maternity leave have focused very much on the situation when women return to work. However, studies concerning the beginning part of the maternity leave process, pregnancy, are reviewed here in their own right, because pregnancy is the time when women are present in their work places with a different appearance than usual and are faced with several stereotypical assumptions of how pregnant women behave in general (Gross & Pattison 2007). In the next section, the research concerning pregnancy as a special working life situation is reviewed.

2.2 Pregnancy and working life

Research on pregnant women at work can be put into two broad categories: first, research concerned with attitudes towards and evaluations of pregnant women at work, and second, research with a focus on pregnant women's own perspectives on working life during pregnancy. As the first article of this dissertation presents a literature review, the findings of that article are not repeated here; instead, some core studies are highlighted and the literature review is updated and expanded with some new research areas which have emerged as relevant during the empirical work of this study.

2.2.1 *Attitudes towards and evaluations of pregnant women in work*

Pregnancy in the work place is usually related to certain social norms or stereotypical expectations, for example, that pregnant women should be more emphatic and understanding than non-pregnant ones (Ashcraft 1999; Halpert, Wilson & Hickman 1993). If these expectations are not met, people's (supervisors, colleagues, subordinates) perceptions, attitudes and behaviour may change towards the working woman during her pregnancy (Bisitline 1985; Corse 1990; Liu & Buzzanell 2004). Stereotyping can also be negative in nature and pregnancy can be seen as social stigma, a situation in which social identity becomes devalued in a particular social context (Major 2004; Taylor & Langer 1977).

From a perspective of negative expectations, pregnancy is supposed to restrict a woman's ability to perform her work duties and decrease her commitment to the organisation. Furthermore, already during the pregnancy, women are expected to be involved in childcare and not return from maternity leave (Corse 1990; Gueutal & Taylor 1991; James 2004; Liu & Buzzanell 2004). However, there is evidence that problems faced by employers when an employee is pregnant are not widespread and that these are usually related to maternity pay entitlement, holiday pay and annual leave (Callender et al. 1997). Smaller firms are more likely to experience problems, perhaps because the absence of a staff member cannot be so easily accommodated by the remaining workforce, or because the specialisation of tasks restricts the number of people being able to cover her absence effectively (Callender et al. 1997; Young & Morrel 2005). In addition, or because of this, employers in small workplaces were more likely to hold negative personal attitudes towards pregnancy than employers in the larger workplaces (Young & Morrel 2005). In fact, it was shown that the majority of companies were reasonably comfortable with pregnancies (Young & Morrel 2005).

Despite these findings, evidence of a reluctance to hire pregnant women (Bragger et al. 2002; Metcalfe & Afanassieva 2005a; 2005b; Hebl et al. 2007) or promote pregnant women (Gueutal & Taylor 1991; Halpert et al. 1993) has been found and a reluctance to promote or hire women exists even for the reason that she may subsequently become pregnant (Aeberhard 2001; Metcalfe & Afanassieva 2005a; 2005b). Very successful women may find their proficiency is questioned once they become pregnant, take maternity leave or adopt flexible working hours for family reasons. Performance evaluations for pregnant women or working mothers have also been claimed to have abated (Williams 2004) even though contradictory results have been presented and thus, women's performance has sometimes evaluated being better than before pregnancy (Gueutal et al. 1995). Two possible explanations of higher performance evaluations are suggested: either pregnant

women worked harder than before and after their pregnancy, or that the raters were more lenient toward pregnant women because they were worried about the legal implications of their evaluations (Gueutal et al. 1995). In a study of undergraduate students in a laboratory settings, women were given lower performance ratings when pregnant than when not pregnant. In particular, males gave lower ratings to pregnant women than females (Halpert et al. 1993). Pregnancy is also claimed to be the most extreme negative differentiation of female employees when gender-based diversity was studied in an small and medium sized enterprises (SME) context (Woodhams & Lupton 2005).

Beside these negative findings about others' attitudes towards and evaluations of pregnancy, the physical changes that pregnancy causes to a woman's body are also important to note as stated earlier in this chapter. One can say that the pregnant body is a manifestation of intimacy and private life (Gatrell 2004; 2007; Longhurst 2000) and working women may feel that their pregnant bodies are not adequately reflecting their employers' image (Longhurst 2000). The body is both a cultural and a natural phenomenon, even though nowadays people tend to acknowledge only the cultural part of this equation (Warren & Brewis 2004). Working pregnant women's bodily difference becomes evident in workplaces which are in many cases characterised by masculine values and norms (Gatrell 2007; Longhurst 2000; Metcalfe & Linstead 2003; Metcalfe & Afanassieva 2005a; 2005b; Schein 2007).

In pregnancy a woman's body is out of control; a woman may suffer from nausea and tiredness and her belly is swelling (Longhurst 2000). Women's changing physiology and hormones have been the focus of the medicentric tradition in pregnancy research, and therefore behaviours during pregnancy have been mostly explained in reference to physiological or neurology, instead of psychology or women's own experiences. Even though hormonal and physical changes are inevitable during pregnancy, these traditional ways to study pregnancy have also strengthened the stereotypes of pregnant women as instable and over emotional actors, also in working life (Gross & Pattison 2007). Loss of bodily control is found discomforting or unpleasant for pregnant women (Warren & Brewis 2004) and the pregnant body is seen differently by others and by pregnant women themselves (Longhurst 2000). The pregnant body attracts attention and people, both men and women, are often fascinated by a pregnant woman's belly, but on the other hand, it may also be seen as ugly and alien. Other people tend to see a pregnant woman as a container of the foetus that needs bodily protection (Longhurst 2000). As an outcome, supervisors and colleagues may be willing to help pregnant women with physically demanding tasks, such as lifting heavy things.

Overall, studies of attitudes towards pregnant women and family leave takers have mostly discussed negative findings and highlighted significant difficulties for pregnant women at work. Taking pregnancy as a physical matter, it seems not to be such a big problem in their working life. The next section reviews the literature about women's own perspectives on working life, including pregnancy-related discrimination at work.

2.2.2 *Working women's perspective on working life during pregnancy*

Previous research has also considered how women themselves perceive working life while pregnant. Such research has focused on issues such as their perceptions of fairness of treatment faced during pregnancy (Adams et al. 2005; Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Buzzanell & Liu 2007), psychological contract (Millward 2006), job satisfaction (Brown et al. 2002), work identities (Major 2004; Millward 2006) and discrimination (Adams et al. 2005; Davis et al. 2005; McDonald et al. 2008).

Studies of work identities and stigmatisation, that is, how the experience of being pregnant affects women's views of themselves as workers and how others view and react to them, reveal that pregnant women do not consider their own work identity changes as important. Instead, they place more importance on preserving their existing identities in the face of changing perceptions on the part of supervisors and colleagues (Major 2004; Millward 2006). Women's work identities are also argued to be challenged due to pregnancy and maternity leave (Liu & Buzzanell 2004). Moreover, pregnant women are reported to find themselves becoming invisible to the organisation as a valued employee, expressed as a feeling of general insecurity about their future status (Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Millward 2006). In many ways, women were treated by their employers as mothers-to-be rather than valid, contributing employees a long time before they actually became mothers. But on the other hand, from the perspective of a psychological contract, women have been reported to feel guilty about the prospect of not being able to fulfil performance expectations due to, for example, fatigue, and thus during their pregnancies are having perceptions of violating their contract (Millward 2006).

Discrimination toward pregnant working women is unfortunately common – even though it is illegal in Finland (Suomen laki 1986) and in many other countries all over the world (see, e.g., Masser et al. 2007: 705). Moreover, discrimination is always also morally and ethically wrong (Chester & Kleiner 2001; Collins & Wray-Bliss 2005). Pregnancy-related discrimination is defined in several ways, for example, as direct or indirect (Suomen laki 1986; McDonald et al. 2008). In addition, when formal discrimination is prohibited, biased behaviour or attitudes

may be expressed through interpersonal discrimination (King et al. 2006; Hebl et al. 2007).

Direct discrimination relates to the acts which are possible to identify, such as dismissals, forced redundancy, reduced responsibilities and less pay coinciding with pregnancy. Indirect discrimination refers to situations when the employer imposes a requirement or condition that appears to be neutral but in fact disadvantages the pregnant employee (Suomen laki 1986; McDonald et al. 2008). Interpersonal discrimination is more subtle in nature and therefore also harder to identify, with avoidance of eye contact, lack of warmth and shortened interaction length being modes of this type of discrimination (Hebl et al. 2007).

Studies conducted in recent years in the UK (Adams et al. 2005; Davis et al. 2005) and Australia (Charlesworth & McDonald 2007; McDonald et al. 2008) show that discrimination during pregnancy is common, but not a dominant phenomenon among working pregnant women. Some statistics from the US (Dixit & Kleiner 2005) show that pregnancy discrimination, or at least the number of charges laid, has increased greatly between 1992 and 2004. It is also suggested that even though the number of women experiencing pregnancy-related discrimination is increasing, they do not report it officially due to a lack of confidence that it will help their situation (McDonald et al. 2008). While there are no specific statistics available in Finland documenting the problem, the 2007 annual report of The Ombudsman for Equality claims that pregnancy and family leave are a current problem in Finland also (Tasa-arvoaltuutetun toimisto 2008).

Empirical studies concerning discrimination show that up to 45 per cent of working women have experienced some form of discrimination during their pregnancies. Discriminatory acts such as denial of training opportunities, changes to job descriptions, criticism of performance or appearance, reduced working hours and dismissal without appropriate reason after their announcement of pregnancy were typical (Adams et al. 2005; Gregory 2001; McDonald et al. 2008). It is reported that up to seven per cent of women had been dismissed, made redundant or treated so badly that they had to leave their jobs as a result of their pregnancy, maternity leave or the circumstances of their return to work following absence for maternity (Adams et al. 2005). Not very much research has focused on those discriminatory practices which are equivocal and not very easy to identify, namely, interpersonal discrimination as defined above, but there is evidence (Hebl et al. 2007) from naturalistic field study settings that pregnant women faced not formally identifiable but rather interpersonal discrimination in comparison with non-pregnant women.

However, there are also contradictory research findings about how women experience discrimination. In one study where almost half of the women reported that they had suffered from some form of tangible discrimination, the majority of the women at the same time felt that the way in which they had been treated during their pregnancies had been fair (Adams et al. 2005: 39). That study did not discuss these findings in-depth but suggested that the women's overall perception of their treatment during pregnancy was positive if only "lesser forms" of negative treatment had occurred. Moreover, although a qualitative study by Davis et al. (2005), which focused especially on women who had experienced discrimination, did not have much to say about positive attitudes towards experienced discrimination, it did argue that there are "grey areas" – situations in which pregnant women's treatment was considered unfair by them but they also emphasised that their employers needed to prioritise their business.

Several aspects are found to be related to pregnancy discrimination, for example, women's age, level of income and length of time in employment, but also women's willingness to return from maternity leave. Younger women are more often suggested to be victims of pregnancy-related discrimination (Adams et al. 2005; James 2004). In addition to aspects at the level of the individual, there may also be aspects at the level of the organisation with significance in the context of pregnancy. Organisational or contextual issues that are shown to affect pregnancy-related work issues are, for example, the extra costs of filling the gap that an employee's absence causes which employers or supervisors found problematic or about which they had sceptical assumptions (Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Young and Morrel 2005).

Pregnancy-related discrimination typically causes financial problems to working women but health problems also occur. Problems with expecting mothers' and their babies' well-being are related to situations where a woman is encountering negative attitudes towards her pregnancy and tries to work harder to counter stereotypical assumptions, whilst remaining reluctant to admit that she is experiencing difficulties at work (James 2004). On the other hand, it is argued that being pregnant and doing hard work is seldom a good combination and that pregnant women often worry about the effects that stress might have on their baby. Pregnancy also highlights the contradiction that women need to be as effective as other colleagues but also need to take it easier than before (Gross & Pattison 2001). In the light of the above, it is not very surprising that women have been found to report significantly lower levels of job satisfaction during (and after) their pregnancies compared to the time before their pregnancies (Brown et al. 2002).

Some studies have shown that pregnancies are perceived as stressful and conflictual, and that they function as a transitional point in supervisor-subordinate relationships for working women (Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Buzzanell & Liu 2007). Moreover, discrimination has been found to be related to problems with an individual manager or colleague, and acts of discrimination towards pregnant workers are committed mostly by their supervisor or employer (Davis et al. 2005; Gregory 2001). Managers have even been found to be prepared to defend their decisions when unacceptable behaviour related to pregnancy has occurred (Adams et al. 2005; Woodhams & Lupton 2006).

Communication studies have found that supervisors' communications include many negative statements, usually indirect ones but nevertheless negatively affecting pregnant women's self-esteem, increasing their mental stress and even worsening their physical state during pregnancy (Liu & Buzzanell 2004). On the other hand, not all women report bad treatment or perceptions of organisational encouragement or positive reactions (Brown et al. 2002; Buzzanell & Liu 2007; Halpert & Burg 1997). It is reported that in most cases perceptions of a supervisor's attitudes toward the pregnant follower did not change during pregnancy and that nearly half of the reported changes were positive. The few negative changes that did occur were generally made by the supervisor rather than by co-workers (Brown et al. 2002).

To conclude, research on pregnancy and work has focused, firstly, on evaluations or attitudes that other people have toward pregnant employees or job seekers, and secondly, on women's own experiences of the treatment they face at work during pregnancy, including discrimination. The importance of individual relationships, especially supervisors' behaviour towards pregnant followers, has emerged from this earlier research (Halpert et al. 1993; Thompson & Francesco 1996; Gregory 2001; Brown et al. 2002; Major 2004). The results of this review also indicate that reciprocal supervisor-subordinate relations play an important role and have attracted more interest in recent studies (Davis et al. 2005; Liu & Buzzanell 2004; Buzzanell & Liu 2007). At the same time, there is a lack of research focusing on these issues from a leadership perspective. In leadership studies, Leader-Member Exchange is one of the main approaches focusing on dyadic leader-follower relationships and therefore offers a new theoretical context in which to study pregnant working women. A review of research on LMX, grounded in a short overview of leadership theories in general, is presented next.

2.3 Leadership theories, past to present

Leadership has been studied extensively over the years. The first trend in research that considered leadership focused on the traits of great leaders. The basic assumption was that it is possible to find and define internal qualities which people are born with and which make people good leaders (Stodgill 1974; House 1977; Yukl 1994; 2002). Although much research has been conducted in a framework of trait theories, the results have been mixed and no obvious relationships between leader traits and leader performance have been found. The next trend in the study of leadership was to focus on leadership behaviour and leadership styles. Leadership was not any more seen as a “given” attribute that one had, but a phenomenon that included the possibility of training individuals to develop good leadership. None of the leadership styles identified proved to be more effective than any other, but leadership was found to be dependent on the context in which a particular behaviour or style was practised, thus leading to the formulation of the notion of a contingency or situational approach to leadership (House 1977; for a review, see House & Aditya 1997).

The movement to a contingency approach brought the importance of the followers in leadership research (House & Mitchell 1974). The Fiedler model (see Fiedler, Chemers & Mahar 1994), also called LPC Contingency Model (Yukl 1994), was the first comprehensive contingency model and proposed that effective group performance depends on the match between the leader’s style of interacting with subordinates and the degree to which the situation allowed the leader to control and influence. The basic assumption was that a person’s leadership style was settled (whether task- or relationship-oriented), and that the right style needed to be matched to the right situation. Three contingency variables were presented as important when defining the situations. The most important was leader-member relations, that is, the degree of confidence, trust and respect subordinates have for their leader. The second variable was task structure, defined as the degree of formalisation and standard operating procedure in job assignments. The third and least important was position power, i.e. the leader’s influence over power-based activities. Each leadership situation resulting from these contingency variables could be classified as “very favourable”, “favourable” and “unfavourable” for the leader (Fiedler & Chemes 1984; Ayman et al. 1995). Other contingency or situational theories, such as path-goal theory (House & Mitchell 1974) and decision-making or decision process theory (Vroom & Yetton 1973; Vroom & Jago 1988), highlighted how leaders need to take account of both follower and situation and act in a certain way in the light of these.

The next wave in leadership research focused on a search for leadership qualities and how those qualities allowed for social influence over others (Hansen et al. 2007). Theories such as transformational and visionary leadership, charismatic leadership and authentic leadership emerged and have established their position since 1980s (Bryman 1996). Although all of these theories take followers very much into account, the main focus has been on heroic leaders.

In transformational leadership theory (Burns 1978; Bass 1985), a transformational leader is considered to inspire followers to share a vision, empowering them to achieve the vision, and to provide the resources necessary for developing their personal potential. They are seen as role models who support optimism and mobilise commitment, as well as focus on the followers' needs for growth. Transformational leaders act as promoters of change or at least cope well with change, and they can create something new out of the old. They build strong relationships with others while supporting and encouraging each individual's development (Bass & Avolio 1990; 1994; Bass 1996). Charismatic leadership (Bass 1985), sometimes confused with transformational leadership (e.g. Conger & Kanungo 1988), is even more oriented towards the individual and concentrates on leaders' ability to raise followers' self-concept by virtue of the leaders' exceptional characteristics and to motivate followers to achieve higher levels of performance. On the other hand, multiple-level interaction processes between leaders and followers are also part of charismatic leadership (Aaltio-Marjosola & Takala 2000). Followers' emotional attachment to the leader plays a central role in charismatic leadership – although charisma is a quality a leader may have, it does not allow for social influence unless it is acknowledged by followers. Both transformational and charismatic leaders can also be unethical if they are motivated by selfish rather than altruistic ambitions and if they use power inappropriately (House & Aditya 1997). Furthermore, in authentic leadership theory leaders' are supposed to be true to themselves and through being conscious of that, followers are considered to trust and respect their leaders, which results in positive outcomes (Avolio & Gardner 2005).

The latest trends in leadership research concern phenomena seen from perspectives such as ethical leadership, emotions and aesthetics, shared leadership and relational leadership. Several research approaches have also been intertwined with each other, e.g. where emotions and aesthetics have been studied, on the basis that leadership is a shared and relational process (Koivunen 2003; Sauer & Ropo 2006).

Ethical leadership (Kanungo & Mendonca 1996; 1998; Takala 1999; Turner et al. 2002; Fulmer 2004; Brown et al. 2005; Hoog & Hartog 2008; Mayer et al. 2009)

relates very much to the studies briefly reviewed above, concerning leadership qualities and seeing leadership in an individual and heroic manner. On the other hand, ethical leadership has been more normative in nature than the theories presented above and is concerned with how individuals “ought” to behave in the workplace (Brown 2007). Ethical leaders are described as being honest, fair and caring. They are defined as promoting and rewarding ethical behaviour among followers through engaging in open communication and shared decision making (Brown et al. 2005). Thus, ethical leadership means leadership by a leader who is both a moral person and a moral manager (Brown & Trevino 2006).

The processual nature of leadership appears to be the main theme in the latest approaches to leadership. Emotions (Fineman 2003; Humphrey 2002; Dasborough & Ashkanasy 2002; Sauer 2005; Sauer & Ropo 2006) and aesthetics (Ropo et al. 2002; Koivunen 2003; Taylor & Hansen 2005; Hansen et al. 2007) brought into the leadership field have highlighted the importance of the individual as a feeling and sensing human being. Emotional knowledge and sensitivity are abilities which good leaders need besides good business knowledge (Fineman 2003; Mayer et al. 2001) but contradiction and seemingly negative emotions also play an important role in the leadership process (Sauer & Ropo 2006). Aesthetics relates to meanings generated via sensory perceptions, such as hearing and listening, seeing, touching and feeling (Duke 1986; Koivunen 2003; Hansen et al. 2006) and contributes to leadership research by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership phenomenon.

Shared leadership is based on the idea that leadership is not something that an individual can provide when organisational or group level goals are to be achieved, but rather it is an interactive process to which individuals in groups contribute and it is through this process that power and influence are shared among participants (Pearce & Cagner 2003; Bligh et al. 2006). Interestingly, shared leadership and relational leadership approaches seem to be rather close to each other. Just as shared leadership does, relational leadership includes others and is not limited to the individual, hierarchically appointed leader, i.e. others are essential to the relational processes by which leadership is produced and enabled (Grint 2000; Uhl-Bien 2006). Relational leadership theory, as presented by Uhl-Bien (2006), has two different, but inter-connected perspectives, i.e. entity and relational. These perspectives are divided primarily by ontological and epistemological standpoints. While the relational perspective takes the view that knowledge is socially constructed and socially distributed, the entity perspective argues for a clear separation between mind and nature and the search for objective truth. Furthermore, the entity perspective is typically interested in individuals and their perceptions of “given” organisational relationships, such as the relationship be-

tween leader and follower or relationships between peers. The relational perspective sees leadership as a social process where relationships are created, constructed and reconstructed over time between people (Hosking et al. 1995; Dachler 1992, as cited in Uhl-Bien 2006).

One of the best-known leadership theories focused on organisational relationships is leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. Uhl-Bien (2006) positions it strongly as an entity perspective, but LMX theory can also be understood and viewed as part of a relational perspective and as discursive leadership (Fairhurst 2007). LMX theory is reviewed next.

2.4 Leader-member exchange theory

Even though LMX theory (Dansereau, Graen & Haga 1975; Graen & Cashman 1975; Graen, Novak & Sommerkamp 1982) goes back over 30 years, it still is one of the most popular approaches adopted in leadership studies when questions of dyadic hierarchical relationships are considered. LMX emerged from Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) research, which is a model of leadership proposed by Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975). This turn in leadership research emerged as an alternative to previous theories which focused on traits and behaviours of heroic leaders and which assumed that leaders interpret themselves in the same manner for all of their followers. It is also to be distinguished from situational theories which assumed that leaders can adapt their leadership to every situation and are willing to put the same effort into all of his or her subordinates, as pointed out in the review above. Instead, LMX takes relationships between leaders and each follower as developing through dyadic interaction, following a unique path, but relating to other dyads also. The basis of LMX can be identified in social exchange theory (Blau 1964; for a review, see Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005; Sparrowe & Liden 1997) and role theory (Katz & Kahn 1966; 1978; for a review, see Wickham & Parker 2007).

Social exchanges entail a series of interdependent interactions between relationship parties and it is through those that they generate obligations (Emerson 1976). Reciprocity and negotiated rules are central in social exchange theory (Cook & Emerson 1978, cited in Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005) and are presented in a similar way in LMX theory. Role theory (Katz & Kahn 1966, 1978) consider the roles that individuals enact in social systems to perform their required tasks. These social systems are seen as pre-planned, task-oriented and hierarchical, and assignments of work roles define the behaviour that employees are expected to exhibit. Roles are argued to be created through interactive role-episodes, and the devel-

opment of these roles is considered a dynamic process. Interestingly, even though LMX theory has adopted several basic assumptions of role theory, it has almost neglected the view of the dynamic nature of roles and its affect on relationships. Also, possible role conflicts (Biddle 1986) are largely missing from the LMX literature.

In the first article of this dissertation, I have presented one way of categorising LMX studies, arguing that three different kinds of focus can be distinguished: firstly, studies have concerned themselves with the nature of the dyadic relationships; secondly, the focus has been on antecedents of the quality of LMX relationships; and thirdly, the concern has been with outcomes of the quality of LMX relationships, both individual and organisational, (see, for example, Vatanen 2003). These research areas will be reviewed in more detail below to show how LMX can contribute to research on the maternity leave process and on working life.

2.4.1 *Nature of LMX relationships*

Dyadic work relationships between a leader and every one of his/her followers (members) are the focus of LMX theory. Essential to LMX theory is that these dyadic relationships are seen as unique and as differing from each other in quality. The quality of these relationships is considered to lie on a continuum, ranging from high to low (Liden & Maslyn 1998; for a review, see Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser 1999). High quality dyads are based on reciprocal trust and contributions whereby followers who have high-quality LMX are seen as part of the “in-group”. Low-quality exchange relationships are characterised by either balanced or negative reciprocity (Davis & Gardner 2004:446), which places these followers in “out-groups”. High-quality relationships exceed the requirements of the employment contract and include the exchange of both material and non-material goods. Low-quality relationships are based primarily on a formal employment contract and exchanges are based on that in turn (Liden & Maslyn 1998). This kind of differentiation among the same superior’s followers raises questions of equality and justice, and this approach to leadership has been seen as “politically incorrect” (Dansereau 1995: 480). It is suggested that leaders must offer opportunities to subordinates to improve the quality of leader-member relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995). For example, superiors may create a supportive and open atmosphere, increase the number and type of challenging assignments and projects, set higher standards and provide positive feedback to out-group members (e.g. Hackman & Johnson 1996, cited in Lee 2001).

Leader-follower relationships are mutually constituted and co-produced (Collinson 2005a; 2005b; see also Bligh & Schyns 2007). Reciprocity is fundamental within the dyadic exchange relationship (Collinson 2005a; 2005b). In terms of reciprocity, two aspects have been distinguished in leader-member exchanges: firstly, attention to the subordinate by the leader, and secondly, assistance of the leader by the subordinate (van Dierendonck, Le Blanc & van Breukelen 2002). The quality of exchange is determined by mutual reciprocity and the level of regard displayed by both members of the dyad (Klieman, Quinn & Harris 2000). The terms investments and returns are used to explain exchanges between the partners of the dyad (Dansereau et al. 1984). One way in which subordinates can reciprocate in these relationships is by either enlarging or limiting their roles so that they either only follow the contract or extend their behaviours beyond normal role requirements (Bhal 2006).

In the literature, the consideration of the LMX construct has led to the presentation of many different types of sub-dimensions. The very first propositions made about dimensions on which exchange relationships could be based were competence, interpersonal skill and trust (Graen 1976), but at the same time, attention and sensitivity were presented as elements basic to LMX relationships (Cashman et al. 1976). Subsequently, many other sub-dimensions have been proposed but one approach to such dimensions that has been widely adopted is the four-dimensional approach based on Dienesch and Liden's (1986) three dimensions, with one dimension added by Liden and Maslyn (1998). These sub-dimensions are contribution, defined as "perception of the amount, direction, and quality of work-oriented activity each follower puts forth toward the mutual goals" (Dienesch & Liden 1986: 624); loyalty, defined as "extent to which the leader and follower publicly support each other" (Liden & Maslyn 1998: 45); affect, defined as "the mutual affection members of the dyad have for each other based on interpersonal attraction rather than on work or professional values" (Dienesch & Liden 1986: 625); and the dimension added later, professional respect, defined as "perception of the extent to which each follower of the dyad has built a reputation, within and/or outside the organisation, of excelling at his/her line of work" (Liden & Maslyn 1998: 64).

One might consider it a weakness that the definitions of two of these sub-dimensions, contribution and professional respect, ignore the reciprocal nature of LMX. Recently, Greguras and Ford (2006) addressed the reciprocity issue by suggesting a new scale developed to measure the supervisor's perspective of exchange relationships. In general, their findings supported the sub-dimensions presented above, both measured from the followers' or leaders' perspectives. Moreover, their results indicated that sub-dimensions affect the relationship in different

ways and thus meaningful information about the LMX relationship are lost if relationships are considered as unidimensional (Greguras & Ford 2006).

These dyadic, reciprocal relationships are seen as developmental processes where both parties of the dyad learn about each other over time (Bauer & Green 1996). There are different models related to the relationships' development. A developmental perspective was also considered by Graen (1976) in the very early phase of LMX theory. In general, the relationship development process begins when two individuals engage in an interaction or exchange sequence (Uhl-Bien, Graen & Scandura 2000; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn 2003). It is suggested (Schriesheim et al. 1999) that the first systematic and thorough discussion of many facets of the LMX construction, including the aspect of relationship development, presents a three-phase development model of LMX and includes role-taking, role-making and role-routinisation stages (Graen & Scandura 1987). Similar elements as this role-based model are also found in the leadership-making model (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1991; Uhl-Bien & Graen 1993), but it is more prescriptive in nature, emphasising the idea of generating more high-quality relationships within organisations.

According to an earlier model (Graen & Scandura 1987), role-taking is a sampling phase in which the leader evaluates the behaviour and motivation of a follower, and decides how much time and energy to invest in the follower in the future. In the leadership-making model the first phase of the development is called "stranger phase", and the relationship parties adopt very formal work roles, with their exchanges being contractual (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1991; Uhl-Bien & Graen 1993; see also Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995). The relationship development process continued with "role-making" (Graen & Scandura 1987) and an analogy was drawn (Bauer & Green 1996) with the "acquaintance" phase in the leadership-making model. The LMX relationship was then developed further through exchanges, with social exchanges achieving greater importance. The quality of relationships is developing, and finally, LMX relationships are said to reach their final stage, role-routinisation. LMX relationships are said to develop quickly and are also supposed to remain constant over time (Bauer & Green 1996; Dienesch & Liden 1986; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell 1993; Vatanen 2003).

The proposition concerning relationship stability or permanency of relationship quality is not very often challenged in the literature. Taking into account that LMX is grounded partly in role theory, which takes conflicts and the dynamic nature of roles into serious consideration (Katz & Kahn 1978), it is surprising that LMX scholars have almost ignored that perspective. Recently, Van Breukelen et al. (2006) raised the question of the effect that changing situations have on rela-

tionships between leader and follower. Absence of the conflict perspective to date is somewhat surprising given the likelihood of conflict in organisational interpersonal relationships. Indeed, it is argued that there is always a possibility for conflict in leader-follower relations (Collinson 2005b; Lührmann & Eberl 2007). Furthermore, conflict is a frequent occurrence in organisations, affecting a host of individual and organisational processes and out-comes (Barki & Hartwick 2004) and could be assumed to affect LMX relationships as well.

A study by Lee and Jablin (1995) focused on communication tactics and strategies used within LMX relationships and began with the premise of potential relationship instability in the maintenance phase. Their study suggests that there may be similarities across situations with respect to the overall strategies that leaders and followers use to maintain their relationships. How they enact those strategies depends on the situation and the quality of the LMX relationships. Research on changes occurring within established dyadic relationships between leader and follower is limited but has recently surfaced in the literature. Johnson and Huwe (2002) note that the quality of relationships between leaders and followers diminishes due to conflict and even minor conflicts can escalate to the point where a working relationship becomes unmanageable. Ilsev's (2003) study focused on the effects that leaders' unexpected behaviours had within LMX relationships. The study shows that the nature of the LMX relationship influences the attributions made about the behaviour of the manager. This also applies to situations where the manager's behaviour is more positive than expected by the follower. Followers who had high-quality relationships with their leader tended to perceive their leaders' behaviour more positively than followers with low-quality relationships. On the other hand, the developed quality of LMX relationships seems to affect and generate a development that is in line with the previously existing quality of the LMX relationship (Ilsev 2003). Again, however, any new situation that challenges the current way of thinking is argued to have an impact on the relationship between leaders and followers (Johnson & Huwe 2002).

Besides these findings presented in the earlier LMX literature about the nature of relationships, including quality, development and construction, aspects which affect relationships have gained much attention in research and are therefore reviewed next.

2.4.2 Antecedents of the quality of dyadic relationships

When the focus has been on background issues to explain why the LMX relationship quality is what it is, the aspects usually studied have been the characteristics of the individuals in the dyad. This is also referred to as entity perspective on rela-

tional leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006). Taking a developmental perspective on the process of LMX relationships, some aspects are found to differ between developmental stages. The quality of leader-follower dyads is argued to advance at first mainly on the rather stable characteristics of the dyad parties, such as their personal, physical and psychological composition (Philips & Bedeian 1994; Nanrgang et al. 2009). In a process of developing LMX relationships, leaders and followers tend to test one another based on certain role expectations. Depending on how mutually shared the expectations are and how well those expectations are met, the quality of the relationship will develop in a negative or positive manner (Bauer & Green 1996; Dienesch & Liden 1986). Later, individuals' expectations of exchange are part of the development process (Uhl-Bien 2000; 2006). Moreover, actual behaviour such as follower performance and leader delegation and testing of competence become more important in later phases of the process (Bauer & Green 1996; Dienesch & Liden 1986; Vatanen 2003; Nanrgang et al. 2008).

Recently, research (Schyns, Kroon & Moors 2008) has shown that followers' needs for leadership/dependence are relevant in the perception of LMX and implicit leadership theories – i.e. the image of leaders in general, or of ideal leaders, influences their perceptions of the relationship quality – but are less relevant than need for leadership. Other characteristics of followers studied in relation to LMX have been reviewed by Schyns et al. (2007), and, for instance, growth need strength, extraversion and locus of control have been on focus previously. It is also argued that subordinates with disabilities are usually placed in the supervisors' out-group, but when individuals with disabilities engage in upward-influencing behaviour (e.g. self-enhancement, where the subordinates brought their achievements to the notice of the supervisor), the relationship with the supervisor was significantly better than when they did not engage in such behaviour (Colella & Varma 2001).

Moreover, the similarity-attraction paradigm, which assumes that individuals who share certain characteristics accomplish positive responses in one another and hence form positive relationships (Byrne 1971), has played an important role when antecedents of the relationship quality are presented. Similarity or diversity between relationship parties is suggested to exist on two levels, i.e. surface-level similarity and deep-level similarity. Deep-level similarity, studied through values, attitudes and personality, is suggested to have a more important role within leader-member exchanges than similarity at the surface level (Hiller & Day 2003; Huang & Iun 2006). Surface-level similarity has been studied by focusing on demographic characteristics, such as gender, age and ethnic background (e.g. Deluga & Perry 1994; Somech 2003; Leponiemi 2008). In addition, perceived

similarity between leader and follower is found to be more important to the quality of leader-follower relationships than actual similarity (Murphy & Ensher 1999; Huang & Iun 2006).

When surface-level similarity has been studied, it has been found that supervisors tend to include demographically similar subordinates in their in-groups at significantly higher rates than other subordinates (e.g. Deluga & Perry 1994; Tsui et al. 1992). For instance, some studies show that subordinates feel more empowered when they have the same gender as their supervisor (Lee et al. 1993). It has also been shown that male supervisors are more prone to forming ties with other male employees than with female employees (Ibarra 1992). Moreover, when participative leadership behaviours and LMX were studied (Somech 2003), demographic dissimilarities (age, tenure and education) of leader and follower affected the leaders' readiness to involve the follower in decision-making processes, especially in the early phase of their relationship. Interestingly, no difference between opposite-sex and same-sex pairs was found when the relationship of superior and subordinate was short, but when their relationship was longer lasting, the degree of participative leadership was less in the case of opposite-sex pairs than same-sex pairs. These findings were in line with previous research which showed that leaders' and followers' demographic characteristics are important determinants of the initial LMX relationship (Somech 2003); however, the phenomenon is complex and multifaceted.

Deep-level similarity, or dissimilarity, and its effect on the LMX relationships have been studied but not as often as surface-level antecedents (see Hiller & Day 2003). When values have been the focus, it has been argued that LMX quality is higher when leaders and members have shared values, either in general or related to work (Ashkanasy & O'Connor 1997).

When similarity in terms of personality has been studied, results have been mixed (Huang & Iun 2006). Similarity attraction is supported by some studies (e.g. Deluga 1998; Bauer & Green 1996) but some findings have not supported that view (Allinson et al. 2001). For instance, studies of the cognitive styles of managers and their subordinates suggest that intuitive leaders are more liked and respected by analytic members than analytic leaders are by intuitive members. Results also indicate that the degree of difference between leader's and member's cognitive styles may influence the nature of the relationship (Allinson et al. 2001). On the other hand, there is evidence that issues which influence the development process are different for leaders and members. Thus, leaders are said to look for members who are assertive and actively seek opportunities to interact

with the leader whereas, in contrast, members appreciate leaders who are trusting and cooperative (Nanrgang et al. 2008).

Besides the individual antecedents of the quality of LMX relationship, contextual and/or organisational aspects have also been found to be related to relationships between leader and follower. It is argued that LMX theory often ignores or understates the importance of the context in which this relationship occurs (Yukl 2004). The need for organisational aspects in LMX studies is acknowledged and it is suggested that more attention should be focused on contextual variables (Dienesch & Liden 1986; Somech 2003; Van Breukelen et al. 2006). So far, for example, country or national culture (Vatanen 2003; Schyns et al. 2005) climate, leader power and work group cohesiveness (Aryee & Chen 2006; Cogliser & Schriesheim 2000; Hoffman et al. 2003; Tse, Dasborough & Ashkanasy 2008), evaluation of other LMX relationships within work groups (Hogg et al. 2005; Martin et al. 2005; Leponiemi 2008; Hooper & Martin 2008; Tse et al. 2008) are found to be related to the LMX.

To conclude, different issues affect the development and quality of LMX relationships. Moreover, in addition to research focusing on the reasons why relationship quality develops in a certain manner, interest has also been on the consequences of different LMX relationship qualities. Research focusing on these outcomes is therefore reviewed next.

2.4.3 *Outcomes of LMX*

Qualitative differences in relationships between leaders and each of their followers are found to lead to different kinds of outcomes. Firstly, LMX quality is seen to be related to followers' attitudes and perceptions, and secondly, the connections between the quality of LMX relationships and actual behaviours by followers or supervisors have also been studied to some extent (see Vatanen 2003).

There are certain behaviours of supervisors that have been found to be a consequence of LMX quality. These are related, for example, to promotions, bonuses and salary increases (see Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995) and to performance ratings (Varma & Stroh 2001). Followers who are partners in a high-quality relationship are found to receive more inside information and to have greater influence in decision-making (Colella & Varma 2001; see Varma et al. 2001). These outcomes are important especially from the followers' points of view. Being a partner in a low-quality or out-group, the relationship with an immediate leader may make employees' whole working life experience awful, or at least, unpleasant.

When the focus has been on followers' attitudes and perceptions as outcomes of LMX quality, these subjective experiences are often related to different forms of satisfaction or attitudes towards organisation and organisational mobility. For example, satisfaction with leader, pay, communication and the job overall (Erdogan & Enders 2007) have been presented as outcomes of a high-quality leader-follower relationship (see Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995; Vatanen 2003; van Breukelen et al. 2006). Recently, it is shown that high-quality LMX relationships are especially important for employees working in a virtual mode (Golden & Veiga 2008). Research into followers' attitudes regarding their own organisational mobility in connection with LMX has found that commitment to organisation (Basu & Green 1997; Liden et al. 2000; Lee 2005; Golden & Veiga 2008), and turnover intentions (Schyns et al. 2007) are related to LMX. Findings concerning turnover intentions are twofold: On the one hand, followers having high-level LMX relationships are found to be unwilling to leave their organisations, and on the other hand, there is some evidence that more employment possibilities are available to them through increased networks and competence provided by their good LMX relationships (Harris et al. 2005; Schyns et al. 2007) and for that reason they more easily find employment elsewhere. The intention to leave one's job has been presented as curvilinear, that is to say, followers with very high or very low LMX relationships have more intentions to leave than others (Harris et al. 2005).

According to research into behaviours, LMX is related to citizenship behaviour (Deluga 1994; Ilies et al. 2007), innovative and creative behaviours (Basu & Green 1997, Tierney et al. 1999) and performance (Liden et al. 2006), all of which can be linked to organisational efficacy. In addition, one critical issue for organisations is the mobility of their employees (Allen et al. 2007). There is evidence that staff turnover, beside the intentions mentioned above, is related to the quality of LMX (Graen et al. 1982; Ferris 1985) and this has also recently been argued to be curvilinear (Morrow et al. 2005; Bauer et al. 2006).

Following these reviews on pregnancy, leadership and LMX, some different perspectives on how LMX can contribute to the research on the maternity leave process in women's working life are presented.

2.5 LMX perspective on pregnancy and the maternity leave process at work

There are many remarkable connections between the research into dyadic leader-follower relationships and research into pregnancy and the maternity leave process. The first article of this dissertation provides a discussion about how combin-

ing these two research fields can contribute to research into both pregnancy and leadership or LMX. Therefore, some of the points made in article 1 are highlighted here, but other points are also made and discussed.

Although a pregnancy lasts only a limited period of time, this period in women's lives appears to be very challenging for women in their working lives, but it can also be challenging for organisations (Gross & Pattison 2007). Pregnancy causes longer-term effects such as sick leave related to pregnancy, maternity leave and return to work as a new parent with new responsibilities. For a working woman, her working life might become harder once she becomes pregnant, both by her changing body limiting her work performance and by the many problems that have been found to be caused by others once she announces her pregnancy at work (Buzzanell & Liu 2007; Gross & Pattison 2007). Unfortunately, the harshness of working life becomes all too clear for too many working women through pregnancy-related discrimination (Adams et al. 2005; Davis et al. 2005; McDonald et al. 2008). Even though some studies have shown that problems are not always to be expected when a woman becomes pregnant, a review of the literature does not shed much light on this.

Studies of pregnancy and the maternity leave process in women's working life have shown that the problems females usually experience at work during their pregnancy are related to individual relationships, such as with their immediate supervisor (Major 2004; Davis et al. 2005). However, few studies of pregnancy in working life view it from a leadership perspective. As the review showed, leadership research works with several theories which somehow view leadership as co-constructed between the relationship parties. LMX is a theory well known for taking an especially relational and processual view of the leadership. Many different kinds of perspectives, such as the nature, antecedents and outcomes of the relationships, have been studied as part of LMX relationships. The significance of interpersonal dyadic leader-follower relationships was recently also noticed in other studies about the maternity leave process (e.g. Buzzanell & Liu 2007). This supports the view that the LMX perspective offers a relevant approach to the study of pregnancy and the maternity leave process in work situations. Next the ways in which these two research areas are related, and how connecting them can contribute to both, are presented.

LMX relationships are argued to differ from each other in quality. It has also been seen that this stable quality will be reached rather quickly once the relationship is created (Liden & Maslyn 1998; for a review, see also Schriesheim, Castro & Coglisier 1999). On the other hand, pregnancy-related studies have shown that performance reviews carried out by managers have been more negative when the

woman reviewed is pregnant, and that supervisors might be hesitant to challenge a pregnant follower. Furthermore, significant changes in superiors' attitudes and behaviour towards their pregnant followers have been noted (Bistline 1985; see also Halpert et al. 1993). Still, it is important to note that not all pregnant women suffer from inappropriate treatment and changes occurring in their working lives can also be positive in nature (Brown et al. 2002; Major 2004; Adams et al. 2005).

However, few LMX studies question the argument that relationships are stable (Lee & Jablin 1995; Fairhurst 2007). Such an assumption neglects another basic argument put forward in role theory, the foundational theory underlying LMX theory, regarding the possible effect of conflicts and the changing nature of the relationship (Biddle 1986). This appears to be a relevant field for further investigations. At the same time, the literature about pregnancy and maternity leave has shown that changes are possible in supervisors' behaviour and attitudes due to pregnancy, and that pregnancy is also defined as conflictual in organisations (Buzzanell & Liu 2007; Liu & Buzzanell 2004). Therefore, pregnancy in working life may be a situation when changes in the LMX relationship may take place. Thus, research focusing on this situation could contribute to existing LMX theory where the quality of relationships is supposed to be stable (Bauer & Green 1996; Dienesch & Liden 1986; Vatanen 2003) and increase our understanding of what kind of changes in LMX take place. An LMX perspective also provides an interesting standpoint from which to study why problems arise in certain leader-follower dyads during a follower's pregnancy and not in other dyads, and how followers may react to these different situations. Both positive and negative experiences need further research. The sub-dimensions of LMX, namely contribution, loyalty, affect and professional respect (Dienesch & Liden 1986; Liden & Maslyn 1998) widen the theoretical context in which changes or effects that emerge in leader-follower dyads when a follower becomes pregnant are explained.

Since in LMX theory both leader and follower are involved in the dyadic relationships they create (Davis & Gardner 2004), this reciprocal nature of these relationships needs to be addressed also in the context of pregnancy. Even though much of the attention has been given to other people's (e.g. supervisors') behaviour, it is essential to note that pregnancy changes a woman's body and thus may also affect her health and restrict the type of assignment that she is able to perform (Gatrell 2004; 2007; Longhurst 2000; Warren & Brewis 2004). Sometimes a pregnancy may also cause a temporary disability to perform work (Gregory 2001). It has also been suggested that pregnant women are viewed as overly emotional, often irrational and less committed to their job (Halpert et al. 1993) even though such biased assumptions have not been supported by previous research (Lyness et al.

1999). Therefore, not only studying the change within relationships is crucial, but also the way in which both dyad parties contribute to the development of their relationship during the follower's pregnancy.

The research into antecedents of LMX quality has shown that different background issues are important in different phases of a relationship's development. At first, rather stable characteristics of individuals are argued to play an important role and have thus largely led to the adoption of the similarity-attraction paradigm, which explains why supervisors tend to include demographically similar subordinates in their in-groups at significantly higher rates than other subordinates (e.g. Deluga & Perry 1994). Gender, age, ethnic background and other diverse factors have been the focus of research into the antecedents of LMX relationships. The phenomenon of similarity-attraction may also be connected to the leader's own family status as superiors with children may behave differently towards pregnant employees than those without children. Moreover, not only these individual characteristics, but also work-related experiences, such as performance, are found to be important antecedents to the quality of LMX.

Closely related to this discussion, attribution theory (Weiner 1986; 1995) must be mentioned as it is based on the argument that people tend to make causal explanations of their own and other peoples' behaviour. The inclination to make causal explanations originates from the success or failure in given situations. Different attributions are found to be related to, for example, motivation, empowerment and individuals' future behaviour. Therefore, background issues and attributions made by individuals are worth further study to increase our understanding of why something happens in an LMX relationship during pregnancy and the maternity leave process.

A third area on which LMX theory has also focused is outcomes related to the quality of leader-follower relationships. The quality of LMX relationships is shown to be directly related to outcomes, namely, low-quality relationships to negative outcomes and high-quality relationships to positive outcomes. The quality of leader-follower relationships is positively related to many important work outcomes, such as positive job attitudes, job satisfaction, frequency of promotions, etc. (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995 Colella & Varma 2001). It can be assumed that if the LMX relationship quality is high, the experiences during pregnancy will be positive, yet the literature on pregnancy and the maternity leave process has discussed mostly negative outcomes of this specific working life situation, including discrimination. Therefore, research into the experiences of pregnant females in their working life that explores how the quality of LMX is related to different outcomes is needed.

In the LMX research tradition, LMX relationships are typically classified using quantitative measurement scales. Thus, the quality of the relationships is defined as being either high or low in quality, sometimes including the idea of the relationship as a construction of different sub-dimensions. Another ontological standpoint for studying relationships can provide a different picture of LMX (Fairhurst 2007). Furthermore, antecedents as well as outcomes related to LMX quality might appear differently once studied using different kinds of methodologies. On the other hand, the research tradition employed in the study of pregnancy and the maternity leave process has more often been one of social constructionism and qualitative methodologies than in LMX studies. Combining these different research traditions and research fields would make an interesting contribution to each field. Therefore, the next chapter discusses these methodological aspects of the study.

3 METHODOLOGY: DISCURSIVE AND NARRATIVE APPROACHES

3.1 Philosophical standpoints of the study

In this study, the world and reality are understood to not just be “out there”, ready for investigations, but as construed and created through social interaction and by a whole range of different social arrangements and practices which change over time and with context (Burr 1995). “Knowing” is understood to be relational and sustained in social processes, being dependent on language use (Burr 1995; Dachler & Hosking 1995). Therefore, this study draws ontologically and epistemologically on the social constructionism paradigm (Berger & Luckman 1967; Burr 1995; Hosking 1999; Dachler & Hosking 1995; see also Koivunen 2003; Sauer 2005; Kovalainen & Eriksson 2008) and methodologically adopts a discursive approach in articles two and three, and a narrative approach in the fourth article.

Various strands of social constructionism are interpretivism, pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934; see, e.g., Burr 1995), but Berger and Luckman’s (1967) book “The Social Construction of Reality” brought these ideas to the field of sociology and have since been developed and discussed within several disciplines and differently oriented groups, such as social psychology (Gergen 1973; Shotter 1993), post-structuralist sociology (Foucault 1972) and feminist sociology (Friedman 2006; Hirschmann 2003). Even though central to these different trends is the view that reality is determined in a process of interaction with others, there is some variation in how much emphasis is given to individualist or to structuralist views. This variation ranges from one end of a continuum where society is seen as consisting only of individuals and their social relations, to another end where “it is no man himself who thinks” (Foucault 1972) and the individual is only a part of the discursive play of power. Furthermore, even though the social constructionist analysis is not one of individual psychology, individuals’ internal states are considered to be involved in the production of reality (Bolton 2005).

The social constructionist view is also discussed and adopted in organisational studies, being part of a linguistic turn in organisational research and discursive leadership (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000a; Fairhurst 2007). Language use, which is central in social constructionism, is active, processual and outcome oriented in any social context, and thus also in organisations (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000a). Social constructionism adopts a view of language that does not simply take it as

holding up a mirror to reality, but gives us alternative way of knowing, talking about and also justifying leadership (Fairhurst 2007). Discursivism and discourse analysis are proposed as fruitful approaches to language-conscious organisational studies (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000a: 143; Fairhurst 2007). Also, narratives and narrative knowing are connected to the idea that the world is socially constructed by means of language (Polkinghorne 1988; Hytti 2003; Kovalainen & Eriksson 2008). When I started my PhD studies, I firstly aimed to follow the quantitative research tradition and I collected quantitative data through which I tested two Finnish translations of LMX measures (LMX7 & LMX-MDM). I actually found the most interesting findings within that dataset from participants' answers to the one open question that was placed at the end of the questionnaire. When I found my final research topic and reviewed the literature concerning both the maternity leave process and leadership, especially LMX, I ended up conducting qualitative research. Methodological choices I have made, to use the discursive and narrative approaches, were based on the review of previous literature, but also very much on the knowledge of other researchers of our group. Therefore, in this study, two different, but closely linked methodological approaches are adopted and these are discussed in more detail in the next two sections. Before that, however, I will discuss some feminist research that can not be ignored in the positioning of this study.

Even though this research is not originally or meaningfully placed in the field of feminist research and feminist theory has not been the starting point for this dissertation, this study can also be positioned as a piece of feminist research as one of the reviewers' of the second article stated. This study about working women is conducted by a female researcher (who has four children herself). It focuses on a gender-related issue and has an interest in making visible systematic relations that can be forms of domination and subordination in organisations (Meehan 2004; see Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). "Giving voice" to women and their special experiences is argued to be the basis for feminist research (Fonow & Cook 1991; Reinharz 1992; Riessman 1993). Epistemologically, feminist research is rooted in social constructionism and discourse and narrative analysis are often the methodological choices of feminist researchers (e.g. Metcalfe & Afanassieva 2005b). Moreover, feminist social constructionism suggests that whatever oppresses women is not inevitable or unchanging and can be made better by human beings acting differently (Friedman 2006). I do not feel comfortable with the term "giving voice", but rather would say that this study reproduces and represents a working woman's view of a specific, largely ignored situation, and for this reason, this study can be understood as being part of a feminist research field.

I have to say that sometimes it would have been much easier if I had followed more traditional avenues in the organizational research field when I made the decision about my research arena for the PhD. The path which led me to this topic started when I decided to write a paper for an EIASM workshop about ‘female managers, entrepreneurs and the social capital of the firm’ in 2004. I had a quantitative dataset, which I mentioned earlier. Thus, I decided to explore whether there was any difference between female and male supervisors’ LMX relationships, and I actually didn’t find any statistically significant differences between genders. When writing that paper, I read a lot a literature about gender and leadership. One issue that bothered me was that even though many authors presented differences between genders, only a few related maternity and motherhood to that discussion – something that seemed to be very salient and worth focusing on in more depth. Later, I have found more relevant literature concerning motherhood in the context of leadership, but in that early phase of my PhD studies, I found a noticeable gap in the leadership research which awoke my interest and which I found to be meaningful. After discussing my ideas for research with my supervisor and presenting a ‘tentative research agenda’ in our research group meeting, I followed the feedback I received and focused on the topic of this dissertation.

I stated earlier that there would have been easier topics to focus on in this PhD and by that I mean that the relevance and meaningfulness of this study have sometimes been hard to explain to people, both in academia and in everyday life. I suppose it is the same situation for most researches who are willing to raise questions about gender or other diversity-related issues in organisations. Fortunately, I have mostly received support for my ideas or received constructive feedback about my work. In spite of it all, and referring to my positioning of this study as being feminist, naturally, I hope that by highlighting some of the oppressive aspects of the phenomena studied, this study will contribute to change and to making working life less oppressive for women (and at the same time for men as well), for example, by making family leave, sick leave and other personal life issues that are part of an individual’s life when a member of the labour force.

Moreover, taking the approach that pregnant woman are followers may include a risk of reproducing culturally prevailing stereotypes (cf. Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 249; Metcalfe & Linstead 2003), e.g. the view that women of childbearing age belong in a subordinate position in organisations. Despite these misgivings, this perspective was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, as the review of pregnancy issues in working life generally and of women employed by organisations specifically has shown, the problems that pregnant women face are mostly related to their immediate supervisors. Therefore, the relationship between women and their supervisors is considered to be critical and worthy of studying in greater depth.

Secondly, it was easier to recruit participants for the study, specifically as potential interviewees, when women having supervisor position themselves was not required. However, four participants occupied a position as supervisor themselves, but all of them also had a supervisor. However, these participants discussed the issues mainly from the perspective of a follower and spoke about their experiences as employees; they talked about themselves as leader only when asked.

3.1.1 Discourse analytical approach

There are many different approaches to the study of a given issue found within discourse analysis (e.g. Alvesson & Kärreman 2000b; Grant & Iedema 2005). Even when applied to organisation and management studies, discourse analysis is highly varied in nature and orientation (Grant et al. 2004; Grant & Iedema 2005). In general, a discursive approach is suggested to be suitable for addressing questions about social practices in several disciplines (Wood & Kroger 2000: 20). In particular, research emerging from organisation and management theory constitutes the avenue of organisational discourse studies (ODS) and is suggested to be distinct from more linguistically-oriented, organisational discourse analysis (Grant & Iedema 2005). In leadership research, the discursive approach has generally been used and shown to increase our understanding of leadership (e.g. Leponiemi 2008; Koivunen 2003; 2007; Ford 2006; Lämsä & Tiensuu 2002).

Leader-follower relationships are complex and multifaceted, and can be defined as interpersonal social practices within a leadership phenomenon (cf. Morrell & Hartley 2006). This view of leadership and leader-follower relationships also allows investigation into the ways leadership is socially construed, and in turn, opens up new avenues for methodological alternatives, such as the use of discourse or narrative analysis (cf. Fairhurst 2007; Morrell & Hartley 2006: 493; Putnam & Fairhurst 2001). There are a few studies which approach leader-follower relationships from a discursive perspective. The traditional quantitative approach has been to divide different groups based on participants' relationship quality first, and then to conduct discourse analysis (Fairhurst Chandler 1989; Fairhurst 1993). Recently, leader-follower relationships have been approached discursively from more general standpoints (e.g. Leponiemi 2008).

In this study, discourse is viewed as a study of talked and written text, produced in a specific social context and process with limited general content (Alvesson & Karreman 2000b). Furthermore, the approach adopted is close to "meso-discourse", defined as being relatively sensitive to language use in context, but possessing the aim of finding broader patterns besides the textual details. Gener-

alisation to similar local contexts is possible, and connections with more general patterns also exist (Alvesson & Karreman 2000b: 1133-1134). The two-fold distinction between discourses with small “d” and big “D” has also been presented. Thus, small “d” discourses are taken to be analytically distinct from other levels of social reality, whereas big “D” discourses are macro-level discourses, which emerge from a historical perspective or relate to the level of society, the latter approach having been developed mainly by Foucault (1972; 1980; see Alvesson & Karreman 2000b).

Secondly, in this study discourse is seen to drive subjectivity and the use of language is thus understood to be not totally devoid of meaning (Alvesson & Karreman 2000b). In producing discourses people constitute their sense of themselves through language and at the same time express their related emotions. This approach to discourses is also connected to meaning-making, where individual ideas and emotions comprise part of the discursive phenomenon (Clegg 1989; Alvesson & Karreman 2000b; Koivunen 2003; Sauer 2005). Furthermore, subject positioning is one form of a discursive approach adopted within this study (article three). Subject positioning is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations. They are the identities, or roles, made relevant by specific ways of talking. Interactive positioning occurs when what one person says positions another person, while in reflexive positioning one positions oneself. Positioning is not necessarily intentional. Because such ways of talking can change both within and between conversations, multiple, contradictory subject positions are available to the participants (Davies & Harré 1990; Edley 2001).

Organisational discourse studies are also argued to have a wider multidimensional nature (Grant & Iedema 2005). By referring to those dimensions, this study can be classified as empirical, i.e. drawing upon transcript data to study the unstable nature of organisations, and as close to monomodal, i.e. focusing on discourses produced within language, not taking into account other kinds of meaning-making during interviews (such as gesticulation or the facial expressions of participants). Furthermore, positioning this study as a discourse of pattern or change is not unambiguous. Whereas studies that define discourse as patterned conduct search for meanings and discourses characterising the formal organisation, the change approach encourages and enables new ways of seeing things in organisations. This study lies somewhere in the middle between these two approaches. On the one hand, the discourses presented in this study emerge from the talk about dyadic relationships and represent dominant lines of expression produced within participants’ talk. On the other hand, there is also an emphasis on showing, through discourses, how both parties in LMX relationships are able to explore new or alternative ways of managing the pregnancy situation in working life.

Organisational discourse studies are suggested to distinguish between cognition and practice views of discourses (Grant & Iedema 2005; partly cf. Alvesson et al. 2000 below). This study adopts a cognitivist orientation. Cognition is seen to dictate the shape of discourse and meaning. In particular, emotions are seen as derivative of social scripts and signs, where discourses of change are manifestations of those. Lastly, this study can be said to adopt a pragmatic approach to analysis. The concern here is to use discourse as a means of enhancing performance and improving the effectiveness of management (Grant & Iedema 2005: 55).

Evaluating discursive research

Reliability and validity in the traditional sense are not directly applicable to discourse analysis, but they still need to be addressed (Potter 1996). Four factors have been suggested when evaluating the reliability and validity of results derived via discourse analysis. These four factors are: deviant case analysis, participants' understanding, coherence, and readers' evaluation (Potter 1996; Stevenson 2004). These four factors have subsequently been taken into consideration in this study. Firstly, during the analysis process deviant examples of the dataset are used to develop and/or further justify different discourses. Secondly, in common with other qualitative work, discourse analysis involves checking the analyst's interpretations with the participants. In this study, the transcriptions of the first round of interviews were sent to participants, asking them to comment on and complement the text if necessary. The transcriptions of the second round of interviews were not sent back to the participants because most did not see that this was necessary when they were asked. Coherence is addressed through the opportunity to compare this study to previous ones. In order to allow the reader to evaluate the results of this study, both the researcher's readings and extracts from interview texts are presented.

In addition to these evaluation criteria for discourse analysis, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) present (referring to Taylor 2001) that especially quality of transcription and usefulness are important when evaluating discursive studies. Quality of transcription is suggested to be especially important when interviews are used as a source of knowledge. There are several different levels of exactness when transcribing interviews. In this study, transcriptions were verbatim but, for instance, the length of silent moments or nuances of voices were not indicated. It would have been much more salient if there would have been other researchers committed to this project. I was the one who conducted all of the interviews and also data analyses. During the analysis processes I went back to the original interview situations several times by listening to the audio files and reminded myself

of the situation and the nuances which were not transcribed in the texts. The usefulness of the study, that is how the new knowledge can be utilized in society, can be gained either by influencing policy makers and/or by influencing practitioners (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 241). Influencing policy makers through the findings of this study is possible, and some findings of this study have already been presented to the Office of Ombudsman for Equality. Dissemination to practitioners has been attempted by writing to the business press and presenting the findings in seminars and training sessions.

All in all, the relationship between leader and follower offers an interesting starting point from which to consider organisational discourses produced by women in a specific situation in working life – being pregnant. Relationships here are considered as dynamic between two organisation members – leader and follower – that may vary from one situation to another. This perspective is adopted instead of applying the stable definition of single relationship quality (high-quality or low-quality LMX relationship). This was done for several reasons. The richness and variety of the data may have been lost if the traditional quantitative categorisation of quality had been the starting point in the analytical process. Indeed, the LMX relationships appeared complex and disconnected from the traditional view of these relationships, presenting a more multifaceted picture of leader-follower relationships.

3.1.2 *Narrative approach*

After collecting the second round of interviews I did not find a meaningful way of how to interpret and introduce my findings using discourse analysis. Rather close to the ideas of discourse analysis, I found narrative analysis very interesting. Narratives and discourses are compared to each other, with narratives defined as “discourses with a clear sequential order that connects events in meaningful ways for definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and / or people’s experiences of it” (Hinchman & Hinchman 1997, cited in Kovalainen & Eriksson 2008). Therefore, the fourth article adopts a narrative analysis of the interview data. Here, the distinction between narrative analysis and analysis of narratives is worth mentioning (Polkinghorne 1995). When conducting narrative analysis, the researcher is organising and interpreting empirical data (e.g. interviews) and constructs narratives as an outcome whereas in an analysis of narratives the researcher is analysing the types, plots or structures of collected narratives (e.g. written autobiographical texts). In this study, narrative analysis is adopted, mainly following the above definition. Moreover, one widely adopted view of narratives, which states that narratives are talk organised around consequential events and in

this sense are always answering the question “and then what happened” (Riessman 1993; 2002), is relevant in this study. Furthermore, narratives are seen as a form of meaning-making structure that organise the significance of events and human actions into a whole (Polkinghorne 1988; Bruner 1990; Riessman 1993).

Within narrative analysis the focus is on what is being spoken, but also on the way of speaking (Hytti 2005). Speaking is never a neutral process. There is always a certain audience, or a reader, to whom the stories are told. They are in a certain way “co-authors” of the story by virtue of who they are, and how they are interacting during the narration process. By telling the story, the narrator is also representing how he or she wants to be seen by others, which is usually as a good person (Riessman 1993; Hytti 2003). Narratives are also found useful in sense-making of challenging transitions in individuals’ life (Riessman 1993) and the authentic experiences of individual people become better recognised by the meaning-making of personal narratives (Kohonen 2007). Interest in using narratives to study leadership in organisations has emerged (Shamir & Eilam 2005; Sparrowe 2005; also see Fairhurst 2007) and it is argued to be suitable approach to study leader-follower relationships as well (Fairhurst & Hamlet 2003; Fairhurst 2007; Sauer & Ropo 2006).

Evaluating narrative research

Evaluating the results of research by the usual criteria of reliability, validity and generalisability is not possible in a traditional sense in narrative research (see, e.g. Riessman 1993; Czarniawska 2004) question of validity in narrative research concerns how we understand the “truth”. Stories are seen to be fundamental to knowing, not just repositories of knowledge and information (Johansson 2004; Hytti 2005). It is then a question of narrative truth and trustworthiness (Riessman 2002) and the narrator’s perspective, and the focus is on her interpretation of the events happening in her life (see Kohonen 2004; 2007). In this study, this is kept in mind when participants’ stories are analysed. Participants narrate their subjective experiences to the female researcher (who has children of her own, and was pregnant during the first round of interviews), and they are probably inclined to present themselves as good employees, but also as good mothers. In addition to the subjective perspective adopted by the interviewees in producing their stories, the researcher is a co-producer of their stories, and of course she is the one who builds the narratives from these stories.

Other ways presented for approaching validity are persuasiveness, correspondence, pragmatic use and coherence (Riessman, 2002, see also Kohonen, 2007).

In this study, these four principles were taken into consideration. In terms of persuasiveness, both the researcher's readings and extracts from interview texts are presented. Correspondence was addressed by sending the earlier versions of narratives back to the participants (except one, who was not willing to continue as a study participant) to read and, if needed, comment on the narratives. The pragmatic use of this study exists through making this research process as visible as possible to the reader, and thus provides a basis for further research. Coherence which highlights, for instance, the concern with representing experience in a way that keeps place and time connected to action, is here achieved by providing complete narratives with a plot, including beginning, middle, and end grounded in context, but also through the longitudinal setting in data gathering. That allowed participants to rethink and present two stories which were produced not only retrospectively, but also in situ concerning what was going on within their life, work and LMX relationship during their pregnancy and return back to work. This also gave the researcher an opportunity to understand more deeply the nature and the development of the LMX relationship over time, and the relationship that has to women's work life decision-making.

To conclude, even though previous studies of LMX relationships rely heavily on the quantitative research tradition, there are narrative roots to the study of LMX relationships (Fairhurst & Hamlett 2003, Fairhurst 2007: 120). Rediscovering the value of narratives in understanding LMX relationships provides an opportunity to gain a greater in-depth understanding of the relationship quality than a snapshot provided by a quantitative measurement scale (Fairhurst 2007). Story-telling enables individuals committed to LMX relationships to discursively reflect upon their experiences and make sense of the relationship in communication (Fairhurst 2007:122).

In this study, interviews were used as a channel for story-telling (Fairhurst 2007) and a source for talked (and written) texts (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000b); the data collection process is discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The research draws on transcribed semi-structured interviews with twenty working women from Finland.

The study participants were recruited via different channels: announcements on Internet discussion sites, an announcement published in a child- and family-oriented Finnish magazine, and also on the Internet sites of two family magazines.

Announcements about this study were also distributed in three community pregnancy-related health-care organisations, which all had pregnant women in that region as patients. Since pregnant working women are a very fragmented group of people, it is difficult to contact them in any other way when searching for volunteers to participate in research. Similar participant recruitment tactics were used by Major (2004), when studying how pregnancy affects women's work identity.

Thirty-eight potential participants contacted the researcher during a five-month period. At first, an interview was arranged with each woman who contacted the researcher and met the basic requirements, timing it to the third trimester of pregnancy. In a later phase, all women who had volunteered were contacted and informed if their participation was required. Some volunteers did not meet the requirements (e.g. some were self-employed and thus did not have a supervisor) and were thus excluded. During the interview period, some women withdrew their participation, and after several interviews had been conducted, participants were selected based on the literature on pregnancy and work as well as on the literature on LMX.

Identifying from the literature and pilot work the key demographic variables that are likely to have an impact on participants' views and to use those as selection criteria is argued to be useful (Green 2004). In this study, the basic requirements for participation were that the woman was pregnant in her last trimester, was working, and had a supervisor. There were two reasons for this participant selection procedure. First, the aim of gathering a wide range of discourses about pregnancy and LMX relationships led to this multi-channel recruitment process and the selection of a heterogeneous sample in terms of backgrounds and occupations. However, it is also suggested that even though mothers from different social backgrounds may experience motherhood differently, living in the same society in the same time period, understanding motherhood has also commonalities through common discourses (Elwin-Novak & Thomsson 2001: 407). Secondly, interviewing women when they were in their third trimesters, with the pregnancy surely announced and clearly visible, people at work had had a chance to react to it. Based on the literature on pregnancy and work as well as on the literature on LMX, the key criteria for participant selection were: participant age, health during the pregnancy, number of previous deliveries, education, length of time the participant had been working with her leader and the status of the employment contract, and quality of work (physically / mentally demanding).

The age of participants ranged from 24 to 40 years. The health situation during the pregnancy varied from "I have felt great" to being in need of hospital treatment. The number of previous deliveries varied from zero to five and the level of

education from vocational school to doctoral degree. The length of the leader-follower dyadic relationship varied from less than one year to five years, and participants were employed on both permanent and temporary contracts. Job descriptions varied from physically demanding factory work to challenging expert assignment.

Table 2. Study participants

Participant	Age	Number of children	LMX tenure	Type of job
Pn 1	32	0	< One year	Pharmacist
Pn 2	28	0	< One year	Social worker
Pn 3	33	1	Four years	Software trainer
Pn 4	37	1	< Two years	Marketing manager
Pn 5	40	5	Five years	Factory worker
Pn 6	24	0	Two years	Pharmacist
Pn 7	30	1	Three years	Researcher
Pn 8	38	3	Three years	Press Officer
Pn 9	27	0	Three Years	Product Manager
Pn 10	28	0	< One year	Personal assistant
Pn 11	31	0	Two years	Account manger
Pn 12	33	1	One year	Journalist
Pn 13	31	1	Two years	Consultant
Pn 14	38	0	Five years	Journalist
Pn 15	34	2	Two years	Project coordinator
Pn 16	34	0	Two years	Production coordinator
Pn 17	27	1	< four years	Salesperson
Pn 18	28	1	Three years	IT expert
Pn 19	38	2	< Two years	Head of training program
Pn 20	35	0	Four years	Pharmacist

I conducted all of the interviews myself. Since it is important that researchers position themselves in the research process (Aaltio 2006), it is worth mentioning that I was in a very similar life situation to my interviewees since I was visibly pregnant when I conducted the first round of interviews. Furthermore, I conducted the second round of interviews very soon after returning to work after my maternity leave. The language used was Finnish and therefore all quotations from the transcripts are translations. Women were interviewed for the first time when they were pregnant in their third trimester and for the second time about one and half years later. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or by phone, except for one interview in the second round which was conducted via e-mail because of

special circumstances. In addition, I informed those women whom I did not meet face-to face that I was pregnant when we discussed the study the first time. A total of 40 interviews were conducted. Participants were informed about the research topic beforehand and the interviewer answered all questions asked about the research. The interviews were loosely structured and uninterrupted narration was encouraged during the interviews. The interviews in the first round lasted between forty minutes and two and a half hours; the median time being about ninety minutes. The interviews in the second round lasted between thirteen and forty-five minutes.

The original idea of the data collection was to conduct a longitudinal study, to see how the development of leader-follower relationships is reproduced in participants' talk over time in the specific working life situation under study, i.e. the process of maternity leave. However, when I began the second round of interviews, I noticed that this would be problematic to study. Only six women had returned to the same situation (same organisation, same supervisor) that they had left when taking maternity leave. Eleven of the LMX relationships were broken, seven for external (organisational) and four for internal reasons (voluntary). Reasons are referred to as external if, for example, the leader had left the organisation due to retirement or movement to a new work place or another position in the organisation. Reasons are referred to as internal if, for example, the follower had moved to another organisation or had taken up a new position in the same organisation of her own will. Three women had not returned yet from their maternity leave and thus the status of the relationship was "open". I spent a lot of time with my data and ended up studying especially the transcripts of those interviews which revealed experiences of discrimination. I also wrote a paper about the development of LMX relationships but as I have adopted a different ontological and methodological standpoint in this study, I decided to exclude that article from my thesis. Table 3 represents the situation among participants when they were interviewed a second time.

Table 3. LMX status after maternity leave (interview round 2)

LMX relationship...	has broken		continues	status was not known yet
	<i>For external reasons</i>	<i>For internal reasons</i>		
	Seven relationships	Four relationships	Six relationships	Three relationships

All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. NVivo software was used as a helpful tool in the data analysis. Next, the data analysis processes are discussed.

3.2.1 *Analysis processes*

Analysis process of discourses

When I started to create the discourses from the texts, the first step in the analysis involved reading and rereading all of the transcripts in order to become familiar with the whole corpus. The first rounds of reading enabled me to identify the discursive resources that participants used when talking about their relationship with the leader during pregnancy.

When writing the first empirical study (article 2) of this thesis, the analysis process continued by focusing on talk considering change within LMX relationships in the context of pregnancy. Talk about emotions had an important role within the text and therefore expressions of related subjective emotional experiences about the direction of the development of the LMX relationships were part of the analysis. Discourses were identified by focusing on the similarities and differences in the ways participants talked about subjective emotions and change within the dyadic exchange relationship. The discourses presented in that article, namely “practical discourse”, “future orientation” and “individual attention”, do not necessarily relate to an overall change of LMX relationship quality, but are intended to show what are the critical areas which participants reproduced discursively concerning such change.

I can say that probably the most challenging part of the analysis process in the second empirical study (article three) was discover the perspectives through which I was able to present what I had found interesting in my data. After reading several earlier empirical studies as well as methodological writings, I found subject positioning useful and related it to discourses. Therefore, the second empirical study focuses firstly on the ways in which women position themselves when they talk about the nature of their relationship with their leader, and secondly, on the discourses through which women explain why they position themselves in a certain way.

In that stage of the research project, I was very familiar with the text corpus from the first round of interviews. Since I had already conducted the second round of interviews and found that women talked there also about their working life during their pregnancy, I also included these parts of the second round of interviews in

the data. The analysis process continued by coding all kinds of reasons women presented in their talk, using NVivo software. I found several themes, for example, talk about parenthood, gender and age, but I was not able to identify anything that could have been called discourses. After that stage of analysis I was stuck for a while, but discussions with other researchers and further reading of the methodological literature helped me to continue the analysis. I was able to take a novel approach to the analysis I had already conducted, and after re-reading my data and preliminary findings I ended up with three discourses: “similarity”, “expectations” and “rooting deeper”, which were used in a relation to “accepted” and “dismissed” subject positions. Indeed, my analysis continued also during the article review process since one reviewer asked to see how these discourses were related to each other and to the subject positions.

In the data collection section above, I described some challenges which I did not expect when I planned the structure of my thesis and also the solutions which lead me to the narrative analysis.

Analysis process of narratives

I tried to find a tight or simple way to represent how my interviewees were narrating their experiences about the maternity leave process. However, I found that the richness and uniqueness of these stories would have disappeared if I had forced them into some classifications or structured themes. Therefore, individual narratives are presented in the fourth article. Representation of participants’ experiences is a multilevel process (Riessman 1993), including at first their attending to experience and telling me about it, followed by my transcribing the interviews. Analysis included several rounds of reading, and decisions about what to include and what to exclude. The next phase of analysis, bearing in mind my research question, was to organise the stories one by one in order to represent the participants’ stories in an individual narrative form. I also selected quotes (that are here translated from Finnish to English) from their transcribed interview texts. Narratives were rewritten several times in order to make them readable and interesting. The fifth and final level of representation comes when the reader encounters these written narratives (Riessman 1993).

In the following chapter, the articles of this dissertation are summarised.

4 SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLES

In this chapter, the articles of this study are briefly summarised, with the findings discussed in greater depth in next chapter, Conclusions and Discussion. The first article generates the theoretical basis for the latter three empirical articles. The main arguments why pregnancy and the maternity leave process in organisations are worth studying in-depth and why especially the leadership perspective is relevant are presented in the summary of the first article. These theoretical starting points are similar in the empirical articles and are thus not repeated at the beginning of each of the three article summaries.

4.1 Pregnancy and Leader-Follower Dyadic Relationships: A research agenda

The purpose of the first article was to review the literature about pregnancy in working life and combined with a relevant approach to leadership, and based on these generate a research agenda. This interest was originally based on the fact that nowadays women are an increasingly important part of the labour force. Generally, in working life women have lower mobility (promotion, turnover, etc.) than men in organisations and temporary employment is more typical for (young) women than men. Family responsibilities are argued to be one reason for this. For women, especially in childbearing age, these are tremendously important issues with regard to their work and career. Over 80 per cent of working women are expected to become pregnant at some point during their working lives (Lyness, Thompson, Francesco & Judiech 1999). It can be argued that assumptions and attitudes towards women at work surface when they become pregnant.

When getting familiar with the literature, it appeared that despite the vast amount of research concerning women's role in working life, research on pregnant women in the workplace is inadequate (Halpert, Wilson & Hickman 1993; Gross & Pattison 2001). The lack of extant research in this area is surprising given that the number of pregnancies every year in workplaces is high and the phenomenon affects both the entire organisation and its members. Indeed, Caudhill (1994) refers to the pregnant employee as "a missing person in management research" (see also Lyness et al. 1999; Major 2004).

Existing research on pregnant women at work can be classified into three broad categories. First, some of the research is concerned with attitudes towards and evaluations of pregnant women at work. Second, some research focuses on pregnant employees and pregnant job applicants' own experiences of the treatment

they have faced or on identity changes at work. Third, discrimination against pregnant workers and questions about equality appear to be one of the main interests in current research. Research on pregnant working women has shown that the problems females usually experience at work during their pregnancy are related to individual relationships, for example, with their manager (Major 2004; Davis, Neathey, Regan & Willison 2005). However, the literature review showed that there have not been many studies which focused on leader-follower relationships in the context of pregnancy. The leader and follower dynamic is one of the basic element in organisations and an important factor in the leadership process is the dyadic relationship that leaders have with their individual followers (Vatanen 2003). The key approach concerning individual relationships between leaders and their followers is found in LMX theory (Dansereau, Graen & Haga 1975; Graen & Cashman 1975).

LMX theory focuses on the individual work relationships that a leader and every single follower create through reciprocal interactions within a work unit. These relationships are seen as developmental processes where both parties of the dyad (the leader and each member) learn about each other over time. LMX relationships are argued to develop quickly and are supposed to remain stable over time (Bauer & Green 1996; Dienesch & Liden 1986; Vatanen 2003). The status of these dyadic relationships is seen as lying on a continuum ranging from high-quality relationships to low-quality leader-follower dyads. LMX studies have mainly focused on the nature of leader-follower relationships, the antecedents of dyadic relationships and the outcomes that different kinds of leader-follower relationships cause. These different perspectives on LMX are useful in creating new knowledge and understanding about issues related to pregnancy and work.

Through the research agenda presented in this article the experiences of how the quality of a leader-follower relationship affects pregnant workers' experiences during their pregnancy and how their leader-follower dyadic relationship is constructed needs exploration. As the antecedents of dyadic leader-follower relationships, both parties' demographics and family status are worth studying in more detail. In addition, the timing of the pregnancy and the status of employment contracts and pregnant followers' health during the pregnancy might be relevant. One proposal for further study concerns the relationship between perceived organisational work-family supportiveness and LMX in the context of pregnancy. Outcomes and consequences such as job satisfaction, work stress and organisational commitment that pregnant employees experience in their working life and how the quality of LMX is related to those events need further investigation.

The quality of leader-member exchanges is usually measured from the followers' perspective and studies which considered both parties of the dyad have normally found significant differences in reports by leaders and followers of the LMX quality (Gerstner & Day 1997). Gerstner and Day (1997) also suggest that LMX is more reliably assessed from the followers' perspective. Vatanen (2003: 28) further suggests that leader and member exchange quality could be treated as separate constructs, conceptualised as perceptions that reside within the individual, independent from the perceptions of the dyadic partner. Varma et al. (2005) recommend in addition that future researchers should study subordinate the views of LMX in much more detail. Hence, the research on pregnancy and LMX could be executed from the perspective of pregnant followers using qualitative methodology. Longitudinal studies with follow-up interviews with women during their pregnancy and then after maternity leave could contribute interesting and useful information about this phenomenon.

4.2 Representations of change within dyadic relationships between leader and follower: Discourses of pregnant followers

The second article explores discursively how change was manifested within leader-follower relationships within a specific working life situation, in this case pregnancy, by pregnant working women. The importance of leadership and leader-follower relations emerged from the current literature on pregnancy and work. Even though this study does not investigate LMX in a traditional way by first dividing followers' in- and out-group status, the study was inspired by major guidelines presented within LMX in line with some other qualitative LMX studies. The development processes, reciprocity and multidimensionality of dyadic relationships were important in this study. The research drew on transcribed semi-structured interviews with twenty pregnant working women.

Three different discourses were identified in pregnant followers' interviews about the reciprocal exchange relationship with their immediate leader. These discourses were "practical discourse", "future orientation" and "individual attention". Discourses were represented through positive or negative emotions. The practical discourse represents change as a modification of daily routines and work performance due to pregnancy and was manifested through representations of sensitivity and disappointment as subjective emotional experiences about the direction of relationship development. The "future orientation" discourse is a representation of change in the dyadic relationship parties' forward-looking interests. This discourse became manifested through the subjective emotions of confidence

and ambivalence regarding the direction of relationship development. “Individual attention” was related to the personal level of the dyadic exchange parties. This discourse became manifest through emotions of gratification and distress. Each discourse and the emotions presented are important to understand as a noteworthy dimension that might be vulnerable in the leader-member exchange when the follower is pregnant.

The findings of this study clearly suggest that there are different discourses considering change within dyadic leader-member exchange relationships in the context of followers’ pregnancy. Overall, this study has broadened our knowledge of the phenomenon of pregnancy in the workplace. Previous studies which have focused on pregnancy in the work place have mostly reported this phenomenon in a negative light, typically showing negatively changing attitudes or behaviour towards pregnant women, and the biases found about their value and trustworthiness in the organisational context (e.g. Bistline 1985; Gueutal & Taylor 1991; Halpert et al. 1993). This study widens the scope, identifying the positive side of the discourses as well. In this study, negative experiences were also recounted. These findings were in line with previous studies where discrimination or dismissals due to pregnancy were often found to have been instigated by the women’s own supervisors or employers.

The findings also challenge the argument that the quality of LMX relationship is stable. This conclusion about the lack of stability could open up a new avenue for future research in the field of LMX. Longitudinal settings could also be valuable in this regard as well as studies that seek to answer questions about antecedents and outcomes related to leader-follower dyadic relationships during pregnancy. The practical implication that follows from this study is the need to apply a multifaceted understanding of different issues that pregnancy creates in dyadic leader-follower relationships. For example, an implication that can be drawn from previous research is that the emotional experiences during interaction between leader and follower seem to mean more to the follower than to the leader (Glaso & Einarsen 2006). The findings of the current study show that pregnant followers represent their relationship with their leader to be dynamic and susceptible to change. Therefore, by increasing the leaders’ understanding and knowledge about pregnancy-related experiences and emotions through training and development, leaders might be able to perform better with their followers in different situations. General discussion and the development of organisational practices and policies concerning employees’ personal life at work is also needed. When it comes to working women, this research would benefit them not only if organisations developed policies and practices but also if women became aware of their own role in the relationship and the effects that pregnancy might have on the relationship

with their leader. It is also important for women to notice that changes happening as a result of pregnancy are not always negative but that positive dynamics are possible as well. Because support has been found for the relationship between LMX and overall job satisfaction, satisfaction with a leader, satisfaction with pay, co-worker satisfaction and perceptions of organisational climate (Gerstner & Day 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995), organisations could also benefit if women stayed motivated and satisfied during their pregnancies and were willing to return to the same place of work after maternity leave.

4.3 Working women positioning themselves in the leader-follower relationship as a result of pregnancy

Pregnancy is one concrete situation where work and family meet face to face. Different factors are related to conflicts between pregnancy and work, particularly in the situation when a woman who is in work become pregnant. The role of the supervisor is salient in this context and therefore this paper considers the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers during pregnancy. Furthermore, a variety of explanations as to why pregnant women face particular treatment have been suggested, but none of these studies adopt the perspective revealed in women's own discursive reproductions of why something is happening in the leader-follower relationship during their pregnancy.

In light of the above, the third article considered the dyadic relationships between leaders and members as a discursive phenomenon (see, e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman 2000; Grant & Iedema 2005). The aim of this study is to explore how followers position themselves within the leader-follower relationship during their pregnancy and also to analyse which discourses women use to describe why they positioned themselves in that way.

Forty interviews were carried out with twenty working women, focusing on their representations about their periods of pregnancy both during and after the experience. Here, the interest was on working women positioning themselves in the leader-follower relationship as a result of pregnancy. Furthermore, discourses that are produced by followers about their pregnancy periods and relationships with their leaders during that time were in focus. The study identified two different forms of subject positioning when participants talked about the quality of their leader-follower relationship during their pregnancies. Either they described themselves as "accepted" and then they represented the relationship as having been the same or developed in a positive way due to pregnancy. The other positioning was

one of being “dismissed”, and related to negative representations of the leader-follower relationship due to pregnancy.

In terms of the subject positions, this paper identifies three discourses from the participants’ talk. The first of these was “similarity”, which was dominant within the “accepted” positioning and related to a perceived similarity with the leader. Here, this discourse relates strongly to demographic issues and has a dominant role in participants’ talk. Talk of similarity in terms of parenthood and gender is probably the easiest, or most axiomatic, way of describing why participants felt they had been either “dismissed” or “accepted”.

The “expectations” discourse is evident when women use issues relating to assumptions made about their pregnancy to explain their subject positions. Through this discourse women talk about having been classified as possible maternity leave takers or not. It was a dominant discourse in relation to “dismissed” positioning, but did not have a very strong role within the “accepted” positioning. Moreover, the “expectations” discourse can also be seen as a way of constructing a justification of and the right to a family and children, even though others (e.g. a leader) did not expect them at the time. At the same time, part of this discourse was about understanding the role of the leader in being responsible for resource utilisation and organisation. From this perspective, participants defined their own pregnancy and forthcoming leave as extra work for their leader.

The third discourse was entitled “rooting deeper”. It related to participants’ existing emotional understanding of themselves and their leaders. This discourse was very subjective and the talk often comprised representations of participants’ personal feelings more than objective descriptions of a person and values. Descriptions of leaders’ personal traits, such as friendliness, warmth, etc. were part of this “rooting deeper” discourse. The participants’ own personality and behaviour was sometimes used within this discourse, too. It existed in a relation with both subject positions but was not in a dominant role in either. Within this “rooting deeper” discourse, pregnant women’s working life and leader-follower relationships appeared as a continuum, where they saw the pregnancy period as just a part of their ongoing reality. This illustrates the importance of the quality of dyadic relationships in the long run.

This study indicated that a discursive approach widens our understanding about how people can position themselves differently from one situation to another in organisational relationships. This could be a valuable study if undertaken at a more general level, for example, within LMX dyads, taking into account both parties’ perceptions and also the organisations’ other members’ points of view. Findings also highlight the importance of promoting diversity (Sinclair 2000) and

justice in the workplace. This supports the need for organisations to value different people in recruitment and promotion activity (see also Schein 2007), and also illustrates how a focus on higher quality leader-follower relationships can be rewarding during the changes that pregnancy involves.

4.4 Congratulations and goodbye? Pregnancy-related discrimination in personal narratives

The aim of the fourth article was to represent different forms of pregnancy-related discrimination practised by the immediate supervisor of a pregnant follower and to increase our understanding of women's sensemaking of that experience. The study also explored whether the quality of the leader-follower relationship was related to the sensemaking process. It has been suggested that pregnancy-related positive or negative experiences are largely related to the relationship of a woman with her immediate supervisor (Buzzanell & Liu 2007). The narrative approach provided a novel way of gathering an understanding of personal experiences at a deep level. The research drew on five personal narratives, collected via two rounds of interviews conducted with women who were pregnant at the time of the first interview, and who had recently returned to work when interviewed for the second time. These five stories were selected from a wider set of twenty interviewees' data due to their providing examples of pregnancy-related discrimination practised by the subjects' immediate supervisor.

The findings of the fourth article showed that women faced pregnancy-related discrimination despite the quality of their working relationship with their immediate leader. Women made sense of their different discrimination experiences in many ways. They spoke about different kinds of discrimination practices, such as problems with bonuses and salaries, assignment changes and denial of training, use of bad language and denigration. The nature of the dyadic relationship with the leader (the quality of the LMX) appeared to affect the women's sensemaking processes. Thus, those with a high-quality relationship represented their experiences in more positive ways than those who were partners in a low-quality relationship. Further, the latter group also attributed the discrimination to external reasons rather than to a personal trait of their supervisor, as those functioning within a low LMX relationship did. This may also relate to the emotional reactions which were found to affect employees' representations of negative events (Dasborough 2006).

As this study shows, even being a partner in a good-quality LMX relationship does not necessarily protect women from pregnancy-related discrimination and

inappropriate behaviour practised by their own supervisor. These findings also further support the findings of this thesis about the dynamic nature of these dyadic relationships. Moreover, good-quality work relationships between leader and follower are argued to be based on positive and balanced exchanges between relationship parties, but the pregnancy situation seems to undermine that reciprocity and cause undesirable behaviour.

The findings of this study clearly indicate that pregnancy may be a very critical point in women's working life. This study highlights the importance of an ethical and moral stance towards pregnancy (and an individual's personal life in general) in organisations and in leadership practices. Furthermore, these findings stress the importance of becoming aware of different forms of discrimination and through that prevent acts of discrimination in organisations. On the other hand, findings of this study also encourage developing and maintaining high-quality leader-member relationships in organisations.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this dissertation is to make a contribution to the current understanding of women's working life during and due to pregnancy from the leader-follower relationship perspective. Empirically, the study seeks to answer the following research question: How do women discursively construct their working life and their leader-follower relationships during their pregnancy and the maternity leave process? More detailed research questions were: How do women construct the nature of their leader-follower relationships due to their pregnancy within their talk? What kind of "why's" do women construct in their talk that is related to pregnancy and nature of their leader-follower relationships? and How do women make sense of their negative experiences during the process of maternity leave and how do they relate the long-term quality of leader-follower relationship to those experiences? The aim of this study is approached in four articles which were summarised above and which are placed in their entirety at the end of this thesis.

At first, the empirical findings of this study supported the view that pregnancy and the maternity leave process are important phases in women's working life as the literature review and my research agenda suggested (article 1). They also showed that immediate leaders play an important role in this specific working life situation as argued in previous studies (article 1; Buzzanell & Liu 2007). The present study shows that it can be concluded that these dyadic relationships are significant and that both parties to the dyad also play important roles in this period of a woman's working life.

In this study, women construed the nature of their leader-follower relationship due to their pregnancy in different ways in their talk (research question i). They represented them as changing and developing, but sometimes also as stable due to their pregnancy and the whole maternity leave process. They also used different discourses (article 2): "practical discourse", "future orientation" and "individual attention", which represented the changing nature of leader-follower relationships. Previous research about pregnancy and work has highlighted the importance of everyday practices in organisations (Gueutal & Taylor 1991; Halpert et al. 1993; Lyness et al. 1999) and the aspect of the pregnant body (Longhurst 2000). Both these discussions were closely related to the "practical discourse". The current literature and the definitions in LMX research ignore the reciprocity of these dyadic relationships (Greguras & Ford 2006) within the two sub-dimensions related to tasks and assignments, namely contribution and professional respect (Liden & Maslyn 1998). The category of practical discourse emerged from the women's talk about the two parties' reciprocal work roles,

where the role of the subordinate is to assist the leader and the role of the leader is to take the subordinate into consideration (van Dierendonck et al. 2002). This can also be seen to relate to the discussion about the dialectical nature of leadership (Collinson 2005b). Also, the importance of women's own role in practical issues at work carries important meanings within this discourse.

Another discourse, "future orientation", was a representation of change in the dyadic relationship parties' forward-looking interests in the long run. Studies about pregnancy and work have noticed this forward-looking aspect (Adams et al. 2005; Millward 2006) but so far none of the sub-dimensions presented among LMX have an aspect focusing on the future. The importance of reciprocal communication emerged through this discourse. Both dyadic parties' representations of their aims, hopes and plans played an important role within this discourse. Moreover, a third discourse, "individual attention", was related to the personal level of the dyadic exchange parties. The individual attention discourse is closely related to the LMX dimensions of affect and loyalty (Dienesch & Liden 1986; Liden & Maslyn 1998). The individuality or personal side of life of both leader and follower was highlighted and represented as being more prominent within the exchange relationship than before the pregnancy. Representations of emotions were part of this discourse. It is important to note that change at the individual level affects emotions to a great extent, particularly when it is a negative one (George 2000; see also Gregory 2001). Reciprocity within LMX relationships and the importance of the active role of working women themselves became highlighted by the findings of this study.

One form of the nature (research question i) and changes within relationships occurred also when especially narratives of discrimination experiences were considered (article 4). Taking especially the approach of negative experiences (research question iii), the findings of this study indicate that pregnancy may be a very critical point in a woman's working life. Thus, on the one hand, pregnancy appeared as some kind of turning point when balanced reciprocity and exchanges were shaken up, but on the other hand, the previous quality of the relationship lead women to make sense of the experience in different ways. Different forms of pregnancy-related discrimination is found, manifesting itself in criticism about performance or appearance, reduced working hours and dismissal without good reason after the announcement of pregnancy (Gregory 2001). In the present study various forms of discriminatory acts carried out by the immediate supervisor were found. The quality of LMX relationships has been found to have an effect on, for example, followers' emotions, intentions, perceptions and on their actual behaviour (Dasborough 2006; see Vatanen 2003). Moreover, interactions between leaders and their followers have been found to be emotional in nature, leaders' behav-

ious engendering both positive and negative emotional responses from followers. These emotional responses are argued to contribute to the positive attitudinal and behavioural consequences associated with high quality LMX relationships (Dabornough 2006). This study showed how women made sense of their experiences depended very much on the previous quality of the ongoing relationship, and thus partners in high-quality relationships made sense of these situation in a much more positive manner than those within low-quality relationships. This finding supports the view that LMX quality is related to follower's ways of reacting to different situations. The findings of this study contradict in a way the view that good-quality relationships cause positive outcomes for followers (Erdogan & Enders 2007; Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995; Vatanen 2003; van Breukelen et al. 2006; Golden & Veiga 2008). However, a good-quality relationship between leader and follower appears to be not always enough – ethical and moral behaviour by the immediate supervisor is also needed. It became quite clear in the stories of discrimination that the treatment women face in the workplace during their pregnancy and their maternity leave affects their decisions whether to return to paid work and a resumption of their career (Judiesh & Lyness 1999; Houston & Marks 2003; Buzzanell & Liu 2007).

Moreover, change was only one way of constructing the nature of their relationships. The nature of the relationships (research question i) became explicit also when women moved from one subject position to another (article 3), from accepted to dismissed, depending on the story they were telling and thus construing the nature of the relationships which differed from each other, but also accepting a positioning referred to as a stable, “business as usual”, way of talking about the relationship. Previous findings about working women and pregnancy are in line with these subject positions insofar as pregnancy does not always create negative issues at work, but can improve the relationship between leader and follower (Buzzanell & Liu 2007).

Furthermore, when women used different discourses of change they also expressed related emotions, both negative and positive (article 2). Positive emotions which women expressed were sensitivity, confidence and gratification, and negative ones were disappointment, ambivalence and distress. Subjective sensitivity emotions were a representation of positive changes within daily routines due to pregnancy. The practical discourse that was produced through these positive emotions represents the development of the relationship as manifestations of responsibility, consideration and high regard. This relates also to the research on pregnant women's work identities which found women to be rather stable considering other peoples' reactions towards them (Major 2004; Millward 2006). Here, women represented themselves as capable of performing, but at the same time they

they highlighted the response given by their leader. Emotions of confidence, the representation of LMX relationship development within a discourse of “future orientation”, builds on security and continuity. Talk about the future covered the time after pregnancy and maternity leave and relates to the discussion about women’s willingness to return to work (Lyness et al. 1999; Houston & Gillian 2003; Buzzanell and Liu 2007). Representations of emotions of gratification consisted of talk about the amount and especially the content of communication between leader and follower. Within this discourse, positive relationship development related to personal closeness, and LMX parties’ discussions about pregnancy and issues related to children and family were part of this talk.

The practical discourse also manifested itself through representations of emotions of disappointment about the LMX development due to pregnancy. Here, the emotions of disappointment were discrimination, unethical behaviour and also inability to perform. The pregnant body is also here part of the participant’s talk of representing loss of body control (Longhurst 2000), such as the need for sick leave due to problems with the pregnancy. Emotions of ambivalence emerged from talk about unknown plans that the leader may have for the follower’s future, or, on the other hand, the follower’s own interests. Lack of communication or unwillingness to communicate appeared to have a significant role within this discussion, similar to the discourse of emotions of distress. Talk about emotions of distress lead to decreased communication and a lack of common interests at the personal level had an important role. Parts of such discourses were representations of misunderstandings or a lack of common ground between the LMX parties. Insults related to pregnancy especially hurt women as employees, but also as future mothers. Pregnant women are often found to worry about the effects that stress might have on their baby (Gross & Pattison 2001). Here, women were even afraid of the possible harm their own strong emotional reactions, like anger or disappointment, might cause the unborn child.

Women also constructed “why’s” about their leader-follower relationships in different ways in their talk (research question ii, article 3). Using the discourse “similarity”, they highlighted shared experiences. The similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne 1971) is one of the most widely used explanations for the quality of relationships (Deluga & Perry 1994; Somech 2003). Similarity attraction also appears to be relevant within exchanges in the context of pregnancy. However, LMX studies have suggested that surface level similarity, usually meaning demographic similarity, does not play such an important role within LMX (Hiller & Day 2003). Here, this discourse relates strongly to demographic issues and has a dominant role in participants’ talk. Gender, which usually is assumed to be related to the similarity attraction paradigm and through that, LMX quality, had an im-

portant role within women's talk also, but not such that it is possible to draw firm conclusions about gender, such as having an important role either in positive or negative experiences. This also challenged the view that men's attitudes are more negative in the case of a working woman's pregnancy than women's (Halpert et al. 1993). Furthermore, these similarities are probably also presented in new ways when the parties' life situation changes. For instance, when a follower is pregnant, she talks about her leader's family status, and that raises the question whether she has used that before her pregnancy. The vitality of this discourse suggests that people may see similarity in different ways in different situations.

Moreover, women may face several difficulties, for example, being bypassed for promotion, and family responsibilities may be one reason for this (Gatrell 2004; Wiens, Tuers & Hill 2002; de Luis Carnicer et al. 2003). For women, especially those of child-bearing age, these are tremendously important issues with regard to their work and career. Largely for this reason women are usually not very willing to share their plans about starting a family with their supervisors. An "expectations" discourse provided an interesting view of the contradictory situation, when on the one hand, it would be good if the supervisor could expect that a woman might take maternity leave, but on the other hand, women are scared that revealing these kinds of intentions will spoil their opportunities in the organisation. It is suggested that leader-follower goal similarity is related to the quality of LMX (Huang & Iun 2006). That assumption may be proven in the way that pregnancy may (or is assumed to) change women's goals from organisational to more individual. Lastly, women also used a "rooting deeper" discourse to attribute the nature of the relationship during their pregnancy. Attribution theory suggests that people usually explain situations of failure with external reasons and success with internal reasons (Weiner 1986; 1995). In this study, women usually talked about their leader's negative traits to explain the negative nature of the LMX. Women also considered the maternity leave process as one phase on a leader-follower relationship continuum, with a certain history and assumed future. This supports the view that it is important to understand the quality of dyadic relationships in the long run.

This study contributes to the literature on working women and the maternity leave process by an in-depth understanding of leader-follower relationships and the dynamics within such relationships. The reciprocity obtaining in LMX relationships and the importance of the active role of working women themselves became highlighted by the findings of this study. The study also contributes to our understanding by showing the positive side of the phenomena as well as the negative ones; however, it also shows that a good-quality relationship between leader and follower is not always enough, and that ethical and moral behaviour by the imme-

diate supervisor is needed. This study contributes to the LMX literature by providing a novel perspective to understand these dyadic relationships as dynamic and multifaceted, for example, being a development process which can be affected by conflicts. Studying these relationships in the context of this specific phase of life brought also into being a new temporal perspective, showing that future expectations and scenarios are an important element of LMX relationships. Contra arguments by prior research that deep-level similarity between leader and follower is more important than surface level similarity (Hiller & Day 2003), in this study the dominant discourse of ‘why’s’ which relationship parties relate to the quality or development of a relationship (cf. antecedents in the LMX literature) related to surface level similarity. The findings also contribute to the knowledge of LMX relationships by showing that outcomes are not always directly related to the way in which a follower defines the overall quality of the relationship, and that even being a partner in so called “high-quality” relationship does not always guarantee fair and ethical treatment.

The methodological approaches applied in this study provide also a fairly new perspective on how LMX theory can be utilised in addition to traditional quantitative research approaches. This study indicated that a discursive and narrative approach widens our understanding of how people can discursively reproduce organisational reality and adopt different discourses, position themselves differently from one situation to another and make sense of their experiments in different ways through narratives.

The immediate supervisors in organisation are the ones who usually have to manage different and sometimes challenging issues on a daily basis. Subordinates’ personal life situations affect their working life as well, and therefore needs to be taken into account by supervisors. This raises also the importance of a wider discussion of the work-life balance. Literature concerning the work-life balance has focused on questions about people coping with two interconnected parts of their lives (see Eby et al. 2005; Frone 2003). This literature has mainly focused on work-family conflict, defined as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985: 77). Later research approached the positive side of the issue from the perspective of work-life facilitation or enrichment (Frone 2003; Greenhaus & Powell 2006; Gutek & Gilliland 2007).

The work-family interface has usually been studied from the perspective of role stress theory, concerning the challenges caused by multiple roles which individuals in modern societies have (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985, Bagger, Li & Gutek 2008; for a review, see Kinnunen & Mauno 2008). Different, even competing

roles, such as being a spouse, a parent and a worker, lead individuals into complex situations in which they have to prioritise issues, make decisions and apply strategies for coping. The interface of these different roles may cause conflicts in people's lives, but enrichment has also been found to occur. Conflicts between work and life are found to be bi-directional, the work domain conflicting with family, and on the other hand, the family domain conflicting with work. The antecedents of the work-family conflict can be grouped into three main categories: work domain, family domain and individual domain (Eby et al. 2005). Work domain-related issues, such as job stress or low schedule flexibility, are found to stem more from work to family, while family-work conflict is caused by family-related stressors and characteristics (Frone 2003; Byron 2005). Organisational aspects of balancing work and life are often considered by family supportive policies, but research has shown that informal work-family supportiveness is the more important factor (Behson 2005; Kinnunen & Mauno 2008).

Even though these situations are challenging for supervisors, the necessary training and development to deal with them are not typically found in organisations (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula in press). The practical implication from this study is that there is a need to increase the leaders' understanding and knowledge about how to balance work and private life, including personal and sensitive issues such as pregnancy-related experiences and emotions, through training and development programs. Also, the ethical and moral aspects of supervisors' work need to be focus on. If this were done, leaders might be able to perform better with regards to their followers in different situations. Taking the perspective of working women, but from a follower's perspective in general, the findings of this study show that there is also a need to develop people as subordinates to help them understand their own role in the leadership development process. This is essential also when situations, such as pregnancy, might somehow be challenging for a organisation.

On an organisational level, general discussion and development of organisational practices and policies concerning employees' personal life at work is also needed. It is also important for organisations to promote diversity and justice in the workplace. This supports the need for organisations to value different people in recruitment and promotion, but also maintain the commitment of female staff and their willingness to return to the organisation after maternity leave.

The limitations of this study are as follows. The methodological approaches adopted for this study are not used very often in studies of LMX and may therefore be a cause of criticism. Furthermore, in this study only the perspectives of pregnant followers were considered as producers of discourses and narratives

about dyadic leader-follower relationships. Alternatives to this perspective are clearly available but were not pursued. Another limitation is the limited focus on leader-follower relationships and especially viewed through the prism of LMX theory; again, a wider approach would have been possible. The national context in which this study was carried out is also the cause of a limitation. Finnish legislation provides for quite a long period of absence after child birth and the opportunity for the female employee to return to the same position if she has a permanent work contract. Finnish national culture has been suggested to be more feminine than that of many other countries (e.g. Hofstede 1984; Suutari et al. 2002) and equality between men and women is at a high level. However, the discourse that defines the role of mother as main care taker of small children is vital.

Overall, several interesting new questions have emerged during the research process and new avenues for future research can be identified concerning the maternity leave process in working life as well as dyadic leader-follower relationships and leadership. Firstly, sensitive issues (such as pregnancy) as well as dyadic leader-member relationships at work life should be studied in future, taking wider perspectives. It would be valuable to collect data from both leaders and followers, but also at the group level or from other related parties (supervisor's supervisor, family members, etc.). Pregnant managers would also be worth studying. Also, an international context and comparative studies between different countries are needed. Written narratives or narrative interviews, group interviews as well as other data gathering methods would provide interesting new understanding of these issues. Leader-follower relationships appeared to be complex and developing in nature. Thus the processual nature of these relationships would be worth studying in more depth. Future research is also suggested concerning the maternity leave process and the different stages within it. For instance, different turning points (cf. announcement situation, sick leave) are worthy of further study. The maternity leave process can also be studied in the context of the work-life balance. Lastly, perspectives on ethics and fairness warrant more attention within both research arenas.

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Pregnancy and leader-follower dyadic relationships: A research agenda

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Abstract

Women are, in increasing numbers, participating in the labour market and are an important part of an organisation's human resource pool. Nevertheless, women still face inappropriate treatment at work. One cause of this is family-related issues. In particular, pregnancy and childbirth present special challenges for working women. Discrimination towards pregnant women is commonplace in work settings. Problems are often related to individual work relationships, for example the one between the pregnant follower and her manager. It is important to understand problems that impact on women in working life that can disturb their job satisfaction, their performance and willingness to give their best for the organisation. Therefore, for the benefit of both employer and employee, existing practices in leader-follower relationships during pregnancy are worth studying in more depth. In leadership studies, the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory is focused on dyadic leader-follower relationships and is thus used here to understand this phenomenon. In the present paper, the literature on pregnancy and work as well as on LMX is reviewed. On the basis of these reviews, a future research agenda is offered.

Keywords: Pregnancy, Working woman, Leadership, Leader-Member Exchange, Leader-follower dyad

Introduction

Nowadays, women are an increasingly important part of the labour force (e.g. Scott & Brown, 2000) both when quantitatively and qualitatively measured, and it is obvious that their significance has shown no signs of weakening (Reciniello, 1999). From a socio-cultural expectations perspective, the traditional domain for females is the family and for males the work (Guttek, Searle & Klepa, 1991). Women still carry the majority of responsibilities for home, family, and child care (Bonney, Kelley & Levant, 1999; Kruger, 1998) even when their career and their spouse's or partner's career are viewed as equal (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2004). Traditional views of men's role in the care of children still tend to hold (Waner, Winter, & Breshears, 2005). However, as more women have joined the workforce in the past few decades, more men have assumed more responsibility for taking care of the family (see Butler & Skattebo, 2004). The increase in the number of fathers actively involved in parenting (de Luis Carnicer, Sánchez, Pérez Pérez & Vela Jiménez, 2003) has enabled responsibilities to be shared better than ever before, but an immutable difference between women and men is that women become pregnant and give birth to children (Schwartz, 1996). This also has implications in working life.

Generally, in working life women have lower mobility (promotion, turnover, etc.) than men in organisations (de Luis Carnicer et al., 2003) and temporary employment is more typical for (young) women than men (Cohany, 1996; Hipple and Stewart, 1996; Kalleberg, Reskin & Hudson, 2000). Family responsibilities are argued to be one reason for this (Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002; de Luis Carnicer et al., 2003). For women, especially at their childbearing age, these are tremendously important issues with regard to their work and career. Over 80 per cent of working women are expected to become pregnant at some point during their working lives (Lyness, Thompson, Francesco & Judiech 1999). It can be argued that assumptions and attitudes towards women in work surface when they become pregnant.

An increasing number of women remain in paid employment during their pregnancy (Gross & Pattison, 2001; Chester & Kleiner, 2001). Therefore, it is important for the employer to recognise that these women are more than just pregnant workers, they are valuable employees before, during and after pregnancy (Chester & Kleiner, 2001). Despite the vast amount of research concerning women's role in working life, research on pregnant women in the workplace is inadequate (Halpert, Wilson & Hickman, 1993; Gross & Pattison 2001). Results of the research that have been conducted have mainly indicated negative perceptions to-

wards working pregnant women (Bragger DeNicolis, Kutcher, Morgan & Firth, 2002). The lack of extant research in this area is surprising given that the number of pregnancies every year in workplaces is high and the phenomenon affects both the entire organisation and its members. Indeed, Caudhill (1994) refers to the pregnant employee as “*a missing person in management research*” (see also Lyness et al. 1999; Major, 2004).

Research on pregnant working women has shown that the problems females usually experience at work during their pregnancy are related to individual relationships, for example with their manager (Major, 2004; Davis, Neathey, Regan & Willison, 2005). Major (2004) found that for the pregnant worker the most salient issues were how their supervisors’ and colleagues’ perceptions about them changed during the pregnancy. Treatment that pregnant women face in work is a social issue that concerns women, legislatures, and employers (Chester & Kleiner, 2001). Importance of organisational leadership and support of supervisor arises as a critical element when studying pregnant workingwomen. The leader and follower dynamic is one of the basic element in organisations is (Dixon & Westbrook, 2003). An important factor in the leadership process is the dyadic relationship that leaders have with their individual followers (Vatanen, 2003). These leader-follower dyads consist of individuals and individual differences and thus phases of life are also part of the phenomenon. Thus, the superior-subordinate relationship appears salient when studying pregnancy within workplace settings.

In leadership research, the key approach concerning individual relationships between leaders and their followers is called Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen, Novak & Sommerkamp, 1982). LMX focuses on individual work relationships that a leader and every single follower create through reciprocal interactions within a work unit. The status of these dyadic relationships is seen as a continuum with high quality (in-group) relationships at one end and low quality leader-follower dyads (out-group) at the other (Liden & Maslyn, 1998, for a review see also Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser, 1999). LMX has been used, for example, to understand how gender is related to leader-follower dyads (Deluga & Perry, 1994; Somech, 2003; Lee, Smith & Cioci, 1993; Ibarra, 1992; Pelled & Xin, 1997) and also how possible disabilities (Colella & Varma, 2001), sometimes caused by pregnancy, might affect dyadic relationships. No research could be found where LMX has been used within pregnancy research even though its applicability to this context seems to be appropriate. Leader-Member Exchange offers a new theoretical perspective from which to approach the treatment pregnant women face in working life as well as its related antecedents and outcomes.

Among women, the education level has been increasing and their professionalism in numerous different occupations has been widened during recent years. It is important to understand problems or changing situations that especially females face in work life that can disturb their performance, willingness to give their best for the organization or their own job satisfaction. From these standpoints the aim of this study is to review the literature on pregnant women at work and LMX. On the basis of this review further research avenues are identified.

The paper begins with a review of the research on pregnancy and work followed by a review of Leader-Member Exchange theory. The connections between LMX and pregnancy will then be presented, resulting in some emerging propositions for investigation in future research. The paper ends with some tentative conclusions.

Research on pregnancy and work

Women are an important part of an organization's human resource and over three-quarters of women at work are expected to become pregnant during their working life (Lyness et al. 1999). There are several studies that have directly addressed this phenomenon. Research on pregnant women at work can be classified into three broad categories. First, some of the research is concerned with attitudes towards and evaluations of pregnant women in work (Corse 1990; Gueutal & Taylor 1991; Halpert et al. 1993; Aeberhard, 2001; Williams, 2004). Secondly, some focus on pregnant employees and pregnant job applicants' own experiences about treatment they face or identity changes at work (Lyness et al. 1999; Brown, Ferrara & Schley, 2002; Major 2004; Bragger DeNicolis et al. 2002; Hebl, Kazama, Singletary & Glick, 2004, see Major, 2004). Third, discrimination against pregnant workers and questions about equality appears to be one of the main interests in the present research (Thompson & Francesco, 1996; Phan & Kleiner, 1999; Lococo & Kleiner, 2000; Chester & Kleiner, 2001; Gregory, 2001; James, 2004; Young & Morrel, 2005; Davis et al., 2005; Adams, McAndrew & Winterbotham, 2005). Key findings from these research areas are presented next.

Attitudes towards and evaluations of pregnant women in work

Corse's (1990) work considers work conflicts and effects on a manager's pregnancy on male and female subordinates. She found that pregnant managers were expected to be more understanding, fair and sympathetic than her non-pregnant counterparts. When a pregnant manager behaved firmly in a conflict she was

rated as more authoritarian and controlling and that was assumed to be a consequence of traditional social norms. Gueutal and Taylor (1991) reported that negative views of pregnant employees exist such as the belief that they limit group productivity and that organisations make too many concessions for them. These beliefs are harmful to the extent that managers and supervisors act on them (Lyness et al., 1999). Also, evidence of reluctance to hire or promote pregnant women has been found (Gueutal & Taylor, 1991). Aeberhard (2001) concluded that reluctance to promote women exists for the reason that she may subsequently become pregnant. Very successful women may find their proficiency is questioned once they become pregnant, take maternity leave, or adopt flexible working hours for family reasons. Performance evaluations and political support for pregnant or working mothers are also argued to abate (Williams, 2004). Results of Halpert et al.'s (1993) study on performance appraisals of pregnant females indicated that pregnant women may face workplace discrimination. Pregnant women got lower performance ratings than other women and males gave lower ratings to pregnant women. Overall, studies about attitudes towards pregnant women uncovered negative findings and highlight significant difficulties for pregnant females' dyadic relationships with their leaders.

Pregnant females' own experiences about treatment they face at work

Lyness et al. (1999) consider the issues of pregnancy in relation to organisational commitment and the return to work after maternity leave. They found that women who had guaranteed jobs after childbirth planned to work later into their pregnancies and to return to work sooner after childbirth than women without guaranteed jobs. Other benefits (paid maternity leave and childcare services) had no significant relationship either with the timing of maternity leave, return or organisational commitment. However, pregnant women were more committed to their organisations if they perceived the organisation's culture to be work-life supportive and they also planned to return to work sooner after childbirth. Based on their study on the post-pregnancy work outcomes for full-time workingwomen, Houston & Gillian (2003) reported that women who did not return to work as intended differentiated from those who did return to work by the amount of planning they had done in pregnancy, as well as having lower pre-natal income and less anticipated support within the workplace. Almost one third of those who returned to work part-time reported reduced job status. This clearly indicates the importance of workplace planning and support when returning to work after maternity leave.

Major's (2004) dissertation about stigmatisation and work identity management among pregnant employees focuses on work identities, that is to say, how the experience of being pregnant affected women's views of themselves as workers and how others viewed and reacted to them. She found that pregnant women did not so much consider their own work identity changes as important, but instead how they sought to preserve their existing identities in the face of supervisors and colleagues changing perceptions. Brown et al. (2002) focus on changes in job satisfaction and perceptions of supervisory and co-worker support caused by pregnancy. In addition, satisfaction to organizational leave policies was examined. The study indicates that in most cases perceptions of supervisor's attitudes toward the pregnant follower did not change during pregnancy and that nearly half of the reported changes were positive. The few negative changes that did occur were generally on the part of the supervisor rather than co-workers. Bragger DeNicolis et al. (2002) and Hebl et al. (2004) were interested in pregnant job applicants and the treatment they face. Both studies found an overall bias or hostile interpersonal behaviour towards pregnant job seekers.

Discrimination and equality

Extant research on pregnancy and work is mainly focused on discrimination against pregnant workers (Callender, Millward, Lissenburgh & Forth, 1997; Phan & Kleiner 1999, Lococo & Kleiner 2000; Chester & Kleiner 2001; James 2004; Davis et al. 2005; Young & Morrel, 2005; Adams et al. 2005) with four very recent studies having been executed by the European Union, Social Found Equal Opportunities Commission in the UK context. James' (2004) review on pregnancy discrimination at work focuses on the legal rights of pregnant women in the UK and Europe, the treatment of pregnant women in the UK and implications of pregnancy-related discrimination. She found wide variations in maternity leave and benefit entitlements across the EU. There were also different types of discrimination related to pregnancy. For example, pregnant women have been complaining through official channels and have asked for advice about being selected for redundancy, overlooked for promotion or training courses and about being refused paid time-off for antenatal classes. Derogatory treatment was also mentioned. James (2004) suggests that pregnancy discrimination is not confined to particular occupations or industries, but Adams et al. (2005) argue that women in the retail sector and hospitality/ consumer services sectors were the most likely to have been treated so badly that they felt they had to leave. Furthermore, women in managerial or elementary positions faced the most explicit discrimination. Length of time in employment is suggested to be an important factor in a pregnant

woman's treatment at work (James, 2004; Adams et al., 2005). Also, younger women are more often suggested to be victims of pregnancy-related discrimination. The most vulnerable time for pregnant women is argued to be the pre-departure stage of pregnancy.

James (2004) focused on reasons for pregnancy discrimination and studied experiences of Britain's big employers in employing working parents. Organisations reported having problems with employees not being able to work late or extra hours, or being absent for childcare reasons. Tiredness, irritableness and stressed behaviour were mentioned as problems related to childcare issues. Female workers not returning to work from maternity leave was also seen as a problem. Callender et al. (1997) found that the problems employers face when an employee is pregnant are not widespread and that they are usually related to maternity pay entitlement, holiday pay and annual leave. Smaller firms are more likely to experience problems perhaps because the absence of a staff member cannot be so easily absorbed into the remaining workforce, or because the specialisation of tasks restricts the number of people being able to cover absenteeism effectively (Callender et al., 1997; Young & Morrel, 2005). In addition, or because of this, employers in small workplaces were more likely to hold negative personal attitudes towards pregnancy than in the bigger ones (Young & Morrel, 2005). Young and Morrel's (2005) study revealed that the majority of companies were reasonably comfortable with pregnancies. Problems or sceptical opinions related to pregnancy that occurred were mainly connected to extra costs, absenteeism, and willingness to support pregnant employees career progression or promotion. Thompson and Francesco (1996) made some suggestions for workplaces to cope with pregnancy, emphasizing the importance of the role of supervisors and managers at all levels.

James (2004), on the other hand, focused on the impacts of pregnancy discrimination and found that financial problems are distinct but that also health problems occur. Problems with expecting mothers' and their babies' well being were related to situations where a woman is encountering negative attitudes towards her pregnancy and tries to work harder to counter the stereotypical assumptions, whilst remaining reluctant to admit that she is experiencing difficulties at work. In other research, Gross and Pattison (2001) argued that being pregnant and doing hard work is seldom a good combination, and that pregnant females often worry about the effects that stress might have on their baby. Pregnancy also highlights the contradiction that women need to be as effective as other colleagues but also need to take it easier than before.

Davis et al's (2005) study suggests that those who experienced pregnancy-related discrimination saw that difficulties were the result of problems with an individual manager or colleague rather than with the whole organisation or society. The study also claims that pregnancy-related rights are poorly understood among employees and employers. Both Davis et al. (2005) and Adams et al. (2005) highlight that discrimination related to pregnancy is also connected to women's willingness to return to work after maternity leave. In the discussion related to the return to work after maternity leave, Chester and Kleiner (2001) suggest that supervisor and co-worker support are an important part of equality treatment and that through supporting behaviour employers and managers can increase employees' respect and loyalty. Gregory (2001) maintains that acts of discrimination towards pregnant workers are executed mostly by their own supervisor or employer. Discrimination manifested itself in criticism about performance or appearance, reduced working hours, and dismissal without an appropriate reason after announcement of pregnancy (Gregory, 2001). Adams et al's (2005) study reported that seven percent of women had been dismissed, made redundant or treated so badly they had to leave their job as a result of their pregnancy, maternity leave or return to work following absence for maternity. Twenty-one percent had faced discrimination that may have led directly to financial losses. Forty-five percent had experienced tangible discrimination, such as denial of training opportunities and changes in job descriptions. Tangible discrimination was highest among managerial and elementary staff and those working in the retail sector.

All in all, the research on pregnancy and work has focused firstly on evaluations or attitudes that other people have toward pregnant employees or job seekers, and secondly, women's own experiences about the treatment they face at work during pregnancy. A third and a recently very salient track of research has focused on issues surrounding discrimination and equality. The importance of individual relationships, especially supervisor behaviour towards pregnant followers has emerged from this earlier research (Thompson & Francesco, 1996; Halpert et al., 1999; Gregory, 2001; Brown et al., 2002; Major 2004). The results of this review also indicate that reciprocal supervisor-subordinate relations play an important role (Davis et al., 2005; Chester & Kleiner, 2001). At the same time there is a lack of research focusing on these issues. In order to better understand pregnancy within workplace settings, a leadership approach needs to be taken into account. In leadership studies, Leader-Member Exchange is the key approach focusing on dyadic leader-follower relationships and therefore offers a new theoretical context in which to study pregnant working women. A review of LMX is presented next.

Leader-Member Exchange

In leadership studies, the key approach to studying dyadic interpersonal leader-follower relationships is the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Graen et al., 1982). It emerged from the Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) research that is a model of leadership that Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975) developed in the 70's. That line of leadership research was an alternative to the theories which assumed that leaders interpret themselves in the same manner for all of their followers or which assumed that leaders can adapt their leadership to every forthcoming situation and are willing to put the same effort into all of his or her subordinates. These basic assumptions distinguish LMX from other leadership research where trait and behavioral theories concentrate on attributes of great leaders and the situational approach widened the scope to the context (Yukl, 1994; Horner, 1997). In situational leadership theories, followers were seen as one part of the context where leadership occurs and the focus was on leadership style that was most efficient to the ongoing situation. Charismatic, transformational and transactional leadership theories renewed the thinking on leadership and found the power of shared vision and values. Those theories classify different leadership styles and the outcomes they cause. More recent leadership theories have focused on group dynamics and leadership occurring within groups. (Yukl, 1994; Drath and Palus, 1994; Horner, 1997; Armandi, Oppedisano, Sherman, 2003; Torpman, 2004.)

Among LMX studies, three different kinds of focus can be distinguished. Firstly, studies have concerned the nature of the dyadic relationships, secondly the focus has been on the antecedents of quality in LMX relationships and the third concerns outcomes, individual and organizational, that the quality of LMX relationships present (see e.g. Vatanen, 2003). Next, all three areas will be discussed in more detail in order to indicate how LMX can contribute to the research on pregnancy and work.

Nature of LMX relationships

Leader-Member Exchange focuses on individual work relationships that a leader and every single follower create through reciprocal interactions within a work unit. These relationships are seen as developmental processes where both parties of the dyad (the leader and each member) learn about each other over time (Bauer & Green, 1996). The status of these dyadic relationships is seen as a continuum ranging from high quality relationships to low quality leader-follower dyads (Liden & Maslyn, 1998, see also Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser, 1999 for

a review). High quality dyads are based on reciprocal trust and contribution whereby followers who have high quality LMX are seen as part of the 'in-group.' Low quality exchange relationships are characterised by either balanced or negative reciprocity (Davis & Gardner, 2004: 446) and places these followers in 'out-groups.' High quality relationships are typified by high levels of mutual trust and respect and low quality relationships are based primarily on the formal employment contract. This kind of differentiation among the same superiors' followers arouses questions of equality and justice and this approach to leadership has also been seen as "politically incorrect" (Dansereau, 1995: 480). Leadership is a multiple-level phenomenon (Yammarino, Dansereau & Kennedy, 2001) and LMX gives a partial view of the leader-follower relationship. Despite its critique, the research on dyadic processes has been seen to provide important insights into leadership even if it often underestimates the importance of the context in which this relationship occurs (Yukl, 2004).

At first, LMX studies focused on the quality of exchanges between leader and follower. The question of multidimensionality led to the presentation of many different kinds of sub-dimensions. Recent studies (Vatanen, 2003) have applied the work of Dienesch and Liden (1986) contributed to by Liden and Maslyn (1998). It is suggested that leader-member exchange consists of four sub-dimensions; 1) contribution, defined as "perception of the amount, direction and quality of work-oriented activity each follower puts forth toward the mutual goals" 2) loyalty, defined as "extent to which the leader and follower publicly support each other", 3) affect, defined as "the mutual affection members of the dyad have for each other based on interpersonal attraction rather than on work or professional values" and 4) professional respect, defined as "perception of the extent to which each follower of the dyad has built a reputation, within and/ or outside the organization, of excelling at his/ her line of work." Dienesch and Liden (1986) as well as Liden and Maslyn (1998) argued that a multidimensional perspective on leader-member exchange extends the construct of the theory and its relationship with organisational outcomes. It also indicates that there can be low and high quality relationships based on different dimensions.

Antecedents of the quality of dyadic relationships

Antecedents of LMX quality have usually been studied as characteristics of individuals of the dyad. The quality of leader-follower dyads is argued to advance mainly on the relatively stable characteristics of the interacting individuals. Later on, actual behaviour such as follower performance and leader delegation and testing on competence becomes more important. Leader-member exchange relation-

ships are argued to develop quickly and are supposed to remain stable over time (Bauer & Green, 1996; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Vatanen, 2003).

The LMX research that has been focused on antecedents of the quality of dyadic relationships has often been based on the similarity-attraction paradigm, which assumes that individuals who share certain characteristics accomplish positive responses in one another and hence form positive relationships (Byrne, 1971). It has been argued that supervisors tend to include demographically similar subordinates in their in-groups at significantly higher rates than other subordinates (e.g. Deluga & Perry, 1994; Somech 2003). For instance, some studies show that subordinates feel more empowered when they have the same gender as their supervisor (Lee et al., 1993). It has also been demonstrated that male supervisors are more prone to forming ties with other male employees than with female employees (Ibarra, 1992). It has further been suggested that gender similarity has a negative association with absence. Based on their study, Pelled and Xin (1997) argue that gender similarity has a stronger negative association with absence in dyads with female leaders than in dyads with male leaders. In addition, Somech (2003) found that when the relationship of superior and subordinate was short, no difference between opposite-sex and same-sex pairs was found but when their acquaintance was longer, effects were in line with earlier research.

Colella and Varma (2001) argue that subordinates with disabilities are placed in the supervisors' out-group, but found that when individuals with disabilities engaged in upward influencing behaviour (e.g. self enhancement, where the subordinates brought their achievements to the notice of the supervisor) the relationship with the supervisor was significantly higher than when they did not engage in such behaviour.

Besides the individual antecedents of quality of LMX, organizational aspects have also been found to be related to relationships between leader and follower. It is argued that LMX often ignores or understates the importance of the context in which this relationship occurs (Yukl, 2004). The need for organizational aspects in LMX studies are acknowledged and it is suggested that more attention should be focused on contextual variables (Dienech & Liden, 1986; Somech, 2003).

Outcomes of LMX

Research on LMX has shown significant relationships with many work outcomes. It is argued that the individuals in high-quality leader-member exchange relations have more positive job attitudes and engage in more positive behaviours than

those in low quality LMX relationships. Support has also been found for the relationship between LMX and overall job satisfaction, satisfaction with a leader, satisfaction with pay, co-worker satisfaction, and perceptions on organisational climate (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The quality of LMX is found to be positively related to the frequency of promotions (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Outcomes found to be related to support at the organizational and/ or supervisor level include work stress, job satisfaction, job performance, work and family balance, absenteeism, job burnout and organizational commitment (Szamosi & Duxbury, 2002).

Altogether, research on LMX has focused on dyadic relationships between leader and follower, their antecedents and the outcomes that are related to those relationships. Pregnancy and work-family balancing literature has proven that issues concerning interpersonal relationships are salient, especially between leader and follower. Nevertheless, there is dearth of research that focuses on individual dyadic leader-follower relationships in the context of pregnancy. In this sense, the Leader-Member Exchange theory would seem to offer potential contributions in this research area. Therefore, connections between LMX and pregnancy research and proposals for further research are identified next.

Pregnancy and LMX: a future research agenda

On the basis of the reviews presented, several proposals can be made for future research. There are many interesting and plausible connections between dyadic leader-follower relationships and the research on pregnancy. Pregnancy is a unique situation in workplaces. Pregnancy is always temporary in status and is only ever a part of a female worker's reality. Although it lasts only a limited period of time, it may have much longer-term effects on the individual and organisation, such as sick leave related to pregnancy, maternity leave, and the return to work as a new parent and responsibilities that the situation creates.

The general studies on pregnancy and work have shown that the problems females usually experience at work during their pregnancy are related to individual relationships such as with their manager (Major, 2004; Davis et al. 2005). However, there are much fewer studies which focus on issues relating to leadership and pregnancy. From Leader-Member Exchange perspective, attention is turned to interpersonal dyadic leader follower relationships and therefore it is presented here as a new research avenue in the context of pregnancy.

Research has revealed that pregnant females are sometimes seen as less valued or less trustworthy employees (Halpert et al. 1993). It has also been shown that performance reviews from managers have been more negative when a woman is pregnant and that supervisors might be hesitant to challenge a pregnant follower. Furthermore, significant changes in superiors' attitudes and behaviour towards his pregnant follower exist (Bistline, 1985; see also Halpert et al., 1993). On the other hand, it is important to notice that not all pregnant women suffer from inappropriate treatment (Brown et al, 2002; Major 2004; Adams et al., 2005). Indeed, Adams et al. (2005) report that a quarter of women did not experience any discrimination during their pregnancy, whilst on maternity leave or on their return to employment. LMX is based on the argument that leader follower dyads differ from each other in quality (Liden & Maslyn, 1998, see also for a review Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser, 1999). Based on earlier research, it can be assumed that the quality of LMX before pregnancy might affect pregnant females experiences at work and that the pregnancy, in turn, might affect the relationship between leader and follower. In this sense, there is a need to explore how the quality of dyadic leader-follower relationship affects the pregnant workers' experiences during their pregnancy. Moreover, the reasons why problems arise in certain leader-follower dyads during a follower's pregnancy and not others merit investigation. Furthermore, emerging changes in dyadic leader-follower relationships as a result of followers' pregnancy are worth studying in more depth. This could also contribute to existing LMX theory where the quality of relationships is supposed to be stable (Bauer & Green, 1996; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Vatanen, 2003). Research following this avenue needs to draw lessons from both positive and negative experiences.

Since in LMX theory both leader and follower are involved in dyadic relationships that they create, leaders' experiences of pregnant followers and their subsequent dyadic work relationships also present a meaningful avenue for further research. However, legislation that forbids discrimination against pregnant workers, as well as common norms connected to leaders' equal behaviour towards followers might lead to difficulties in extracting the true feelings of leaders.

The sub-dimensions of LMX, namely contribution, loyalty, affect and professional respect (Dienesch & Liden 1986; Liden & Maslyn 1998) could be useful when studying emerging issues in dyadic leader-follower relationships during pregnancy. Firstly, which areas form the basis of relationships that succeed or fail? For instance, are high quality relationships that have been based on professional respect more prone to suffer when the follower becomes pregnant than when the relationship is based on the interpersonal affect dimension? The sub-dimensions of LMX widen the theoretical context that can explain some changes

or effects that emerge in leader-follower dyads when a follower becomes pregnant. Further research needs to focus on the experiences of how pregnant women find out how their leader-follower dyadic relationship is constructed as well as on the sub-dimensions of LMX.

The research into antecedents of LMX quality are often related to the similarity-attraction paradigm that explains how supervisors tend to include demographically similar subordinates into their in-groups at significantly higher rates than other subordinates (e.g. Deluga & Perry, 1994). That might be crucial in dyadic leader-follower relations because most of the superior positions are still held by men who, in turn, are argued to have more prejudiced conceptions against pregnant women than females (Halpert et al., 1993). Age, ethnic background and other diversifying factors could also be related to this. For instance, younger women are more often suggested to be victims of pregnancy-related discrimination (James, 2004 and Adams et al., 2005). It is also possible that similarity-attraction may be connected to the leader's own family status, not only their gender. Superiors who have their own children may behave differently towards pregnant employees than those without. In short, the variables related to antecedents of quality and changes in leader-follower dyadic relationships need further investigation. Issues concerning the leader's gender and/or family status would be appropriate starting points in this regard, as would the age difference between leader and follower.

In Leader-Member Exchange theory, the quality of leader-follower dyads are argued to advance firstly on estimations made mainly on the grounds of individual characteristics and later on actual performance and delegation (Bauer & Green, 1996). The time when a woman becomes pregnant could be very critical. It is suggested that the length of time in employment may be an important factor in a pregnant woman's treatment at work (James, 2004; Adams et al., 2005). If the quality of LMX has not had time to reach maturity, or reached the stage where the follower has had an opportunity to prove her ability to the leader before the pregnancy announcement, the development process of the relationship may suffer. Future research needs to address questions about the length of time the woman has been working with her leader and the status of the employment contract, more specifically whether she is a permanent or temporary employee and the consequences that these differences might generate.

Pregnancy could also affect an employee's health and restrict the type of assignment that she is able to perform. Sometimes pregnancy may cause temporary disability in work (Gregory, 2001). A pregnant woman's experience of working life is affected by many diverse factors including whether she is suffering a pregnancy-related illness or whether it is her first pregnancy, and it is important not to

assume that all pregnant women experience their respective pregnancies in the same way (James, 2004). Halpert et al. (1993) suggest that pregnant women are viewed as overly emotional, often irrational, physically limited and less committed to their job. However, Lyness et al. (1999) argue that the myths about pregnant females' lack of commitment to their work are not supported. Characteristics of both parties of the dyad, including pregnancy-related factors such as pregnant followers' health during the pregnancy, might be relevant and worth studying when focusing on the antecedents of LMX.

Organisational aspects are found to be connected to relationships between leader and follower (Allen, 2001) and the importance of contextual factors is highlighted as needing more attention in LMX studies (Somech, 2003; Yukl, 2004). Work-family research seems to offer important insights when the focus is turned to family issues such as pregnancy. Therefore, the concept of perceived organisational family support is presented next as a possible related factor to dyadic leader-follower relationships.

Although employees are suggested to differentiate between support from an organisation as a whole and the support they receive from their immediate supervisor (Allen, 2001; Thompson, Jain, Kopelman & Prottas, 2004), the supervisors role is argued to be decisive in organizational work-family issues in that they are in a position to actively encourage or discourage employees intentions to balance their work-family demands. Furthermore, supervisors also make implicit and explicit choices regarding the adaptation of workplace practices (Thompson, Thomas & Maier, 1992; McDonald, Brown & Bradley, 2005). Several studies have found that employees' perceptions of the "family-friendliness" of their workplaces reflect the informal social supports connected to the relationships that employees develop at the workplace, especially those with their supervisors (Allen, 2001; Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998).

Organizational Family Support is "a global construct that encompasses the work-family policies and practices offered by an organization, the totality of which convey a message regarding the organization's interest in helping employees achieve a viable balance between work and family life" (Thompson et al., 2004: 546, see also Allen, 2001). Perceived Organizational Family Support (POFS), which is a subset of Perceived Organizational Support (POS), was developed to measure employees' perceptions of how supportive the organization is of their work-life needs (Jahn, Thompson & Kopelman, 2003). Perceived organizational support is defined as employees' global beliefs about the extent to which the organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986) and it has been found to be an

antecedent of trust in managers (Tan & Tan, 2000; Connell, Ferres & Travaglione; 2003). It is also argued that POS and LMX are different constructs but are related and influence one another (Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997; Erdogan, Kraimer & Liden, 2004).

Perceived organizational family support is comprised of two dimensions of support: 1) tangible support, which consists of perceptions of instrumental and informational support, and 2) intangible support, which consists of perceptions of emotional support (Jahn et al., 2003; Thompson et al., 2004). Allen's (2001) study proved that when the perception of an organization's family-supportiveness was favourable it positively correlated with perceptions of supervisor support. Therefore, it can be assumed that pregnant workers' perceptions of their organization's family supportiveness may affect the relationship with their immediate leader. Research connecting perceived organizational family supportiveness and LMX has not been found but relations between these concepts, the perceived importance of the leader in work-family balancing and role of the leader in LMX appear to be significant. One proposal for further studies concerns the relationship between perceived organizational work-family supportiveness and LMX in the context of pregnancy. That could also contribute to LMX theory by increasing our understanding of contextual factors related to leader-follower dyadic relationships.

A third area where LMX theory has also focused is on the outcomes that are related to the quality of leader-follower relationships. In this context it will bring important insights to the existing literature. The quality of leader-follower relationships is positively related to many important work outcomes such as positive job attitudes, job satisfaction, frequency of promotions etc. Results of research on organizational or supervisor support indicate that work stress, job satisfaction, job performance, work and family balance, absenteeism, job burnout and organizational commitment are relevant (Szamosi & Duxbury, 2002). Similarly, research on pregnancy and work does not give a very positive account in such issues. Halpert et al. (1993) found evidence that negative stereotypes and beliefs associated with pregnant women exist. This is notable for the same reason that supervisory ratings are important when discussing advancement or other benefits. Research following this avenue could focus on outcomes and consequences that pregnant females experience in work life and how the quality of LMX is related to those events. Besides what to study, it is important to consider how to study. Therefore, attention is now turned to the question of possible methodologies in future research in this area.

The quality of leader-member exchanges is usually measured from the followers' perspective and the studies that have concerned both parties of the dyad have normally found significant differences between leader and follower reports of the LMX quality (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Gerstner and Day (1997) also suggest that LMX is more reliably assessed from the followers' perspective. Vatanen (2003: 28) further suggests that leader and follower exchange quality could be treated as separate constructs, conceptualised as perceptions that reside within the individual, independent from the perceptions of the dyadic partner. Varma, Srinivas and Stroh (2005) recommend in addition that future researchers should study subordinate views of LMX in much more detail.

A quantitative research tradition has been strong among LMX studies as well as other leadership studies, but Conger (1998) and Waldman et al. (1998) propose that qualitative methods should be used more often to both widen and deepen the understanding of leadership. Fairhurst and Hamlett (2003) applied the qualitative approach to LMX by proposing and using (Prebles, 2004) narrative analysis when studying dyadic leader-member exchanges. Interviews had usually been used when studying pregnant women's own experiences about treatment they face (Major, 2004; Adams et al. 2005; Davis et al. 2005). Silverman (2001) argues that a deeper understanding of social phenomena can be obtained through more qualitative methods of exploration. Hence, the research on pregnancy and LMX could be executed from the perspective of pregnant followers using the qualitative methodology. Longitudinal studies with follow-up interviews where women could be interviewed during their pregnancy and then after maternity leave could contribute interesting and useful information about this phenomenon. Nevertheless, besides the qualitative approach that aims to understand phenomenon deeper and is theory building in nature, quantitative research methodology is also needed to generalize and test the theory.

All in all, research into the working pregnant women is only in its infancy and more empirical data is needed in this area. Next, some short conclusions are presented which tie up the key themes identified.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to review and bring together the research on pregnancy, work and Leader-Member Exchange theory and to make some proposals for further studies. The importance of leadership and leader-follower relations emerged from existing literature on pregnancy and work (Davis et al., 2005; Chester & Kleiner, 2001).

LMX theory (Graen et al., 1982; Liden & Maslyn, 1998), as the key approach among leadership research focusing on dyadic leader-follower relationships, seems to offer a useful approach to contribute to this new research agenda. LMX studies have mainly been focused on the nature of leader-follower relationships, the antecedents of dyadic relationships and the outcomes that different kinds of leader-follower relationships cause. These different perspectives of LMX are useful in creating new knowledge and understanding about issues related to pregnancy and work. Through this research agenda the experiences of how the quality of leader-follower relationship affects pregnant workers' experiences during their pregnancy and how their leader-follower dyadic relationship is constructed needs exploration. As the antecedents of dyadic leader-follower relationships, both parties' demographics and family status are worth studying in more detail. In addition, the timing of the pregnancy and the status of employment contracts and pregnant followers health during the pregnancy might be relevant. One proposal for further study concerns the relationship between perceived organizational work-family supportiveness and LMX in the context of pregnancy. Outcomes and consequences such as job satisfaction, work stress and organizational commitment that pregnant employee experience in work life and how the quality of LMX is related to those events need further investigation.

As for the practical implications of combining pregnancy and work with LMX research fields, findings can help both organisations and its individual members. From an organisation development perspective, understanding the problems and special needs pregnancy creates within the workplace can help facilitate the development of effective organisational policies and practices that better respond to the needs of both leaders and their followers in the context of pregnancy. Organizational family supportiveness and knowledge about how it affects leader-follower dyadic relationships should also help organizations and leaders to demonstrate appropriate behaviours. Findings from the research into pregnancy and leadership are useful when training and developing leaders in organisations. From an individual perspective, this research area could assist workplaces striving for equality and fair treatment of a diverse workforce, in particular in increasing women's well being at work as well as their willingness to give their best for the organization. Fair treatment during pregnancy would increase pregnant employees' commitment to the organization and also her performance. Organization can therefore additionally benefit from higher productivity as well as reduced absenteeism and turnover. Understanding these issues is fundamental in developing and improving workplace relationships and in preventing discrimination to a point where women feel comfortable not only in starting a family, but also in returning to work post childbirth.

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Representations of Change within Dyadic Relationships between Leader and Follower: Discourses of Pregnant Followers

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Abstract *This study explores the different discourses of change within dyadic leader–follower relationships due to the followers’ pregnancy. The research draws on qualitative interviews with 20 pregnant working women in Finland. The discourses of change were produced in talk through the participants’ subjective emotional experiences about the direction of development (both positive and negative). Therefore, each of the discourses is presented here using representations of emotions. In this study, three different discourses were identified that represent change within the leader–member exchange (LMX) relationship. These were ‘practical discourse’, ‘future orientation discourse’, and ‘individual attention discourse’. The contribution of the article is threefold. First, the discursive approach applied in this study is rarely used in conjunction with LMX studies or studies concerning pregnant working women. Second, considering the accounts about change within relationships between pregnant followers and their leaders deepens our understanding about working women. Third, the findings challenge the traditional view that leader–member exchange relationships are stable.*

Keywords *discursive approach; leader–member exchange; leadership; pregnancy; working women*

Introduction

Due to the larger number of women participating in working life, pregnancy and childbirth have become a common reality in organizations (Lyness et al., 1999). The issues surrounding working pregnant women have recently gained more attention, especially through equal opportunities- and discrimination-oriented research (Chester & Kleiner, 2001; Gregory, 2001; Lococo & Kleiner, 2000; Thompson & Francesco, 1996). The experiences of pregnant workers have also attracted attention from policy makers, for example, in the context of the EU, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in the UK has published several research reports related to pregnancy discrimination (Adams et al., 2005; Davis et al., 2005; James, 2004; Young & Morrel, 2005).

The literature has shown that when discrimination occurs, or other problems that women experience at work during their pregnancy, they are most often related to individual relationships, for example, with their manager (Davis et al., 2005; Halpert et al., 1993; Major, 2004). This raises the question of leadership in organizations in the context of pregnancy. This stream of research appears quite narrow and, despite the vast amount of research concerning women's role in working life, more research on pregnant women in the workplace is needed (Gross & Pattison 2001; Halpert et al., 1993). Changes in behaviour and/or attitudes towards employees due to pregnancy warrant more attention, especially from a leadership perspective.

Within leadership studies, interpersonal vertical working relationships are considered within leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen et al., 1982; Graen & Cashman, 1975). I argue in this article that LMX theory is a useful approach to the research combining pregnancy and work (see also Liu & Buzzanell, 2004; Mäkelä, 2005). LMX is based on the argument that leaders and every single one of their subordinates create a unique dyadic relationship with each other through reciprocal interactions (Liden & Maslyn, 1998; for a review see also Schriesheim et al., 1999). Generally, these relationships are argued to develop quickly and are supposed to remain stable over time (Bauer & Green, 1996; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Vatanen, 2003). This static view of leader-follower relationships can be challenged by a dialectical approach to leadership (Collinson, 2005a, 2005b). In this approach interest is turned from individual actors (leaders or followers) to relationship dynamics between them. That provides an opportunity to understand more deeply the complex, interactional and mutually constituted nature of leader-follower relationships and the potential for dissent within these (Collinson, 2005a, 2005b; see also Bligh & Schyns, 2007). It is suggested that, as the circumstances of the relationship change, the LMX relationship may change as well (van Breuklen et al., 2006; Vatanen, 2003). Very few studies concern dynamics in settled dyads, but there is evidence that, for example, a conflict between leader and member can diminish the overall quality of the relationship (Johnson & Huwe, 2002). Reciprocity and the dynamics of a relationship between the members of the dyad offer an interesting starting point in the discussion of pregnancy in a work context.

The aim of this article is to explore discursively how pregnant woman represent and describe change within the relationship with their immediate leader due to pregnancy. The study begins by considering the literature of interpersonal work relationships affected by pregnancy. It then focuses on the construction and dynamics of LMX. After discussing these theoretical perspectives, the discursive approach is presented. Following this, the identified discourses are presented and discussed, tying those to theoretical perspectives. The article ends with a presentation of conclusions.

Pregnancy's effects on interpersonal work relationships

Interpersonal relationships in the work context are complex and include sensitive elements (Moye & Henkin, 2006) especially those between leaders and followers (Harter et al., 2006). Even though pregnancy is always temporary in status it may have much longer-term effects on both the individual and the organization. For example, the pregnant body, sick leave related to pregnancy, maternity leave and the return to work challenge working life and individual actors as well. It can be assumed

that experiencing pregnancy (and parenthood) may affect women's spouses and their work life also (see Mäkelä, 2008) but only the view of pregnant women themselves are considered here.

One might assume that significant progress in women's position in the labour market has changed their working life and attitudes towards pregnancy during the last few decades. Unfortunately, when reviewing studies on pregnancy and work within the last two decades, there does not appear to be a very noteworthy difference in the results. Earlier studies have revealed that pregnant women are sometimes seen as less valued or less trustworthy employees, and that supervisors might change their attitudes and behaviours, producing negative performance reviews and showing a hesitancy to hire, promote or challenge pregnant workers (Bistline, 1985; Gueutal & Taylor, 1991; Halpert et al., 1993).

Still, many women have to face the harshness of business life when they become pregnant, take maternity leave and return to work. Recent research has shown that discrimination sometimes leads to women leaving their jobs. A worsening financial situation is also often connected with pregnancy. Pregnant women are also reported to find themselves becoming invisible to the organization as a valued employee, expressed as a feeling of general insecurity about their future status (Millward, 2006). Incorrect and even unlawful practices related to pregnancy within organizations are found to be commonplace, and managers are prepared to defend their decisions when unacceptable behaviours related to pregnancy occur (Adams et al., 2005; Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). Pregnancy-related discrimination most often refers to problems with an individual manager or colleague rather than with the whole organization or society (Davis et al., 2005). Discriminatory acts are mostly performed by supervisor or employer (Gregory, 2001). Moreover, several studies reveal that pregnant women do not consider their own work identity changes as important, but instead place more importance on preserving their existing identities in the face of changing perceptions on the part of supervisors and colleagues (Major, 2004). On the other hand, it is important to note that not all pregnant women suffer from inappropriate treatment (Adams et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2002; Major, 2004). Indeed, positive changes within individual relationships are sometimes found to emerge (Brown et al., 2002; Buzzanell & Liu, 2007).

Physical changes that pregnancy causes to a woman's body are important to notice also. One can say that the pregnant body is a manifestation of intimacy and private life (Gatrell, 2004, 2007; Longhurst, 2000) and working women may feel that their pregnant bodies are not adequately reflecting their employees' image (Longhurst, 2000). The body is both a cultural and a natural phenomenon, even though nowadays people tend to acknowledge only the cultural part of this equation (Warren & Brewis, 2004). Working pregnant women's bodily difference becomes evident in workplaces which are in many cases characterized by masculine values and norms (Gatrell, 2007; Longhurst, 2000; Schein, 2007). In pregnancy a woman's body is out of control; a woman may suffer from nausea and tiredness and her stomach is swelling (Longhurst, 2000). Loss of bodily control is found discomfoting or unpleasant for pregnant women (Warren & Brewis, 2004) and the pregnant body is seen differently by others and by pregnant women themselves (Longhurst, 2000). The pregnant body attracts attention and people, both men and women, are fascinated by a pregnant woman's belly, but on the other hand, it is also seen as ugly and alien. Other people

tend to see a pregnant woman as a container of the foetus that needs bodily protection (Longhurst, 2000). Then, for instance at work, supervisors and colleagues may be willing to help pregnant women with physically demanding tasks, such as lifting heavy things.

Pregnancy- and work-oriented literature has shown that issues concerning interpersonal relationships are salient, especially between leader and follower. The importance of individual relationships, especially a supervisor's behaviour towards pregnant women is emphasized in this stream of research. It is suggested that supervisor and co-worker support are an important part of equal treatment and that through supporting behaviour, employers and managers can increase employees' respect and loyalty (Chester & Kleiner, 2001).

Next, my focus turns to the leadership research concerning especially dyadic leader–follower relationships and their relevance to research on pregnancy and work.

Construction and dynamics of LMX

Work relationships that a leader and each single follower create through reciprocal interactions are the focus of leader–member exchange (LMX) theory. These relationships are developmental processes where both parties of the dyad learn about each other over time (Bauer & Green, 1996). The quality of each relationship varies, ranging from high-quality relationships to low-quality leader–follower dyads (Liden & Maslyn, 1998; see also Schriesheim et al., 1999, for a review). Good-quality relationships are the result of successful exchanges of information and resources between leaders and followers creating a group of 'trusted assistants' to leader (Dansereau et al., 1975; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Typical for low-quality LMX relationships are poor communication, and lack of respect and loyalty (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991; Tepper et al., 2006); those relationships are also more formal in nature.

Leadership is relational (Grint, 2000) and leader–follower relationships are mutually constituted and co-produced (Collinson, 2005a, 2005b; see also Bligh & Schyns, 2007). Reciprocity is fundamental within the dyadic exchange relationship (Collinson, 2005a, 2005b). In terms of reciprocity, two aspects can be distinguished in a leader–member exchange: first, attention to the subordinate by the leader, and second, assistance of the leader by the subordinate (van Dierendonck et al., 2002). The quality of exchange is determined by the mutual reciprocity and level of regard displayed by both members of the dyad (Klieman et al., 2000). Dansereau et al. (1984) used the terms *investments* and *returns* to explain the exchanges between the partners of the dyad.

Besides the reciprocal nature of LMX, the construction of the exchange relationship between a leader and a follower is important. In the literature, the consideration of the LMX construct has led to the presentation of many different types of sub-dimensions. One that is widely adopted is the four-dimensional approach consisting of contribution, defined as 'perception of the amount, direction, and quality of work-oriented activity each follower puts forth toward the mutual goals' (Dienesch & Liden, 1986: 624); loyalty, defined as 'extent to which the leader and follower publicly support each other' (Liden & Maslyn, 1998: 45); affect, defined as 'the mutual affection members of the dyad have for each other based on interpersonal attraction rather than on work or professional values' (Dienesch & Liden, 1986: 625);

and the dimension added later, professional respect, defined as 'perception of the extent to which each follower of the dyad has built a reputation, within and/or outside the organization, of excelling at his/her line of work' (Liden & Maslyn, 1998: 64). One might consider it a weakness that the definitions of two of these sub-dimensions, contribution and professional respect, ignore the reciprocal nature of LMX. Recently, Greguras and Ford (2006) addressed the reciprocity issue by suggesting a new scale developed to measure the supervisor's perspective of exchange relationships. Nevertheless, these sub-dimensions are adopted and utilized within many LMX studies and are also applied here.

It is argued that the quality of leader–follower dyads improve at first mainly on the basis of relatively stable characteristics of the dyadic parties. Later on, actual behaviour such as follower performance and leader delegation and testing of competence becomes more important. LMX relationships are argued to develop quickly and are also supposed to remain constant over time (Bauer & Green, 1996; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden et al., 1993; Vatanen, 2003). Stability or permanency of the relationship quality is not challenged in the LMX literature very often (Lee & Jablin, 1995). Van Breuklen et al. (2006) raised the question of the effect that changing situations have on leader–follower relationships. The absence to date of answers to this question is somewhat surprising given the likelihood of conflict in organizational interpersonal relationships. Indeed, it is argued that there is always a possibility for conflict in leader–follower relations (Collinson, 2005b; Lührmann & Eberl, 2007). Furthermore, conflict is a frequent occurrence in organizations, affecting a host of individual and organizational processes and outcomes (Barki & Hartwick, 2004) and could be assumed to affect LMX relationships as well.

Research on changes occurring within established dyadic relationships between leader and follower is limited. Johnson and Huwe (2002) note that the quality of relationships between leaders and followers diminished due to conflict – even minor conflict – and can escalate to the point where a working relationship becomes unmanageable. Recently, questions related to the transitional identities of leaders and followers have been raised (Lührmann & Eberl, 2007) and support the view of the changing nature of LMX. Emotions are also suggested to play a central role in the leadership process (George, 2000), and especially due to multiple exchanges between supervisors and their subordinates, there is a variety of situations that can elicit emotional reactions (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002). Emotional experiences during interaction between the leader and the follower are suggested to mean more to the follower than to the leader (Glaso & Einarsen, 2006). In general, emotions are fundamental for all individuals and affect their everyday life; as well, they have an effect on their long-term decision-making processes (see George, 2000) and are thus important to take into account when considering change. Studies of leader–follower relationships and related emotions have suggested that the quality of the relationship influences followers' attributions of their leader's behaviour (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Ilsev, 2003) and therefore, people being part of a high-quality relationship may not react emotionally as strongly as those that are part of lower-quality dyads. However, as mentioned earlier, any new situation that challenges the current way of thinking, here pregnancy, is argued to have an impact on the relationship between leaders and followers (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Johnson & Huwe, 2002; Liu & Buzzanell, 2004).

Nevertheless, there is a dearth of empirical research that focuses on individual dyadic leader–follower relationships in the context of pregnancy. The present study makes a contribution by providing a discursive approach to studying how change within LMX relationships is represented by pregnant followers. The discursive approach, data and context of this study are presented next.

Discursive approach

In this study, the discursive approach is viewed as a study of talked (and written) text, produced in a specific social context and process with limited general content considering the complex social practices and variations at the local level (see Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). People are here seen to make their world understandable as well to themselves and as to others by the accounts they reproduce within the language use (Koivunen, 2003). Furthermore, the approach adopted here is close to ‘meso-discourse’, which is defined as being relatively sensitive to language use in context, but possessing the aim of finding broader patterns besides the textual details. Generalization to similar local contexts is possible, and connections to more general patterns also exist (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Discourses have also active role, being not only accounts of organizations reality, but shaping organizational behaviour and generate meaning (Grant et al., 1998; Koivunen, 2003).

In this study change discourses are identified from the participants’ talk in interviews about their LMX relationships. By addressing a specific work-life situation, in this case pregnancy, it is possible to understand this less studied phenomenon in more depth without tying it to a wider macro-level discourse, which may emerge from a historical perspective or relate to the level of society (e.g. Foucault, 1980). Moreover, in this study discourse is seen to drive subjectivity. Producing discourses about change within their LMX relationships, women sense of themselves is constituted through language and at the same time language expresses their related emotions. This approach to discourses is also connected to meaning making, where individual ideas and emotions comprise part of the discursive phenomenon (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Clegg, 1989; Coupland et al., 2008).

A discursive approach is required in LMX research to widen and deepen our understanding of leadership (Fairhurst & Hamlett, 2003). However, only a few studies have applied the discourse analytical approach when studying leader–member exchanges (Fairhurst, 1993; Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Leponiemi, forthcoming). Relationships between two organization members – leader and follower – are here considered as dynamic and able, if not likely, to vary from one situation to another. This perspective is adopted instead of applying the stable definition of single relationship quality and the grouping classification as some of the earlier discursive LMX studies have done (Fairhurst, 1993; Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989). This approach was taken for several reasons. The richness and variety of the data may have been lost if the traditional quantitative categorization of quality had been the starting point in the analytical process. Indeed, the phenomenon appeared complex and disconnected from the traditional view of these relationships, presenting a more multifaceted picture of leader–follower relationships.

In the research on pregnant women’s experiences of the treatment they face at work, interviews have been typical (Adams et al., 2005; Davis et al., 2005; Major,

2004), and the discursive approach has also been used in several studies (e.g. Buzzanell, 2003). However, in gender studies a discursive approach and analysis has been more commonly used (see e.g. Wodak, 1997) and organizational studies considering gender have also utilized it (Ashcraft, 2004; Brewis, 2001).

This study takes into account only the perspective of one part of the dyadic relationship, that is to say, only pregnant women as followers have been interviewed. Although four participants also had a position as leader, all had an immediate supervisor, and they discussed their own experiences as employees mainly from the position of a follower and talked about themselves as leader only if asked. Even though interviewing both parties of the dyad would have been interesting and the relevant discourses would have differed from the ones presented in this study, it has been suggested that leader–follower exchanges should be treated as separate constructs, conceptualized as perceptions that reside within the individual, independent from the perceptions of the dyadic partner (Vatanen, 2003). The views of LMX by subordinates need to be studied in much more detail (Varma et al., 2005).

Participants, data and analysis of the study

The research draws on transcribed semi-structured interviews with 20 pregnant working women. In Finland, where the data was collected, women on average give birth for the *first time* when they are 28.0 years old and the average age of women giving birth is 30. Women go on to have 1.84 children. In Finland, 58,840 children were born in 2006 (Tilastokeskus, 2008). The employer has a duty to change the employee's assignments if the current work is harmful to the pregnancy. Maternity leave is 105 working days and parental leave 158 working days in Finland. Fathers most often use only short periods of parental leave (1–18 working days) and thus it is mothers who are the ones staying at home (Lilja et al., 2007). Maternity leave begins at the latest one month before the due date of delivery. Collective labour agreements may include agreements on salary payment during maternity leave (Frilander & Taskinen, 1999; Työministeriö, 2006a, 2006b). Either the mother or the father (but usually the mother) has the right to stay at home in order to take care of the child up until the day when the child is three years old. After this three-year period, the employee has the right to come back to the same position if s/he had a permanent work contract before commencing maternity leave. In many cases pregnancy causes extra costs and duties for employers. Proper statistics about these costs are not available and measuring them is also very problematic (Lilja et al., 2007; Maliranta & Napari, 2007; Metsämäki, 2005).

The study participants were recruited via different channels, the study having been advertised on several internet sites, in a child- and family-oriented Finnish magazine and in three pregnancy-related community health-care organizations. The key demographic variables that are likely to have an impact on participants' views were identified from the literature and from pilot work; these variables were then used as selection criteria (Green, 2004). In this study, the basic requirements for participants were that the woman was pregnant in her last trimester, was working, and had a supervisor. The reason for wanting to interview women when they were in their third trimester was that pregnancy was likely to have been made public (and was very likely to be visible), and that people at work would have had a chance to react to it.

As the aim was to gather a wide variation in discourses about pregnancy and leader–follower exchange relationships, a multi-channel recruitment process and the selection of a heterogenous sample in terms of backgrounds and occupations was considered essential.

Thirty-eight voluntary participants contacted the researcher during a five-month period. At first, an interview was arranged with each woman who contacted the researcher and met the basic requirements, timing it to the third trimester of pregnancy. In a later phase, all women who volunteered were contacted and informed if their participation was required. Some volunteers did not meet requirements (such as working as an entrepreneur and not having a supervisor) and were thus excluded. During the interview period, some women withdrew their participation, and after several interviews had been conducted participants were selected based on the literature on pregnancy and work as well as on the literature on LMX. The key criteria for participant selection were: participant age, health during pregnancy, number of previous deliveries, education, length of time the participant had been working with her leader and the status of the employment contract, and quality of work (physically / mentally demanding). The age of participants varied from 24 to 40 years. The health situation during the pregnancy varied from ‘I have felt great’ to a need for hospital treatment. The number of previous deliveries varied from zero to five and the level of education from vocational school to doctoral degree. The length of the leader–follower dyadic relationship varied from less than one year to five years, and the women were employed on permanent and temporary contracts. Job descriptions varied from physically demanding factory employee to challenging expert assignment.

The author conducted all of the interviews in Finnish and therefore all quotations presented in this article are translations. Thirteen interviews were conducted by telephone and seven face to face. Participants were informed about the research theme beforehand and the interviewer answered any questions regarding the research. The interviews were semi-structured, using a broad interview guide. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 2 1/2 hours. The median length was about 90 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed adopting discursive approach.

The first step in the analysis involved reading and rereading all of the transcripts in order to become familiarized with the whole corpus. The first reading rounds enabled the identification of the discursive resources that participants used when talking about their relationship with the leader during pregnancy. In subsequent rounds attention focused on talk considering change within LMX relationships in the context of pregnancy and related subjective emotional experiences about the direction of development. Discourses were identified by focusing on the similarities and differences in the ways participants talked about subjective emotions and change within the dyadic exchange relationship. The discourses presented in this article do not necessarily relate to an overall change of LMX relationship quality, but are intended to show what are the critical areas which participants reproduced discursively concerning such change. If the quality of each relationship had been measured, as traditional LMX research does, using, for instance, LMX7 or LMX-MDM scales before and during pregnancy, change due to pregnancy would have been understood very differently than this study does. This study does not explore participants’ unique

LMX qualities, but instead highlights the ways of talking about change within leader–follower relationships due to pregnancy.

Identified discourses

The types of discourse identified in this study concerning the women’s exchange relationship with their leader in the context of pregnancy were ‘practical discourse’, ‘future orientation discourse’ and ‘individual attention discourse’. In turn, the discourses were manifested through the following subjective emotional experiences about the direction of development: sensitivity and disappointment as representations of the first discourse, confidence and ambivalence as representations of the second, and emotions such as gratification and distress as representations of the third. Every discourse also had a reciprocal aspect referring to the standpoint that both leader and member contributed to the dyadic relationship.

Each discourse was used with several participants and each participant used more than one discourse. The intensity of discourses varied (see Koivunen, 2003). Figure 1 summarizes the findings of the study. Next, the discourses and subjective emotional experiences about the direction of development are presented with extracts from the data. To guarantee participants’ anonymity, all names used as attributions of quotations are pseudonyms.

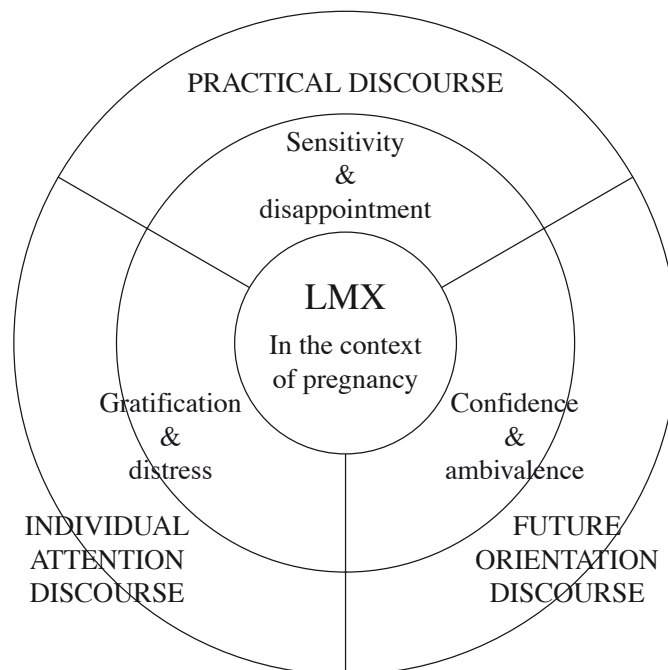


Figure 1 Pregnant followers’ discourses on the change of their leader–follower relationships

Practical discourse

The practical discourse represents change as a modification of daily routines and work performance due to pregnancy and was manifested through representations of sensitivity and disappointment as subjective emotional experiences about the direction of relationship development. Previous research about pregnancy and work has highlighted the importance of everyday practices in organizations (Gueutal & Taylor, 1991; Halpert et al., 1993; Lyness et al., 1999) and the aspect of the pregnant body relates to this discourse (Longhurst, 2000).

This discourse was closely related also to the two sub-dimensions presented in LMX, contribution and professional respect (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Even though the extant literature and definitions ignore the reciprocity of LMX (Greguras & Ford, 2006) within these two dimensions, the nature of the dyadic exchange relationship was essential. The practical discourse emerged from the talk about the two parties' reciprocal work roles, where the role of the subordinate is to assist the leader and the role of the leader is to take the subordinate into consideration (van Dierendonck et al., 2002). This can also be seen relating to the discussion about the dialectical nature of leadership (Collinson, 2005b). Also, the importance of women's own role in practical issues at work carries important meaning within this discourse. The terms *investments* and *returns* have been used to explain the exchanges between the LMX partners (Dansereau et al., 1984). Here, investments, or practical acts, which the subordinate accomplishes, are connected with the representations of pregnant followers' own work behaviour and leaders' reactions to them. Returns, or the role that the leader has in the relationship, are connected to the representations of leaders' work behaviour that are affected by the follower's pregnancy and the types of reactions they create in the follower.

The practical discourse as a manifestation of subjective sensitivity emotions was a representation of positive changes within daily routines due to pregnancy. The practical discourse that was produced through these positive emotions represents the development of the relationship as manifestations of responsibility, consideration and high regard. This relates also to the research on pregnant women's work identities which women found rather stable but considered other peoples' reactions towards them (Major, 2004; Millward, 2006). Here, women represented themselves as capable of performing, but at the same time they highlighted the response given by their leader. The following examples of the participants' talk illustrate how the practical discourse became manifested through subjective sensitivity emotions.

Anna's talk represents the follower's own responsible attitude to practical arrangements, and the extra effort she is putting into her job also represents the change situation in her relationship with her leader. Within the practical discourse, sharing work tasks more intensively and having common goals represent the participant's subjective emotions about increased sensitivity. Both parties of the dyad are presented to contribute to the relationship:

After we went through all those issues about [my pregnancy], she [the leader] asked me, 'what about this project [that I am responsible for]?' Then I told her that I have been thinking about doing this and this in a certain way, and the only big issue within this project is to write the final report to our financier. So that is what we have been going through. And I will write as much of it as I can and she

will finish it. So, there is no such assignments that I will leave it incomplete. And so, she has been fine [with my pregnancy]. (Anna, 34, project coordinator, pregnant with her third child)

Mary's view represents how the practical discourse is manifested through sensitivity emotions resulting from the leader's practical and considerate acts during the follower's pregnancy, and this relates also to the body of the pregnant woman that others can see a need to protect (Longhurst, 2000):

So all has gone very well. When I have asked not to go to some specific machine where I can't do something, there is no problem with that. Immediately it has been said that that's ok. Where do you want to be or where do you want to go? So in that sense everything is very well, you don't have to be anywhere against your own will if you feel you can't. (Mary, 40, factory worker, pregnant with her sixth child)

The practical discourse also manifested itself through representations of disappointment emotions about the LMX development due to pregnancy. Here, the practical discourse represents discrimination, unethical behaviour and also inability to perform. The pregnant body is also here part of the participant's talk of representing loss of body control (Longhurst, 2000), such as the need for sick leave due to problems with the pregnancy. As reviewed earlier, discrimination and other negative practices towards pregnant employees have been the main focus in previous research. Even though the aim of this study was not to put the discourses gathered in order of importance, it is worth noting that this was not an especially dominant discourse compared to others.

This quotation from Sarah shows how the discourse of practice becomes expressed through disappointment emotions:

Then I got pregnant again. In November I of course knew, but I didn't have the courage to say until after Christmas. And my employer (immediate leader) said very clearly that he is disappointed, that he expected to get me back working full time within a year. And when they heard about my pregnancy they realized that it won't happen. Then it all stopped. After that, no work assignments have been given to me in meetings. (Sarah, 28, software trainer, pregnant with her second child)

Cathy's view illustrates how the follower's inability to perform her assignments due to the pregnancy is represented within this practical discourse as negatively affecting relationship development:

I believe that my leader is annoyed about the fact that I am not available. Of course it bothers me . . . When I was on sick leave for two weeks, he called me and said he is amazed that things here are not the same as earlier. What I said to him was, did he expect things to be the same? He has had a weird view about the time after my departure, that everything just takes care of itself . . . Some bonuses for me had not been paid, and three weeks ago I sent my leader an e-mail where I asked if kindly someone would pay them or otherwise give an explanation why they are still pending. Then he sent me this registered letter in

which he said that ‘I won’t pay and, in addition, I won’t pay the sick leave salary either and your salary payment has already been stopped. The amount paid for March I will take back from your annual leave. And you can bring your mobile phone and office keys back here’. This could be interpreted as a sort of a sign of withdrawal. (Cathy, 37, marketing manager, pregnant with her second child)

The main function of the practical discourse is to make visible what kind of change within everyday work women may face when they become pregnant. Besides that presented in the above quotations, change was represented, for example, through quality and the number of assignments, delegations and permissions granted to the follower to participate in training days or programs. The requirement of an effective and high-performing worker exists, and this becomes clear when the pregnant women talk about the direction their LMX relationship development has taken. There were also remarks within this practical discourse that even though pregnancy may restrict performance (by bodily changes), once taken into account, it is possible for work to be adjusted to the situation. This is an important discourse for organizations, to encourage them to bring in practices and policies that take pregnancy into account, but also to put other work/family- or personal-life related questions on the table. Indeed, this discourse highlights that ethical and moral discussion of these issues could be valuable. Next, the discourse of future orientation and the representations of subjective emotions are presented.

Future orientation discourse

The ‘future orientation’ discourse is a representation of change in the dyadic relationship parties’ forward-looking interests. None of the sub-dimensions of LMX have an aspect focusing on the future and a direct connection to the structure of LMX could not be found. Studies about pregnancy and work have noticed this forward-looking aspect (Adams et al., 2005; Millward, 2006). This discourse became manifested through the subjective emotions of confidence and ambivalence regarding the direction of relationship development. The length of time considered was essential. The Finnish context might be one element especially affecting this discourse. Finnish legislation provides quite a long period of absence and the opportunity to return to the same position if the employee has a permanent work contract. Situations where these discourses were produced occurred at the end of the pregnancy period, where the women were already prepared to leave their workplace. In this article future orientation is understood as a time period in the long term (time after maternity leave). It comprises the representations of a follower’s own interests concerning the continuation of her job and also her opportunities in the workplace during and after the pregnancy. The idea of reciprocal communication became visible through this discourse. Both dyadic parties’ representations of their aims, hopes and plans played an important role within this discourse.

When this discourse became manifested through confidence emotions, the representation of LMX relationship development builds on security and continuity. Talk about the future covers the time after pregnancy and maternity leave. Open, positive communication emerged as an important element within this future orientation discourse. Carol’s talk clarifies this very well:

I just mentioned about this situation to establish my work contract. We have been talking about it. She tries to progress with it as well, when I am absent from work, so everything is fine with that. The starting point has been that I am away one year and we get a replacement, so I don't need to worry what happens to my work and do I have a place to come back to. (Carol, 38, education manager, pregnant with her third child)

Eva's talk shows how confidence emotions, an expression of trust in this case, result in development that is positive even though the pregnancy has changed some orientations concerning the future within the LMX relationship:

Int: How has your leader regarded your pregnancy?

Eva: Very well. Encouraging and positive from the moment I told. And positively also in the way that she does not suppose . . . Even though I have myself said that I won't stay home for a very long time, in spite of that she doesn't push me in any direction, but has been saying that you make your own decisions and let me know. I have the feeling that I don't have any pressure to come back very soon, or stay longer at home than I want to. Somehow she has responded just as I think good leaders in working life do. (Eva, 28, personal assistant, pregnant with her first child)

Another change discourse regarding future orientation emerged from emotions of ambivalence. One characteristic of this discourse was representations of uncertainty and obliviousness. Ambivalence emotions emerged from talk about unknown plans that the leader has for the future concerning the follower, or, on the other hand, the follower's own interests. Lack of communication or unwillingness to communicate appeared to have a significant role within this discussion. The first quotation from Luise illustrates the future orientation discourse through ambivalence emotions and represents the importance of forward-looking intentions in working life in general. The role of the leader and her/his power to make decisions about the follower's position after her absence becomes visible. In the following quotation, Louise represents her future position in an uncertain way:

In that sense I don't expect any surprises from my leader anymore. Everything that she can affect negatively, she will surely do. Or at least she won't improve anything related to me. That's what I think. And I don't really expect anything from my leader – I don't even have any positive expectations regarding her. She is just writing new job descriptions where this Matthew [new employee, partly her replacement] would be, so I don't know if she does those descriptions for the time I am on maternity leave or generally for this marketing organization. And I suppose that she has plans where there would be operational and economic reasons why they don't need me anymore. I have begun to feel that since there are such few days left, that I am just waiting to get away. (Louise, 27, product manager, pregnant with her first child)

Both Louise's and Andrea's quotations represent the nature of changing situations in working life and organizations. The place pregnant women leave may be totally different when they come back, especially if they are going to take a long period of

leave. Ambivalence emotions are connected here to the future-oriented discourse, representing the uncertainty about both the follower's own interest as well as her leader's position after the period of absence:

Firstly, I want to decide myself when I will come back. If I am at home for three years, my leader will have already retired. I don't want to expect anything which may not come true. Then I will talk with the leader and we'll take it from there. I want to go through the conversation then, but now it is too early, since my own plans are still so unclear. (Andrea, 38, PR Officer, pregnant with her fourth child)

'Future orientation' as presented here had elements related to time and commonly shared interests. Making interests explicit, or relating a lack of explicitness, was part of this discourse. Lastly, my focus now turns to the third discourse, individual attention discourse.

Individual attention discourse

'Individual attention' was related to the personal level of the dyadic exchange parties. The individual attention discourse is closely related to the LMX dimensions of affect and loyalty (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). This discourse became manifest through emotions of gratification and distress. When individual attention was identified as a specific discourse, emerging representations were related to more unofficial parts of the representations of LMX relationships. Informal communication between the leader and the follower and the sharing of personal life experiences had an important role within this discourse. Individuality or the personal side of life of both leader and follower was highlighted and represented as being more prominent within the exchange relationship than before the pregnancy. On the other hand, this discourse was diminished for the reason that work life and personal life are usually kept separate and changes that occurred within individual attention were perceived as a development beyond the working relationship. Deep representations of emotions were part of the individual attention discourse. It is important to note that change at the individual level affects emotions to a great extent, particularly when negative (George, 2000; see also Gregory, 2001), and talk about insults was also one element within this discourse.

When 'individual attention' was identified through gratification emotions about LMX development, the amount and especially the content of communication between leader and follower was represented as being important. Within this discourse, positive relationship development related to personal closeness, and LMX parties' discussions about pregnancy and issues related to children and family were part of this talk. The next quotations from Eva and Christine show how this discourse emerged in participant talk:

the pregnancy elicits certain things to the everyday discussions that wouldn't be otherwise included. More personal issues, and stories about getting her own children. It doesn't really have so much of an effect on her liking me, but to some extent, it might improve our relationship when she tells more personal things about herself. (Eva, 28, personal assistant, pregnant with her first child)

Int: How do you feel this pregnancy has affected your relationship with your leader?

Christine: Well, I don't know . . . It has brought new topics into the conversation. I don't know if anything else. In a certain way it's a positive development. Sometimes we have just waffled on about these issues [pregnancy and children]. (Christine, 32, dispenser, pregnant with her first child)

When the change within the dyadic leader–follower relationship was expressed through discourse of distress emotions, it related to decreased communication and lack of common interests at the personal level. Parts of such discourses were also representations of misunderstandings or a lack of common ground between the LMX parties. Insults related to pregnancy especially hurt women's emotions as employees, but also as future mothers. In some cases, women were even afraid of the possible harm their own strong emotional reactions, like anger or disappointment, might cause the baby.

The following quotations illustrate this individual attention discourse and the emotional representation of distress. The first quotation (Louise) represents how informal- and personal-level communication was part of that change talk. This text shows how the relationship's negative development is represented within talk:

But after that [announcing the pregnancy] we haven't talked at all. Or if you ask how are you, she won't even answer. I feel she is distant somehow. Our relationship – well, we have never been best friends but had discussions as normal adult people do. We are now very business-like compared to our relationship earlier. (Louise, 27, product manager, pregnant with her first child)

The next quotation shows how unmet expectations or needs to have the leader's attention at the personal or psychological level are part of this discourse:

Int: Have your pregnancy affected to this [liking to work with the supervisor]?

Helen: Yes. It influenced in that way that especially after the miscarriage [before this pregnancy] I really had difficulties in doing my work. I went to our medical care centre to discuss it. It felt so hard at that time when you had lost an opportunity at motherhood. At that time it felt so definite, even though we knew that there would be another opportunity. But anyhow, I had a feeling that my leader did not understand the situation at all, although I openly told her. Her view on this was that 'you are so young, what are you worrying about, just move on'. She didn't understand that at all. And when you are working alone and listening to depressed mothers' worries all day long and have a crisis in your own life, well she did not understand how hard that was for me. (Helen, 28, social worker, pregnant with her first child)

This third identified discourse, 'individual attention', represented the change within the LMX relationship due to pregnancy as a matter of personal and psychological issues between the leader and the follower.

In sum, the pregnant followers' discourses that were identified in this study are representations of change within their leader–follower relationship. Change

discourses were represented through emotions both positive and negative in nature. The final part of this article discusses these findings and presents some conclusions.

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this article was to explore discursively how women represent and describe change within the relationship with their immediate leader due to pregnancy. The importance of leadership and leader–follower relations emerged from the current literature on pregnancy and work. One main stream in leadership research that focuses on dyadic vertical relationships in organizations is leader–member exchange (LMX) theory. It offers interesting viewpoints on organizational leader–follower relationships. Even though this study does not investigate LMX in a traditional way by first dividing followers' in- and out-group status, the study was inspired by major guidelines presented within LMX. The development processes, reciprocity and multi-dimensionality of dyadic relationships were important in this study. The discursive approach adopted here considered how change was manifested within leader–follower relationships within a specific work-life situation, in this case pregnancy. The research drew on transcribed semi-structured interviews with 20 pregnant working women. The findings of the study contribute not only to increasing our understanding of work-related issues in the context of pregnancy, but also challenge assumptions about the stability of leader–member exchange relationships.

In this article, three different discourses were identified in pregnant followers' interviews about the reciprocal exchange relationship with their immediate leader. These discourses were 'practical discourse', 'future orientation' and 'individual attention'. Discourses were represented through positive or negative emotions. Since emotions are found to be related to individuals' everyday performing as well as to their long range planning (see George, 2000), recognizing these accounts of emotions is noteworthy. Each discourse and the emotions presented are important to understand as a noteworthy dimension that might be vulnerable in the leader–member exchange when the follower is pregnant.

The findings of this study clearly suggest that there are different discourses considering change within dyadic leader–follower exchange relationships in the context of followers' pregnancy. Overall, this study has broadened our knowledge of the phenomenon of pregnancy in the workplace. Previous studies have mostly reported this phenomenon in a negative light, typically showing negatively changing attitudes or behaviour towards pregnant women, and the biases about their value and trustworthiness in the organizational context (e.g. Bistline, 1985; Gueutal & Taylor, 1991; Halpert et al., 1993). This study widens the scope, identifying the positive side of the discourses as well. In this study, negative experiences were also recounted, and thus it is in line with previous studies where discrimination or dismissals due to pregnancy were often found to have been instigated by the women's own supervisors or employers.

Pregnant followers' discourses about the dyadic relationship with their leader do not give the whole or a definitive picture of the issues occurring in the workplace. Fundamentally, the discourses presented in this study are evocations and perceptions from the discourse producers' perspectives and thus give only a partial view of dyadic

leader–member relationships. Despite the limitations of this study related to its sample or method, the findings challenge the argument that LMX relationship quality is stable. This conclusion about the lack of stability could open up a new avenue for future research in the field of LMX. For example, longitudinal studies on the dynamics within established leader–member dyads in the context of organizational change might be able to illustrate better this phenomenon. This study also suggests new questions for future research about pregnancy and work. Longitudinal settings could also be valuable in this regard as well as studies that seek to answer questions about antecedents and outcomes related to pregnancy and leader–follower dyadic relationships.

The practical implication that follows from this study is the need to apply a multi-faceted understanding of different issues that pregnancy creates in dyadic leader–follower relationships. For example, an implication that can be drawn from previous research is that the emotional experiences during interaction between the leader and the follower seem to mean more to the follower than to the leader (Glaso & Einarsen, 2006). The findings of the current study show that pregnant followers represent their relationship with their leader to be dynamic and susceptible to change. Since pregnancy is a very personal and sensitive issue, it possesses these emotional aspects too. Therefore, by increasing the leaders' understanding and knowledge about pregnancy-related experiences and emotions through training and development, leaders might be able to perform better with their followers in different situations. General discussion and the development of organizational practices and policies concerning employees' personal life at work is also needed. When it comes to working women, this research would benefit them not only if organizations developed policies and practices but also if women became aware of their own role in the relationship and the effects that pregnancy might have on the relationship with their leader. It is also important for women to notice that changes happening as a result of pregnancy are not always negative but that positive dynamics are possible as well. Because support has been found for the relationship between LMX and overall job satisfaction, satisfaction with a leader, satisfaction with pay, co-worker satisfaction, and perceptions of organizational climate (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), organizations could also benefit if women stayed motivated and satisfied during their pregnancies and were willing to return to the same place of work after maternity leave.

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Working women positioning themselves in the leader-follower relationship as a result of pregnancy

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify how pregnant women position themselves in the relationship with their immediate leader as a result of their pregnancy. Secondly, this study explores what kind of discourses pregnant followers' produce and use when they represent the reasons why the relationship with their leader developed the way it did during their pregnancy.

Design/methodology/approach – In total, 40 interviews were carried out among 20 working women, adopting a discursive approach in data analysis while focusing on their representations about their periods of pregnancy both during and after the experience.

Findings – Women positioned themselves as “accepted” or “dismissed” in the relationship with their leader due to their pregnancy. The study identifies three different discourses relating to the positioning, namely “similarity”, “expectations”, and “rooting deeper”.

Originality/value – There is a lack of research exploring the explanations behind the nature of leader-follower relationships in the context of the followers' pregnancies. Furthermore, the discursive approach adopted in this study is less used within studies concerning relationships between leaders and followers, and studies concerning pregnant working women.

Article Type: Research paper

Keyword(s): Women; Pregnancy; Leadership; Employment; Finland.

Introduction

Diversity is a part of every organization. One interesting phenomena within diversity, basically related to gender, is pregnancy and childbirth. Pregnancy is one of the most concrete family issues that both working women, and their employer have to take into account. In short, pregnancy makes family life visible in organizations (Buzzanell and Liu, 2007; Gatrell, 2004, 2007). However, organizations are mostly characterized by masculine models of work (Schein, 2007), and introducing pregnancy and childbirth into that context are even described as a culmination point for women in work (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005).

Previous literature about working while pregnant has shown that there are many difficulties that pregnant women might face, including different forms of discrimination and colleagues' and supervisors' changed attitudes (Adams et al., 2005; Gatrell, 2004; Halpert et al., 1993). Even though research has mostly reported negative issues, that is, not the whole truth about work life reality. Most of the women are not subject to inappropriate behavior during their pregnancies (Brown et al., 2002; Major, 2004; Adams et al., 2005; Mäkelä, 2007; Buzzanell and Liu, 2007).

The role of the supervisor is salient when work and family life face each other (Warren and Johnson, 1995; Tepper, 2000; Clark, 2002; Lapierre and Allen, 2006). When a working woman becomes pregnant, her work relationship with her immediate leader plays a significant role in how this period unfolds at work (Halpert et al., 1993; Major, 2004; Davis et al., 2005; Gregory, 2001; Liu and Buzzanell, 2004; Millward, 2006; Buzzanell and Liu, 2007). The perceived experience has long-term effects, not only on the focal pregnancy period but also the period after that. If a woman has been treated unfairly due to pregnancy, she might be unwilling to come back to the same organization after childbirth, or her work motivation might decrease (Lyness et al., 1999; Houston and Gillian, 2003; Davis et al., 2005; Adams et al., 2005; Buzzanell and Liu, 2007).

Within leadership research, relationships between leaders and followers, e.g. leader-member exchanges (LMX), are suggested to have a significance in the pregnancy and maternity leave situation in organizations (Liu and Buzzanell, 2004). In general, relationships between leaders and their followers are supposed to develop rather quickly and remain stable. However, new circumstances or situations of conflict are likely to have an effect on the relationship (Bauer and Green, 1996; Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Liden et al., 1993; Johnson and Huwe, 2002). Recent studies have defined pregnancy as one such "conflict" in organiza-

tions, and it is shown to affect relationships between leaders and followers (Liu and Buzzanell, 2004; Buzzanell and Liu, 2007).

In essence, pregnancy is part of most women's lives and nowadays women also make up an important proportion of the labor force. The treatment of working women during pregnancy needs further research (Buzzanell and Liu, 2007). Pregnancy plays a special role in working life, and the relationship with immediate supervisors appears to be crucial. Despite that, within organizational studies on pregnancy, attention is usually on macro-level processes rather than at the micro-level (Buzzanell and Liu, 2007). Very few studies in management literature specifically consider the relationship between leader and follower (cf. micro-level) during pregnancy. Pregnancy and maternity leave may even be a key turning point in the relationship between leader and follower, especially if it is negative in nature (Liu and Buzzanell, 2004; Buzzanell and Liu, 2007). When followers' discourses about changes occurring within LMX relationships during pregnancy were studied, both positive and negative dynamics appeared (Mäkelä, 2007). Since previous research supports the view that relationships between leaders and their followers are in transition during pregnancy, there appears to be a need to consider why this is happening.

According to attribution theory (Weiner, 1986, 1995) people tend to make causal explanations about their own and other peoples' behavior. The initiation to make causal explanations originates from success or failure situations. Different attributions are found to be related to, for example, motivation, empowerment and individuals' future behavior. Change in the nature of the relationship has been the focus of studies on relationships between leaders and followers during pregnancy. However, another useful point of departure could be to focus on general perceptions and the question of why perceived relationship develop in certain ways due to pregnancy. A discursive approach to leader-follower relationships in combination with attribution theory thus appears to offer a helpful approach for structuring our understanding about leader/follower relationships and pregnancy.

In light of this, this study considers dyadic relationships between leaders and members as a discursive phenomenon (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Grant and Iedema, 2005). A discursive approach to organizational phenomena emphasizes the ways in which language constructs the organizational reality, not only the ways how it reflects it (Hardy et al., 2005). The aim of this study is to explore how followers position themselves within the leader-follower relationship during their pregnancy and also to analyze which discourses women use to describe why they positioned themselves in that way.

The following part of the paper presents a short overview of the present literature that combines work, pregnancy, and dyadic relationships. The focus then turns to methodological issues, after which the findings of the study are presented. The paper ends with a discussion and some conclusions.

Working during pregnancy

Previous literature has considered what happens when a working woman becomes pregnant. This research has shown that pregnancy might cause changes in other peoples' attitudes or behavior towards the pregnant worker. From the perspective of other people in organizations, pregnancy is supposed to restrict a woman's ability to perform her work duties, decrease her commitment to the organization, and involves them in childcare and not returning from maternity leave (Corse, 1990; Gatrell, 2004; Gueutal and Taylor, 1991; James, 2004; Liu and Buzzanell, 2004; Miller, 2005).

Studies have found several types of discrimination that a woman might face when she becomes pregnant. Discrimination manifests itself in criticism about performance or appearance, reduced working hours, being overlooked for promotion or training courses, and dismissal without an appropriate reason after an announcement of pregnancy (Halpert et al., 1993; Gregory, 2001; James, 2004; Williams, 2004). Discrimination towards pregnant workers is practiced mostly by their own supervisor or employer (Gregory, 2001).

Working women themselves have different perceptions about working while pregnant. Buzzanell and Liu (2007) study pregnancy and maternity leave as a conflict management process. In the study are two opposing groups of participants, those who reported being discouraged, and the other who reported being encouraged in terms of their employment status and career opportunities. These groups diverged in their perceptions, for example, of their interdependent relationships with leaders or organizations. In particular, leader-follower relationships were perceived to be problematic among those women who felt themselves to be discouraged. In contrast, for women who felt they were encouraged, the pregnancy periods were perceived as sustaining positive relationships with their leaders. A further study considered pregnancy in the context of LMX (Mäkelä, 2007). That study found three different ways of talking about change within the LMX due to pregnancy. Firstly, the parties' performance of their roles (i.e. changes in how the follower fulfilled her work duties and assignments, and how the leader fulfilled his/her own) was one way to present how LMX changed due to pregnancy. Secondly, there was talk about the LMX parties' future orientation and

change within it. Thirdly, the way how change was presented was through attention on the individual. Within each of these three discourses, change was found to be presented by positive or negative ways of talking.

The importance of the role of leader is also noteworthy in studies analyzing work identities due to pregnancy (Major, 2004). Pregnant women do not so much consider changes in their own work identity as important, but more how they should seek to preserve their existing identities when relating to supervisors. On the other hand, previous literature provides evidence (Brown et al., 2002) that in most cases, perceptions of supervisors' attitudes toward the pregnant follower do not change during pregnancy and that nearly half of the reported changes are positive in nature. The few negative changes that do occur are generally on the part of the supervisor rather than co-workers.

In summary, there are still few studies that have considered working women and their supervisors during pregnancy, especially in management literature. More specifically, there is a gap in the research on the ways in which women's general experiences about the nature of the relationship with the leader during pregnancy becomes represented in discursive use.

Explaining treatment at work during pregnancy

When looking for the reasoning, or explanations, behind attitudes or practice that change due to pregnancy, there are some relevant studies. For example, Halpert et al. (1993) suggest that when leaders have been the focus, gender explains some changes, in particular, male leaders give lower performance ratings to pregnant women than female leaders do.

When research focuses on explaining changes in pregnant followers' own traits, several issues are pertinent. A pregnant woman's age, income level and length of time in employment affect discrimination, but also her willingness to return from maternity leave. James (2004) and Adams et al. (2005) suggest that younger women are more often victims of pregnancy-related discrimination, and older women with higher earnings and longer work history are more willing to return to employment (Houston and Gillian, 2003). From an interpersonal perspective, differences between leader-follower expectations can be related to women's perceptions about pregnancy and maternity leave (Liu and Buzzanell, 2004).

Besides, this pregnancy and work literature, general research about leader-follower relationships has found the similarity attraction (Byrne, 1971) to be con-

nected with the quality of relationships (Deluga and Perry, 1994; Somech, 2003) and may be relevant in the context of pregnancy. Similarity or diversity between parties to a relationship is said to exist on two levels, a deep-level and a surface-level similarity. Deep-level similarity, studied through values, attitudes and personality, may have a more important role within LMX than does similarity at the surface level (Hiller and Day, 2003; Huang and Iun, 2006). Researchers have studied surface level similarity through demographical characteristics, such as gender, age, and ethnic background (Deluga and Perry, 1994; Somech, 2003). In addition, the perceived similarity between leader and follower is more important to the quality of leader-follower relationships than any actual similarity (Murphy and Ensher, 1999; Huang and Iun, 2006).

In summary, pregnancy is one concrete situation when work and family meet face to face. Different factors are related to conflicts between pregnancy and work, particularly in the situation when a woman becomes pregnant. As reviewed earlier, the role of the supervisor is salient within this phenomenon and therefore this paper considers the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers. Furthermore, a variety of explanations as to why pregnant women face particular treatment have been suggested, but none of these studies adopt the perspective of the woman's own discursive reproduction about why something is happening within the leader-follower relationship during pregnancy. Next, this paper addresses the discursive approach of the study, and after that, presents the empirical data, analytical approach and context of the study. The paper continues with a presentation of the findings of the study concerning how women position themselves within leader-follower relationships during pregnancy, and of what kinds of discourses are constructed within a woman's talk when she describes why the relationship with the leader developed in a certain way.

The research

Discursive approach

Among leadership research, the discursive approach has been used and has been shown to widen our understanding about that phenomenon (Koivunen, 2003, 2007; Ford, 2006; Lämsä and Tiensuu, 2002). Leader-follower relationships are complex and multifaceted, and can be defined as interpersonal social practices within the leadership phenomenon (Morrell and Hartley, 2006). This view on leadership and leader-follower relationships also allows investigation into the ways leadership is socially construed, and in turn, opens up new avenues for methodological alternatives, such as the use of discourse or narrative analysis

(Morrell and Hartley, 2006, p. 493; Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001). There are few studies approaching leader-follower relationships from the discursive perspective. The traditional quantitative approach has been to divide different groups based on participants' relationship quality first, and then to conduct discourse analysis (Fairhurst and Chandler, 1989; Fairhurst, 1993). Recently, leader-follower relationships have been approached discursively from more general standpoints (Leponiemi, 2008) and also in the pregnancy context (Mäkelä, 2007).

This study concerns organizational dyadic relationships and the two different standpoints from which to consider women's talk for the duration of each pregnancy. First, the study focuses on the ways women position themselves when they talk about the nature of their relationship with their leader, and secondly, on the discourses through which women explain why they position themselves in a certain way. To clarify these two different perspectives on talk, the paper now addresses them in more detail.

Subject positioning is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations. They are the identities, or one can say roles, made relevant by specific ways of talking. Interactive positioning occurs when what one person says positions another person, while in reflexive positioning one positions oneself. Positioning is not necessarily intentional. Because such ways of talking can change both within and between conversations, multiple, contradictory subject positions are available to the participants (Davies and Harrè, 1990; Edley, 2001; Olsson and Walker, 2004). Here, the focus is on ambiguous ways in which women use positioning within the interviews when they discursively represent the nature of the dyadic relationship.

Positioning is commonly related to explanations as to why they positioned themselves in a certain way and these patterns of texts are seen as discourses. The discourses through which they offered these "whys" within the interviews are seen here as relating closely to "meso-discourses" (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). Meso-discourse is talked text, produced in a specific social context and process with limited general content. It is defined as being relatively sensitive to language use in context but aims to find broader patterns beside the textual details. Generalization to similar local contexts is possible, as is a connection to more general patterns. The relation between these discourses and wider macro-level discourses (which emerge from a historical perspective or relate to the level of society, Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), are discussed in this study. Next, the paper turns to the empirical data and its context.

Empirical data and the context of the study

To achieve a sufficiently in-depth view and to get rich data, this study uses long-term data collection. More specifically, 20 working women participated in the study and were interviewed twice. The women were first interviewed when they were pregnant and for the second time about one and half years later. One interview was conducted via e-mail due to special circumstances. Hence, the total amount of interviews was 40. Analysis focused on the representations made about the women's pregnancy periods during and after the experience.

In Finland, where the data were collected, women on average give birth for the first time when they are 27.9 years old, and go on to have 1.8 children (Tilastokeskus, 2006). The employer has a duty to change employees' assignments if the current work is harmful to the pregnancy. Maternity leave in Finland is about ten months long and begins at the latest a month before the expected delivery date. Collective labor agreements may include agreements on salary payment during maternity leave (Frilander and Taskinen, 1999; Työministeriö, 2006a, b). Either the mother or the father (usually the mother) has the right to stay at home in order to take care of the child up until the day the child is three years old. After this three year period, provided the parent on family leave had a permanent work contract before the leave, they have the right to come back to the same position they left. In addition, subjective rights to child day care and also leave to care for a sick child have statutory force and enable women to participate in work. All in all, in many cases pregnancy gives rise to extra costs and duties for employers.

This is the context in which various discourses are enacted. The discourses that are identified are related to this, but also to general cultural values. Furthermore, every single organization where the participants work plays a significant role in how they create meanings.

Findings

In this study, the focus was on the followers' way of representing the nature of their dyadic relationship with their immediate leader during their pregnancy (subject positioning) and through which discourses women describe why the subject positioning was as it was. Both leader and follower play a significant role when it comes to the representations of the leader-follower relationship. In addition, in this paper, "leaders" were defined as individuals who influence employee's daily tasks and evoke emotional responses in employees, even when they are not doing

activities (e.g. inspiring employees to achieve a vision) which are conventionally related to leadership (Dasborough, 2006).

Subject positions and related discourses

The subject positions that women took in the interviews included, for example; “mother-to-be”, “employee” or “specialist in own work”. This study focused on positions which were represented within the talk about the nature of leader-follower relationships during pregnancy. Two main subject positions within the leader-follower relationships could be identified; these were:

1. dismissed; and
2. accepted.

“Accepted” positioning was related either to representations where everything was the same as before the pregnancy or to a situation where the relationship had developed in a positive way. The “dismissed” subject positioning represented the relationship between the leader and the follower in a negative light due to pregnancy.

Previous findings about working women and pregnancy are in line with these subject positions insofar as pregnancy does not always create negative issues at work, but can improve the relationship between leader and follower (Buzzanell and Liu, 2007; Mäkelä, 2007). However, women took up different positions within single interviews, and the quality of their leader-follower relationships did not show up as being as well-defined as is usually the case in leadership studies, e.g. within LMX studies. Positioning varied from one situation to another, and this gives rise to questions about the complex nature of leader-follower relationships in general.

While constantly positioning themselves, women commonly reproduced explanation to the positioning within their talk. Analyzing these subject positions together with the “whys” gives us an opportunity to understand what kind of discourses are vital with pregnant working women in organizational settings. The three discourses that were identified when women explained their subject positions within the dyadic relationship with the leader were “similarity”, “expectations”, and “rooting deeper”.

Next the study presents these subject positions and related discourses with quotations from interviews.

The subject position – “accepted”

Each of the interviewed women positioned themselves “accepted” at least once when they talked about the relationship with their leader during their pregnancies. They then represented the relationship being somehow either stable or developed in a positive manner compared to the situation before pregnancy.

When women positioned themselves as “accepted”, the dominant discourse explaining it was “similarity”. It was the term used when something was represented to connect leader and follower. Most often, similarity comprised talk about the family situation and gender but talk about age was also part of this discourse. With “accepted” positioning, the similarity in terms of family status was dominant. From the participants' talk, maternity, as shared experience, emerged as a strong single issue that they used to explain the relationship with female leaders during pregnancy. Male leaders' parenthood also existed within this discourse.

Common attitudes and general discussion about femininity and masculinity may also relate to this “similarity” discourse. Pregnancy, motherhood and family strongly represent feminine values and are thus here also part of that general discussion about societies, work-life and family roles. Even in Scandinavian countries, for example Finland, where national culture has been suggested to be more feminine than in many other countries (Hofstede, 1984; Suutari et al., 2002), the discourse that defines the role of mother as main care taker of small children is vital. The dominant role of this discourse is also interesting in the sense that in work life, where very different people work together, and where such diversification is increasing all the time, the talk about similarity between the leader and follower is still strong. Furthermore, these similarities are probably also presented in new ways when the parties' life situation changes. As indicated here, when a follower is pregnant, she talks about her leader's family status, and that raises the question whether she has used that before her pregnancy. The vitality of this discourse suggests that people may see similarity in different ways in different situations. Therefore, as well as a workforce in general being diverse, it is important that supervisors' positions are held by a range of different people as well.

The quotation from Maija illustrates the use of the similarity discourse with “accepted” positioning. This quote is also interesting in the sense that this woman has been pregnant again during the interview period and has had different supervisors during her pregnancies. She positions herself differently within these two leader-follower relationships and another quote from her is presented later. Here, she relates to the parenthood very strongly and also highlights other similarities between her and the supervisor:

My present boss, she has three daughters herself, they are adults already [...] She said several times at the workplace that 'now remember, rest, and don't do this and that, try to delegate those jobs to her. [...] She had a particular background herself in that she has given birth to three daughters and worked with these same assignments, has also been unemployed and she has experience (in that work) (Maija, two pregnancies and two supervisors during the interview period).

Just as “similarity” discourse was dominant and commonly used with “accepted” positioning, another strong discourse was also identified from the participants' interviews. “Accepted” positioning was explained using the “rooting deeper” discourse. This discourse was identified from the participants' talk when they represented their current understanding (including the time before pregnancy) about deeper level issues. This discourse included representations about, for example, attitudes, values and personality. Through this discourse, leader/follower relationships located to continuum, where the pregnancy period was just a part of an ongoing reality, having roots.

The “rooting deeper” discourse had emotional elements. This discourse was very subjective and the talk often comprised representations of participants' personal feelings more than objective descriptions of a person and values. Descriptions of leaders' personal traits, such as friendliness, warmth, etc. were part of this “rooting deeper” discourse and positive terms were used with “accepted” positioning. In addition, representation of leaders' values appeared, especially when it came to family. The participants' own personality and behavior was sometimes used within this discourse too.

This quotation from Laura shows how the discourse of “rooting deeper” is expressed with an “accepted” subject position:

She has derived motivation from her profession, but also from being a person who encourages women's careers and advances equality. Children and family are at the personal level in first place for people; she doesn't diminish that in any way. Her opinion is, that it is wonderful that young people have children but also that they will come back to work. That certainly comes out

in the way she has reacted to this pregnancy (Laura, first child, worked with this leader less than one year).

Beside these two discourses, this study also identifies a third discourse which it terms “expectations”. Through this discourse the subject position “accepted” was attributed to representations of positive organizational (supervisory) presuppositions about pregnancy. It was not very commonly used among “accepted” positioning, but when it emerged, participants painted a picture of a fair and/or desirable ethical leader-follower relationship when talking about how leaders' reacted to them as a person-pregnancy representing their private life situation. This discourse also represented well the dyadic and active nature of the relationship; open communication and the possibility of anticipating each other's actions in an organization can bring positive outcomes for both parties.

The next quotation from Tiina shows how she uses an “expectations” discourse as an explanation when she positioned herself as “accepted”, but also how she speculates and compares it with some other (pregnancy) situations in her organization:

Int: Was there any difference between the time before your pregnancy and now. Did something happen in the relationship between you and your boss?
Tiina: Not exactly, no. Because my leader knew that we had been trying for another baby for a while and to a certain degree, she already thought that I would leave soon. I have heard about situations where this issue has been a bit of a surprise, and there were some problems. But in our relationship, there was nothing, nothing I noticed. But she has probably got accustomed to the fact that that I won't be there for long. I bet, that if I now would get pregnant, after having announced to everybody that we are not having any more children, there would be something to say (Tiina, two children, both pregnancies in the same organization and under the same supervisor).

All in all, the subject position “accepted” represented positive leader-follower relationship situations during followers' pregnancies in organizations and work life. “Accepted” positioning related to several explanations and three discourses identified from participants' talk, “similarity” and “rooting deeper” being stronger than “expectations”.

Next, the paper presents findings on another way in which women positioned themselves, “dismissed”.

The subject position – “dismissed”

Not all of the women positioned themselves as “dismissed” but the ones who did took that position several times during the interviews. As the “dismissed” position represented the leader-follower relationship in a negative light due to follower's pregnancy, it was understandable that women took this position strongly. Leadership literature argues that “negative interactions with a leader are of more concern for employees” and thus are more commonly articulated by followers' as well (Dasborough, 2006, p. 166). However, it is important to notice that women adopting these “dismissed” positions also adopted an “accepted” position (at least once) during the interviews. The three identified discourses on explanations of positioning were similar to the “accepted” positioning, but the intensity of discourses differed between these subject positions.

The dominant discourse which women related their to their “dismissed” subject position was “expectations”. Women related this discourse to the “dismissed” position using phrases like “shock” or “surprise” about their pregnancy in working life. The “dismissed” position was strongly related to discrimination, practical decision making and acting through the “expectations” discourse. Furthermore, this discourse was commonly identified from the exchanges about the timing of the pregnancy announcement. This was important in the sense that the “expectations” discourse included the real time period when the leader had the opportunity to react to the forthcoming leave.

The “expectations” discourse included issues like the age of the participant, the number or age of her current children, and tenure within the organization. If women were closer to their forties, they reported that they defined their pregnancy as being a surprise to the leader and said that they weren't expected to become pregnant any more. Also, when a woman already had quite young children, they explained that the leader did not expect a new pregnancy yet. Furthermore, if the participant had a very short organizational tenure and/or had had a relatively short working history with her leader, they said that the leader typically didn't expect the pregnancy.

Pregnancy-related discrimination practices have been the focus of several previous studies concerning pregnancy and work. Important issues related to discrimination and other unethical behavior are extra work and costs caused by pregnancy (Young and Morrel, 2005; Liu and Buzzanell, 2004). There were both similarities and dissimilarities with previous research within this discourse. For example, while earlier studies suggest that the youth of pregnant women is a reason for discrimination (James, 2004; Adams et al., 2005), within this discourse the “right” age for pregnancy – an age when they were supposed to have children was

common. This relates to much more general structures of society. Nowadays, women start a family later than some decades ago, and starting a family is usually well planned and intentional (Miller, 2005). Relatively young women, or women close to their forties, are probably not expected to become pregnant, and this may cause bafflement among others, but also themselves.

The following quotation illustrates the “dismissed” positioning and relates it to the expectations discourse:

Int: How has your supervisor taken your pregnancy?

Susanna: Mm [...] rather fine. He hasn't [...] mm [...] he bowed to this fact. I remember once when we were in some (informal) office meeting he asked me, he was drunk then, if I had been planning to have a fourth child. I suppose that he thought, as I already have three and I am at this age, that I do not want any more children, and I thought that way myself too. But you can change your mind [...] (Susanna, fourth child, first pregnancy in this organization and under this leader).

The “expectations” discourse was dominant in the relation with the “dismissed” subject position, but the other two discourses, “similarity” and “rooting deeper”, were both clearly present and rather equal in strength. Next, the study considers the “similarity” discourse.

When a “similarity” discourse was used with “dismissed” positioning, the women's talk was of dissimilarity or a low level of similarity with leader. As mentioned earlier, this discourse included issues like family status, gender and age. In using a “similarity” discourse, women highlighted the relevance of demographics, private life and family in organizational settings. Its use also represented how “similarity” might include multiple phenomena, probably consisting of different elements in different circumstances, here parenthood is especially emphasized.

An interesting example of how this discourse existed in participants talk can be seen from the next citation from Maija. In the previous section, Maija positioned herself under “accepted” and used a “similarity” discourse there and this quotation represents her “dismissed” positioning. She uses a similarity discourse strongly in relation to both positions:

Well, I was annoyed at my colleague, who was going through these infertility treatments, and I know those are hard [...] But she was a master at bullying (me). [...] The leader should have stepped in. But he did not, he was a man, he was not interested and he did not understand. He is childless himself, that was it [quotation 1 comes from here] And this previous leader (who she is talking about here), he was not bad either but probably didn't

comprehend these matters (Maija, two pregnancies and two supervisors during the interview period).

Whereas the “similarity” discourse is related as an explanation to a “dismissed” position – reflecting followers' and leaders' dyadic (dis)similarity – the third discourse, “rooting deeper”, was more subjective and emotional in nature. Within the participants' accounts, current understanding about deep-level issues was one important part of the descriptions that was present. When the attitudes, values or personality of the leader were used to explain the dyadic relationship during pregnancy, women's expressions and the words they used very were negative within a “dismissed” position.

The next quotation again comes from Susanna. It illustrates one example of the use of a “rooting deeper” discourse and also shows us how the same participant uses different discourses in her talk:

Int: What about the things you have said about your leader, have there been any connections to his attitudes towards your pregnancy?

Susanna: Well, he feels uncomfortable with the changes happening in daily routines, and it certainly made him uncomfortable when I became pregnant. His character and attitudes became visible. It would be better if nobody left and no new people come, that everything remains stable (Susanna, fourth child, first pregnancy in this organization and leader).

This discourse can also represent the dichotomy of pregnancy and work, just as with inter-role conflicts between work and family in general (Eby et al., 2005). On the other hand, pregnant women go through a transition to motherhood (Gatrell, 2004; Miller, 2005; Millward, 2006), and at the same time life goes on as usual, her working life included. Achieving an understanding of the changing life situation that pregnancy creates, may be challenging for both leader and follower. In the interviews, participants talked about psychological, physical and hormonal changes they had, and changes that pregnancy caused to their own behavior and personality. However, they did not relate those to the relationship quality, but instead used more general issues to explain it.

In summary, different descriptions about important issues that were related to subject positioning were presented within participants' talk. Both leader and follower emerged as important elements within the leader-follower relationship and were present in discourses about the nature of that relationship during followers' pregnancies. In addition, organizational issues, such as other members of the organization or the organization culture, also sometimes arose but were not the focus of this paper.

Conclusions and discussion

Pregnancy has an important role in work life (Gatrell, 2004, 2006, 2007; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005) and the role of the immediate leader is significant when a working woman is pregnant (Halpert et al., 1993; Major, 2004; Davis et al., 2005; Gregory, 2001; Liu and Buzzanell, 2004; Millward, 2006; Buzzanell and Liu, 2007). Despite this, there are very few studies in management literature concerning issues of leadership and relations between leader and follower when a woman is pregnant. Thus, further research is needed (Buzzanell and Liu, 2007). From these standpoints, the aim of this study was to explore how followers position themselves within the leader-follower relationship during their pregnancy and what kind of discourses were used to explain that positioning. To achieve these aims, this paper considered dyadic relationships between leaders and members as a discursive phenomenon (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Grant and Iedema, 2005). Here, the interest was on positioning and discourses that are produced by followers about their pregnancy periods and relationships with their leaders during that time. The study identified two different forms of subject positioning when participants talked about the quality of their leader-follower relationship during their pregnancies. Either they described themselves as “accepted” and then they represented the relationship as having been the same or developed in a positive way due to pregnancy. The other positioning was “dismissed”, and related to negative representations of the leader-follower relationship due to pregnancy. In terms of the subject positions, this paper identifies three discourses from the participants' talk. The first of the identified discourses was “similarity”. This discourse was dominant within the “accepted” positioning and related to a perceived similarity with the leader. Most often, “similarity” meant discussion about the family situation and gender. Some studies concerning pregnancy and work have suggested that women have more positive attitudes towards pregnancy than men do (Halpert et al., 1993). Within LMX theory, the similarity paradigm is one of the most widely used explanations when it comes to the quality of the relationship (Deluga and Perry, 1994; Somech, 2003).

Similarity attraction also appears to be relevant within exchanges in the context of pregnancy. However, LMX studies have suggested that surface level similarity (demographic characters) does not play such an important role within LMX (Hiller and Day, 2003). Here, this discourse relates strongly with demographical issues and has a dominant role in participants' talk. Talk of similarity in terms of parenthood and gender is probably the easiest, or most axiomatic, way to describe why participants felt they have been either “dismissed” or “accepted”. The “expectations” discourse is evident when women use issues relating to assumptions made about their pregnancy to explain their subject positions. Through this dis-

course women talk about categorization where they have been classified as possible maternity leave takers or not. It was a dominant discourse in relation to “dismissed” positioning, but did not have a very strong role within the “accepted” positioning. Huang and Iun (2006) suggest that leader-follower goal similarity is related to the quality of the LMX. Here, that assumption may show up in the way that pregnancy may (or is assumed to) change women's goals from organizational to more individual. When pregnancy is not anticipated by the leader, this new situation or unexpected dissimilarity with common goals may have an effect on the relationship. Moreover, the “expectations” discourse can also be seen as a way to construct a justification of and the right to a family and children, even though others (e.g. a leader) did not expect them at the time. At the same time, part of this discourse was about understanding the role of the leader in being responsible for resource utilization and organization. From this perspective, participants defined their own pregnancy and forthcoming leave as extra work for their leader.

The third discourse was entitled “rooting deeper”. It related to participants' existing emotional understanding of themselves and their leaders. It existed in a relation with both subject positions but was not in a dominant role in either. Within the “similarity” discourse women talked about demographics and other issues that can actually be measured. In “rooting deeper”, emotions and feelings were dominant. This can be seen as the same kind of distinction that LMX theorists have presented, namely surface level and deep-level similarities (Hiller and Day, 2003). In this study, both of these discourses were clearly present, but in contrast to earlier studies, the discourse that was seen to relate to surface level similarity was dominant, whereas other studies have argued that deep-level similarities have a more important role within these relationships. Within this “rooting deeper” discourse, pregnant women's work life and leader-follower relationships appeared as a continuum, where they saw the pregnancy period as just a part of their ongoing reality. This illustrates the importance of the quality of dyadic relationships in the long run. In addition, attribution theory suggests that people usually explain failure situations with external reasons and success with internal explanations (Weiner, 1986, 1995). Here, women usually talked about their leader's negative traits to explain adopting the “dismissed” position.

The findings presented above must be interpreted in view of the limitations of the study. Firstly, only women in follower positions were interviewed. Thus, this study reports only a partial view of what is happening in the workplace. Secondly, the methodology adopted in this study is quite new within leadership research, which has usually been studied using quantitative methods. Here, the aim was to show how women positioned themselves within the dyadic leader-follower relationship and what kind of discourses are vital when a pregnant woman explains

that positioning. This study contributed to our present knowledge about work life and diversity through the period around pregnancy. It also increased and broadened our understanding about dyadic relationships between leaders and followers in general. Several ideas for future research emerged and are outlined below.

Work life and pregnancy is a complex phenomenon and needs more attention. For instance, it could be valuable to study different experiences, like discrimination conducted by one's own supervisor, in more depth. It could also be useful to study relationships between leaders and followers in longitudinal settings to investigate the outcomes that different experiences cause. This study indicated that a discursive approach widens our understanding about how people can position themselves differently from one situation to another in organizational relationships. This could be a valuable study if undertaken at a more general level, for example within LMX dyads, taking into account both parties' perceptions and also the organizations' other members' points of view.

In conclusion, this study stresses the importance of increasing awareness about different work – family issues, especially pregnancy, in order to improve conditions for working women, but also to help supervisors and organizations better manage a dynamic work life. Awareness of expectations and how subject positions are adopted, may lead both working women and supervisors to rethink this paradox. Nowadays, women may face several difficulties, for example, being bypassed for promotion.

Family responsibilities may be one reason for this (Gatrell, 2004; Wiens-Tuers and Hill, 2002; de Luis Carnicer et al., 2003). For women, especially those of child-bearing age, these are tremendously important issues with regard to their work and career. Largely for this reason women are usually not very willing to share their plans about starting a family with their supervisors beforehand. Furthermore, it is arguable that the “similarity” and “rooting deeper” discourses allow both pregnant women and other members of organizations to understand the importance of promoting diversity (Sinclair, 2000) and justice in the workplace. This supports the need for organizations to value different people in recruitment and promotion activity (see also Schein, 2007), and also illustrates how a focus on higher quality leader-follower relationships can be rewarding during the changes that pregnancy involves.

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**CONGRATULATIONS AND GOODBYE?
PREGNANCY-RELATED DISCRIMINATION IN
PERSONAL NARRATIVES**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to shed light on different acts of pregnancy-related discrimination committed by the discriminated woman's immediate supervisor and to present how women make sense of this experience. The purpose is also to explore whether the quality of the leader-follower relationship is related to the sensemaking process. The research draws on five personal narratives, collected via two-round interviews conducted with women who were pregnant at the time of the first interview, and who had recently returned to work when interviewed for the second time. The narrative approach is adopted in data analysis. Representations of several kinds of discrimination practices existed within the narratives and even being a partner in a good quality leader-follower relationship did not protect women from pregnancy-related discrimination. However, sensemaking was more positive in nature amongst women involved in a high quality leader-follower relationship than those in a low-quality relationship.

Keywords: Pregnancy, Discrimination, Leadership, Narrative Approach

INTRODUCTION

Becoming a mother is a fundamental transition phase in a woman's life (Gatrell, 2005; 2007; Miller, 2005). Motherhood may change a woman's identity, affect her values and take her decision-making in a new direction (James, 2008). As the number of women in the labor market has grown radically (e.g. Scott & Brown, 2000), this phenomenon has become a more common part of working life, although it has been shown that there are differences between women's intentions to become mothers within different lines of business or occupations (Blackwell & Glover, 2008). In addition to the changes that individual women go through, the maternity process also affects organizations. These effects within organizations may be felt in the mobility of personnel, leaves of absence, the need to source

competent replacement labor and also at the interpersonal level between a woman and other members of the organization.

Research concerning the maternity process (i.e. pregnancy, maternity leave and return to work) has shown that this phase of life can be challenging for working women. First, it has been argued that women are disadvantaged in work life due to motherhood, or even potential motherhood (Knights & Richards, 2003; Gatrell, 2004, Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Kugelberg, 2006; Masser et al., 2007; Ainsworth & Cutcher, 2008). Pregnancy-related studies have reported different kinds of discrimination that women face when they become pregnant. When talking about any kind of discrimination, it also relates to ethical and moral questions (Collins & Wray-Bliss, 2005). Discrimination due to pregnancy has been found to be very common and to be related, for instance, to women's decisions about their return to work. In many cases, research has revealed that women who face discrimination during their pregnancies do not return to the same organization or to the same assignments they left (Davis et al., 2005).

There are a few studies that have addressed the process of maternity in working life from an individual perspective (Major, 2004; Millward, 2006; Buzzanell, 2003; Charlesworth & McDonald, 2007). For instance, it is suggested that during the maternity leave process some women experience unfair discrimination (Charlesworth & McDonald, 2007) stigmatization (Major, 2004) or are presented with an opportunity to make different choices and changes in their lives (Buzzanell, 2003).

Previous research on the maternity process has revealed that the role of the immediate supervisor has proven to be significant in the work-related experiences of their subordinates or followers during pregnancy (Halpert et al., 1993; Major, 2004; Davis et al. 2005; Gregory, 2001; Liu and Buzzanell, 2004; Millward, 2006; Buzzanell and Liu, 2007). Discrimination against pregnant working women is mostly carried out by their own supervisor or employer (Gregory, 2001). The period of pregnancy has also been found to be a multifaceted phenomenon that has the potential to change the quality of the leader-follower relationship (Mäkelä, 2007). There is some evidence that the perceived quality of the leader-follower relationship during pregnancy affects a woman's intentions regarding her return to work, and that the woman is more likely to be willing to return to work, either full- or part-time, when her experiences are positive (Houston and Gillian, 2003; Buzzanell and Liu, 2007). However, even though this phenomenon appears relevant for studies on management, there is a paucity of empirical work concerning women's experiences of pregnancy in the workplace (McDonlad et al., 2008).

In the management literature, leadership particularly, leader-follower relationships in organizations are studied at a more general level. Such relationships have been found to differ from each other in quality, ranging from high to low. Usually, it is argued that once the relationship quality has reached its status, it will remain stable. However, there is evidence that certain dynamics and changes are possible within relationship quality (Bauer & Green, 1996; Lee & Jablin, 1995). The quality of relationships have been found to be crucial to organizational efficacy as well as to an individual's well-being (McCuiston et al., 2004; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Indeed, the quality of leader-follower relationships has been found to be related to many different outcomes, such as followers' intentions to quit or stay in organization, and also to various measures of satisfaction (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Van Breuklen et al., 2006). Moreover, it is argued that leadership is a reciprocal process of meaning making and the core component of leadership is sense-making (Grisoni & Beeby, 2007). Even though these issues have traditionally been studied using quantitative research methods, adopting a qualitative approach may provide an opportunity to understand how people make sense of their intentions, perceptions and different experiences. Thus, it is possible that the quality of these relationships can also be found to affect these processes.

Even though discrimination by supervisors based on pregnancy appears to be a very common problem, research concerning different forms of discrimination and how women make sense of the discrimination experience is rare (Major, 2004, McDonald et al., 2008). Therefore, a sensemaking process – which is defined as “a process of interpretation and meaning production whereby people reflect on and interpret phenomena and produce intersubjective accounts” (Brown, 2005, p 1581 referring to Weick, 1995; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Miller, 2005) – provides a novel perspective from which to gain an in-depth understanding of those experiences.

In light of the above, this study aims to increase understanding about the forms of pregnancy-related discrimination which are committed by working women's immediate supervisors and to represent how women make sense of this kind of discrimination. The aim is also to explore whether the quality of the leader-follower relationship is related to the sensemaking process. The following section presents a short overview of the current literature on discrimination at work due to pregnancy and how the actions of supervisors relate to it. Sensemaking has been suggested to be a narrative process in itself (Weick, 1995) and thus this study adopts a narrative approach, presenting findings in an individual narrative form (cf. Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Kohonen, 2004; 2007). The paper ends with a discussion of the study's implications and some conclusions.

DISCRIMINATION DUE TO PREGNANCY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Pregnancies and leaves of absence have become a common phenomenon in organizations due to the increased proportion of women in the labor market. Organizational changes taking place due to pregnancy and maternity leave have also started to attract more attention in the research arena (for a review, see Mäkelä, 2005). For women, this period of their lives may become a challenging one in terms of their work-life balance but also their personal well-being, depending on what kind of treatment they face from within their organizations. From the organization's point of view, it may be a question about the reliability of its employees, that is to say, how much pregnancy and maternity leaves restrict working women's ability to perform their tasks and how they perform in general.

There is substantial evidence that pregnancy is seen as an encumbrance to organizations (Gueutal & Taylor, 1991; James, 2004; Chester & Kleiner, 2001; Kugelberg, 2006). Discrimination and inappropriate behavior toward pregnant working women are unfortunately common. Almost half of all working women are found to have experienced tangible discrimination, such as denial of training opportunities, changes to job descriptions, criticism about performance or appearance, reduced working hours, and dismissal without good reason after the announcement of pregnancy (Adams et al., 2005; Gregory, 2001; Davis et al., 2005; McDonald et al., 2008). Intangible discrimination, such as comments and remarks made due to pregnancy also occur (Adams et al., 2005; McDonald et al., 2008). Somewhat surprisingly, even though almost half of the women studied reported that they had suffered from some form of discrimination, the majority of them felt that the way they had been treated during their pregnancies had been fair (Adams et al., 2005). That study did not discuss these findings in more depth, but suggested that overall perceptions regarding treatment during pregnancy was positive, only if 'lesser forms' of negative treatment had occurred. Another qualitative study (Davis et al., 2005) that focused specifically on the women who had experienced discrimination mentioned that there are 'grey areas' – situations when their treatment was unfair, but they themselves empathized with their employers' need to prioritize the business.

Discrimination has been found to be related to problems with an individual manager or colleague, and acts of discrimination towards pregnant workers are committed mostly by their own supervisor or employer (Davis et al., 2005; Gregory, 2001). Managers have even been found to be prepared to defend their decisions when unacceptable behavior related to pregnancy occurs (Adams et al., 2005; Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). Discrimination manifests itself in criticism about performance or appearance, reduced working hours, and dismissal without good

reason after the announcement of pregnancy (Gregory, 2001). The treatment women face in the workplace during their pregnancy and leave of absence is found to affect their decisions regarding their return to paid work and resumption of their career in general (Judiesh & Lyness, 1999; Houston & Marks, 2003; Buzzanell & Liu, 2007). Women are more willing to return to work, either full- or part-time, when they experience support from work, including the support of a supervisor (Houston & Marks, 2003).

Buzzanell and Liu's (2007) study that focused on maternity leave as a gendered conflict management process, created two groups retrospectively based on interviews conducted, and found that if women themselves feel encouraged they also sustain positive relationships with their leaders and return to the same employer after their leave. Furthermore, the same study showed that if women consider themselves discouraged, there is a high possibility that they will quit their organizations after their maternity leave. However, whilst the study emphasizes the importance of leader-follower relationships, it does not focus specifically on those relationships or on how women relate the quality of leader-follower relationships to their experiences. Therefore, some perspectives of leader-follower relationships in organizations are reviewed next.

Leader-follower relationships affecting followers' experiences

Dyadic relationships between a leader and each of his or her followers are found to differ from each other. The relationship quality is argued to range from high to low, and based on that, followers are divided into those who are within the supervisors' in group and those who are part of the out-group (Liden & Maslyn, 1998, see also Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser, 1999 for a review). These arguments are based on the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen, Novak & Sommerkamp, 1982). Once developed, the quality of the LMX relationships is usually argued to remain stable over time, but contradicting views have been presented and there is evidence that changes are possible (Bauer & Green, 1996; Lee & Jablin, 1995). The quality of these relationships has been found to have an effect on, for instance, followers' emotions, intentions, perceptions and on their actual behavior (Dasbrough, 2006; see Vatanen, 2003). Moreover, interactions between leaders and their followers have been found to be emotional in nature; leaders' behavior engendering both positive and negative emotional responses from followers. These emotional responses are argued to contribute to the positive attitudinal and behavioral consequences associated with high quality LMX relationships (Dasbrough, 2006).

Taken as a whole, research on leader-follower relationships has shown that the quality of the relationship influences a follower's emotions and may have several other different consequences. Furthermore, literature concerning pregnancy discrimination at work has shown that issues concerning interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers are salient. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research that focuses on individual sensemaking processes in instances of discrimination and how the quality of a dyadic relationship is related to those processes.

This study makes a contribution by representing different forms of discrimination conducted by women's direct supervisors and increases our understanding of women's sensemaking during this form of discrimination. This study also explores whether the quality of the leader-follower relationship is related to the sensemaking process. Utilizing longitudinal data, collected from two-round interviews, (the first conducted with women who were pregnant and the second conducted shortly after they had returned to work) is exceptional in both pregnancy discrimination and also LMX research. The chosen narrative approach is discussed next, and it is this approach which also provides a novel perspective to both areas of research.

THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

Narrating is part of human life. An especially well developed skill of human beings is the use of language. People organize and share their knowledge and understanding through their use of words and different stories (Bruner, 1990). There are several ways in which narratives are used by researchers. One widely recognized definition is that narratives are talk organized around consequential events and in this sense, narratives are always answering the question "and then what happened" (Riessman, 1993, 2002). This consequentiality or the plot of the narrative follows "either the sequence beginning-middle-end or the sequence situation-transformation-situation" (Weick, 1995). Furthermore, narratives are seen as a form of deriving meaning or sensemaking structure to organize the significance of events and human actions into a whole (Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1990; Riessman, 1993).

The world is full of stories, waiting for listeners. By sharing their stories, people want or try to share their knowledge and opinions on life and their attitude to it. At the same time, in putting into words events that have happened (or may happen in the future), the narrator creates his or her own world and understanding of it. Within narrative analysis, the focus is on what is being spoken, but also on the manner of speaking (Hytti, 2005). Speaking is never a neutral process. There is

always a certain audience to whom the stories are told. The people in the audience are, in a certain way, “co-authors” of the story, because of who they are, and how they interact with the teller during the narration process. By telling the story, the narrator is also representing the way he or she wants to be seen by others, and that is, usually, as a good person (Riessman, 1993; Hytti, 2003).

Narratives have been found useful in sensemaking of challenging transitions in individuals’ lives, including motherhood (Riessman, 1993; Miller, 2005), and one can say that facing pregnancy-related discrimination by one’s supervisor may be one of those. It has been suggested that women’s experiences and the related actions concerning work-life issues in general arising after childbirth should be studied through in-depth narratives created from the women’s actual life experiences and the studies repeated over a period of time (Cartwright, 2004, 33). Authentic experiences of individuals would become better recognized through understanding the meaning making of personal narratives (Kohonen, 2004; 2007) and the complexity, for example, of their sensemaking processes in an organizational context would be better understood. There is an emerging interest in using narratives to study leadership in organizations (Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005; see Fairhurst, 2007) and it is argued that this would be a suitable approach to studying leader-follower relationships as well (Fairhurst & Hamlet, 2003; Fairhurst, 2007).

Even though previous studies on LMX draw heavily on the quantitative research tradition, the narrative roots of studying leader-member exchange relationships do exist (Fairhurst & Hamlett, 2003, Fairhurst, 2007, 120). Rediscovering the value of narratives in understanding LMX relationships provides an opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding of the consequences of relationship quality than a snapshot given by a quantitative measurement scale usually does (Fairhurst, 2007). Storytelling enables individuals committed to LMX to reflect discursively upon their experiences and make sense of the relationship in communication (Fairhurst, 2007, 122). This approach to LMX has been applied in earlier studies (e.g. Leponiemi, forthcoming).

The storytellers – gathering the data

This study interprets the personal narratives of five women who have faced discrimination from their immediate supervisors due to pregnancy. When initially gathering the data, I did not particularly seek out stories of discrimination, but was looking for participants for interviews about pregnancy and work in general. 38 women contacted me voluntarily after seeing my advertisement on the internet,

in a family magazine or at a healthcare organization for pregnant women. Twenty women were interviewed for the first time when they were pregnant and for the second time about one and half years later (one participant wanted to take part via e-mail). I conducted all of the interviews, in Finnish, and therefore all quotations presented in this paper are translations. Loosely structured thematic interviews were carried out, tape-recorded, and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. In the first interview round, five of the women reported that they had been treated by their direct supervisors in a way that could be interpreted as discriminatory or involving inappropriate practices.

Representation of participants' experiences is a multilevel process (Riessman, 1993), including firstly their experience and telling it to me, then verbatim transcription of the interviews. For a long time, I tried to find a tighter or simplified way to represent how my interviewees were narrating their experiences, however I found that the richness and uniqueness of these stories would have disappeared if I had forced them into some classifications or structured themes. Therefore, five individual narratives are presented in this paper. Analysis included several rounds of reading, and decisions about what were included and what was excluded. The next phase of analysis was, bearing in mind my research question, to organize the stories one by one in order to represent the participants' stories in an individual narrative form. I also selected quotes (that are here translated from Finnish to English) from their transcribed interview texts. Narratives were rewritten several times in order to make them readable and interesting. The fifth and final level of representation comes when the reader encounters these written narratives (Riessman, 1993).

The next two individual narratives, discussed together with the three other personal narratives, represent my interpretation of these women's stories which they told me during the two interview rounds. The narratives are created in order to represent how women make sense of the discrimination by their supervisors due to their pregnancy. Furthermore, through these narratives, the quality of the leader-follower relationship and how these women relate it to their sensemaking process are also discussed. To guarantee the anonymity of the participants, all names used are pseudonyms.

*Individual narratives**Making sense of discrimination in Mary's narratives*

Mary, 27, was expecting her first child and was working as a Product Manager in a sector of business that had been going through big structural changes during the last few years. She had worked in the same organization for three years and had a permanent work contract. Mary had worked with the same supervisor all that time. Mary defined their dyadic relationship before the pregnancy as 'neutral and not especially close', which in terms of LMX can be understood as talk about a low-quality relationship. The company where Mary was working had about 150 permanent employees and that rose seasonally to about 300. Her own supervisor had about 25 subordinates and five of them were working in the same department as Mary. The company had recently made over ten people redundant and was in negotiations about a new joint venture. Due to the uncertain organizational situation, Mary had looked for a new job, but when she became aware of being pregnant, she did not continue that search.

The first interview was conducted by phone according to Mary's wishes. I called her on her private phone in her free time. At first, Mary sounded a bit guarded but during the interview she became relaxed and talked openly with me. At the end of the interview I asked her if I can come back to her later, after the maternity leave and ask how life is going. She agreed, but when I contacted her by e-mail about one and half years later she was no longer willing to give an interview. Instead, she wrote me an e-mail, a written narrative, about her present work life situation. Against this background, the following narratives are analyzed to reveal how Mary makes sense of the discrimination she experienced due to her pregnancy.

Announcement as a turning point

Mary starts her story about working life and pregnancy by dichotomizing it to the time before and time after the pregnancy announcement and makes that division several times in her narrative. Before announcing the pregnancy in the organization Mary tells that she hasn't had any problems there, but after the announcement, troubles with her supervisor started immediately.

“Int: If we think about your supervisor, how would you describe the relationship between you and her?”

Mary: Do you mean now or before I told her about my pregnancy?”

Mary made her announcement about three months before the expected day of delivery, about two months before the beginning of her maternity leave. Mary's supervisor reacted negatively towards her announcement. The announcement situation itself was a very personal experience and probably also an embarrassing situation to Mary. Mary makes sense of the event in her narrative in different ways, ending up representing it as a funny episode. In her story, at the beginning of the interview she avoids speaking about that event itself and refers to it just using single words. Later, when the atmosphere in the interview situation became more confidential, Mary talked about the situation openly. Lastly, she juxtaposes the situation and disguises it with humor. However, her tone and the way how she speaks about this situation does not give the impression that Mary has taken this situation to be very funny at all. The representation of the announcement situation is presented through the following quotations.

“However, she can snort about [my pregnancy in meetings] like ‘we haven’t enough time to get a replacement for you’ and these kinds of issues that she said once I had told.”

Later she tells: “at first when I told her, she was saying things like ‘what does this mean?’ I answered her that ‘in addition to the fact that I am going to become a mother; the company needs to take on a replacement person for me as soon as possible’. Her reaction was, ‘Aha’. Then, after a short visit to her office, she came back and said ‘oh, that is why your skin has been looking so bad, and now, after you had managed to lose weight, it will all be put back on’”.

At the end of the interview, she comes back to that situation again: “Well, it is a negative [experience] but nowadays it makes me laugh, my supervisor’s reaction towards my announcement. When she said that ‘that’s why you have got such bad skin and now you will put weight back on’, that is one single event [that has stuck in my mind]. But it makes me laugh more than anything. It is more of a funny issue than a negative one. But at first it felt quite bad.”

As shown below, Mary describes this pregnancy announcement situation at first in a very defensive manner and it becomes clear that she has not been willing to share the information about her pregnancy in the organization for several reasons at a very early phase. She even uses the word ‘detect’ in this context. Mary tells that the main reason for keeping the pregnancy a private issue was her negative presuppositions about her supervisor’s behaviors. Mary also cites the timing of on-going joint venture negotiations and changes that might cause in the organization. Mary defends and explains her own decision about the timing of the announcement. She gives several explanations and points out that she has behaved correctly, also referring to legislation.

“well... at first, it was fine. I wasn't detected very early [pregnancy went unnoticed by colleagues]. In fact I told them quite late, three months before [the expected day of delivery]. That is two months before [when you have to inform your employer], according to the law. I told them rather late, but everybody else except my supervisor was happy [...] she has behaved in a sort of jealous way and has made my work life complicated.”

In Mary's narrative, the pregnancy announcement situation played a role as a turning point, an event which made her private life also an organizational matter. In her story that turning point was negative in nature in terms of her immediate supervisor's reaction. The supervisor reacted negatively to the announcement and this kind of behavior, rude and impolite comments, is one form of pregnancy discrimination.

Discrimination and coping with it

After the pregnancy announcement the supervisor made Mary's work life “complicated”, as Mary says. At first, when she starts telling about the problems which she has faced, she makes sense of different events and issues in short overviews of several single situations and intertwines these to her strong personal presuppositions about what pregnancy might mean for her work life in the future. At first, Mary mentions disagreement with her supervisor about bonus payments and accumulations. In Mary's narrative, these events are represented as bullying, not a financial burden to the company or even less to her supervisor herself. In working life, financial losses are found to be very typical to pregnant workers and one form of discrimination.

“Well, after I told her that I was pregnant, I have had to argue with her. Everything like ‘we won't pay your bonuses’, and she has surprisingly forgotten that last year they promised to increase my bonus. And issues like that.”

Mary also talks about other specific work life situations after the pregnancy announcement when her supervisor has acted in an inappropriate manner. The supervisor has taken over some of Mary's work assignments and did them herself when Mary was away. “Incorrectly”, as Mary mentions and in doing so questions her supervisor's professionalism, which she does several times during the interview. She also removed Mary from several work-related e-mail lists and no longer informed her about issues closely related to her work assignments. These discriminatory acts Mary presented as the supervisor's attempts to belittle Mary's performance, not only to Mary herself but also to other people in the organization.

In Mary's narrative, pregnancy and maternity leave are construed as a risk to Mary's own work life and career, but also as an opportunity for the supervisor to edge Mary out of the organization. Throughout the whole story Mary represents herself as a diligent and competent worker, whose performance has not been negatively affected by the pregnancy. Once during the interview she speculates that she would probably have not been very willing to do any extra assignment besides her own if her supervisor would have asked her, using the following metaphor (which is presented here as a direct translation from Finnish):

“in that case, I probably would have been a bit like having [devils] horns on my head...”

Using this kind of expression, it seems that she verbalizes her own willingness to get back at her supervisor in a humorous way in order to keep the audience ‘on her side’ throughout the story, not emphasizing the supervisor instead. The supervisor has the role of the ‘villain’ in Mary's story. She is represented as a jealous, unqualified, unstable snob who has intentionally caused problems and made Mary feel bad. When it comes to discrimination, Mary represents herself as a victim of her supervisor's arbitrary decision-making and wielding of power, but she also positions herself as being an active and forceful actor in an unfair situation.

Power relations play an important role in Mary's narrative. Mary tells that she contacted the CEO and legal representative of the company's personnel to resolve the problems with bonuses. This can be understood as Mary's way to use power in the organization and get help with this discrimination situation. On the other hand, Mary also represents this as a risky decision which she just had to do without worrying about her supervisor's opinion and anger that this caused. Mary points out in her narrative that this act especially annoyed her supervisor and may be one reason why her supervisor was willing to push her out of the organization in the long run. This part of her story also represents the Finnish national and organizational context where power distances are rather low and it is possible to contact upper management relatively easily.

“Within the same e-mail I wrote to her that ‘when I inform our legal representative [...] this will not do me any favors in your eyes, but neither did telling you about my pregnancy. Now I have had enough of you walking over me’. It was a rather acrimonious e-mail, but still decorous. Then, when she had read the e-mail, she yelled to me from the next door ‘Mary, come here, I have something to say to you!’”

Mary tells that she often communicated with her supervisor via e-mail even though their rooms were next to each other because “the supervisor is so often out of her office and travelling, and it is easier this way”. In her story, after these acts

of discrimination, communication via e-mail seemed to have a new function; it provided documentary evidence about the on-going situation if needed. When Mary was telling her story to me, she was still unsure if she will get the bonuses about which they had been arguing with the supervisor. She also had many suspicions about whether some new problems would emerge before the maternity leave.

Mary was frustrated about the situation that none of the decisions concerning the organization's future and her own assignments had been confirmed before she had been forced to tell about her pregnancy in the organization due to her visible belly. Mary also felt uncomfortable about the supervisor's accusations about not being given sufficient time to reorganize Mary's work. I found that she has been wondering if the issues would have gone differently if she had told about her pregnancy earlier.

Not only was Mary upset and angry about the discrimination from her own supervisor, but Mary's narrative is also focused on her fears and anxieties about her future in the organization. Even though Mary does not talk much about becoming a mother and the forthcoming change in her life in that sense, her story can also be understood as the narrative of destabilization of one's basic elements of security in life. Mary is preparing herself for the unknown of motherhood (Miller, 2005), but at the same time, she has to worry about the unknown of her working life, professional identity and basic need to earn a living as being at risk. In light of this, Mary did not view returning to the organization as unthinkable, but when I asked about her thoughts on her return from maternity leave she mentioned that she had also considered the possibility of looking for a new job during the leave.

Second narrative

After about one and a half years, I contacted Mary by e-mail and she told me shortly that she had changed employer. At first she agreed to my request for a second interview, but none of the dates I suggested suited her. Finally, five months and a few alternative date suggestions later, she wrote to me: "I apologize, but I have got over this and I don't want to dwell on it anymore". Even though her decision bothered me for a long time (Mary was the only one of my twenty interviewees who did not want to participate in the second round interview), I later found her personal narrative especially interesting because Mary's unwillingness to participate in another interview is part of her personal narration.

Mary's written narrative was not very long but it was her representation of issues that happened after our discussion. This narrative was chronologically construed and related mainly to one episode; changes that had happened to her job description. Mary does not directly refer to her previous narrative but it was written as a continuation of it. I had earlier sent the transcription of the first interview to her for review and the possibility to comment on it if needed. She mentions in her e-mail that she had read the transcript and thus, I suppose, she wrote this story after reminding herself about the story told previously.

In this narrative, Mary makes sense of the discrimination as a process that continued after her leaving for maternity leave and also after her return. As earlier, the 'villain' of the story was the supervisor. Within this narrative, Mary used very skeptical and accusatory expressions about her supervisor. Mary represents the supervisor as an unfair person and points out that the supervisor had lied to others in the organization. In this narrative, Mary also uses almost the same words as in her previous narrative when she starts telling about what happened.

Within the first narrative (interview) Mary represented her fears and suspicions about the forthcoming situation in the organization: "In fact, she is planning new job descriptions for us and I bet that I will be edged out my own assignments and then it can be said, when I come back from my maternity leave, we don't have a job for you anymore. I have this kind of feeling at the moment."

The second narrative starts by her writing: "Just when I had left for my maternity leave, my supervisor announced that she had agreed together with me about changes to my job description and informed about this in the personnel newsletter. In fact, we had not made any agreements about it and my supervisor said that I will be doing assignments which did not exist when I returned."

Mary represented her own situation as problematic and again, as in her earlier narration, representations about power relations existed. Here, the narration referred to the supervisor's opportunity to share or withhold information in the organization and Mary herself acting in the light of the information that the supervisor was willing to share.

"When I returned from my maternity leave I wasn't informed about this change to my job description, but I continued working with my previous assignments (sharing those with my replacement person, who had by then been employed on a permanent basis), believing that I had my own job. [...] I became aware about these changes in my assignments accidentally during official negotiations with the employer."

After that, Mary turns her narration to other changes which have occurred in the organization and shows how she lost her possibility to use power as earlier when she contacted the CEO directly, who she knew beforehand. She ends her narrative by writing:

“and also the owners of the company had changed during my leave and my supervisor had turned the new management against me before they had even met me. I resigned from the company [about five months after the return] and changed my place of work”.

All in all, Mary’s narratives are representations of pregnancy being a turning point in her working life, especially when it comes to her supervisor. Mary did not represent the relationship between the supervisor and Mary as ever being close or high in quality, but the way she narrates about it after these discriminatory practices have been committed by the supervisor, the telling is very negative in nature. There was another woman participating in my study, Cathy, whose story was of course very personal and unique itself, but had several similar elements as Mary’s story. Cathy’s personal narratives, told within two interviews, are not analyzed here as a whole and put into an individual narrative form, but I would like to highlight some points of view of her narratives and reflect these to Mary’s narrative.

Cathy was 37, expecting her second child. She worked as a Marketing Manager in a small, family-owned company from its start up for almost two years when we discussed this for the first time. The way Cathy talked about the dyadic work relationship with her supervisor was very official and I interpreted their relationship as being low in quality. In fact, I sent an earlier version of her individual narrative to her and she agreed with my interpretation of the relationship quality. Just as in Mary’s narrative, Cathy’s narrative also had a clear turning point that was highlighted several times during the interview and it was used to dichotomize time and events ‘before’ and ‘after’ it. In Cathy’s narrative, the turning point was pregnancy-related sick leave and her absence that caused negative reactions from her supervisor. Cathy pointed out both tangible and intangible discriminatory practices which her supervisor committed, and just as in Mary’s narrative, conflicts about bonuses and other financial issues were present. Differently from Mary’s story, Cathy talked about events very directly from the very beginning of the interview, but similar to Mary, referred to the ‘turning point’ several times during both of the interviews.

Like Mary, Cathy also represented herself as a competent and good worker and her supervisor as a ‘villain’, a person, a supervisor and an entrepreneur. It was also interesting to notice that these two women (and no one else from all the other

participants) used the same metaphor in their stories; the phrase '*[devils] horns on my head*' was used also by Cathy in a very similar context as Mary did – a willingness to get back at the supervisor. Cathy represented communication via e-mail as 'documentation'. Cathy also related discrimination to dismissal of her contribution to the organization, and did not see discrimination as a financial matter for the organization, but once again, as an opportunity for the supervisor to tease her. Even though the analysis of Cathy's narrative is not presented here in a detailed way, it is worth mentioning that even though Cathy described her situation as being a victim of unfair and unethical supervisor behavior, she represented her experiences as a sort of learning experience. This may have been due to her own, quite serious health problems related to worries about her and her forthcoming baby's well-being, and to rethinking her own values.

In contrast to Mary, Cathy was willing to participate in the second interview and we continued our long discussions. She started her narration by reminding me about the past events very briefly and then moved on to the events that had happened since then. She told a long story about how her supervisor had sold the whole company and made all of the personnel redundant – "illegally" according to Cathy – including Cathy herself. In her narrative, Cathy represented again the supervisor as a 'baddie' and herself now as a 'hero', helping herself and other redundant staff to get legal advice and financial compensation. The rest of the second narration focused on Cathy's plans for the future and her applying for a new job.

All in all, both Mary and Cathy represented their LMX relationships as being low in quality before and during the pregnancy and both women had not continued working with the same supervisor when interviewed (or asked for an interview) for the second time.

Next, Beth's narratives are represented in individual narrative form to show how she narrated her discrimination experience.

Beth was pregnant with her second child when we first discussed her experiences. She had a permanent work contact with a small company where there was 11 full-time and 2 part-time employees. She was working as a consultant and explained that the nature of her assignments required her to continuously update her product knowledge. Beth had been working for that employer for one year before her first maternity leave and with the same supervisor the whole time. She represented her dyadic long-term leader-follower relationship in a positive manner and stated herself as being part of the supervisor's in-group and thus I interpreted the relationship to be high in quality. When Beth told me about her experiences of her first pregnancy and working life on the first occasion, she was very positive and did

not talk about problems with her supervisor at that point. However, I discerned that she was somehow feeling guilty about starting a family, for instance when she spoke about her first pregnancy announcement:

“I announced it a month after my probationary period ended; it was sort of a rude action from my side. Of course I knew during the probationary period that I was pregnant, but it was like a strategy [not to tell] because I was afraid for the continuation of my work contract.”

Beth got pregnant again before returning from her first maternity leave. There was a lot of travelling related to her assignments, and due to having a small child, a new pregnancy and other family responsibilities, she was unwilling to come back to the same position she had left. Beth asked if it would be possible to work part time. The employer did not take that suggestion very positively, but they made an arrangement to try it and see if it would work. Before announcing her later pregnancy to the organization, Beth had a miscarriage. She continued working part-time, two to three days a week only under the terms of agreement about having assignments if there is any in the organization. During this period, Beth’s replacement’s work contract was made permanent, covering Beth’s previous assignments, but Beth told that it was not such a ‘big deal’ for her because she did not want to take that position back and was also planning another child. Beth became pregnant again soon after that.

Both interviews with Beth were conducted by phone. She very openly told about her experiences from the very beginning of both interviews, explaining different events and moving from one event to another very easily. Based on these, Beth’s personal narratives are analyzed next in order to show how she makes sense of her pregnancy-related discrimination.

Announcement as a turning point

Beth starts her story by telling about the background and her earlier miscarriage. After that, she turns her narration to the current pregnancy, and by saying “I hadn’t the courage to tell until...” she represents her fears about reactions towards to her pregnancy. Beth informed about her pregnancy in the organization well in advance, at the beginning of her second trimester, about six months before the expected day of delivery, and after four months of part-time working. Beth’s announcement caused some kind of negative reaction from her supervisor and Beth mentions the announcement situation itself twice during the interviews:

“My employer very clearly notified me that he was very disappointed with the situation, and instead [of the announcement of a new pregnancy] they had expected me to return to full-time work within a year.”

Another reference to the announcement situation was: “The first reaction was ‘oh’. And then he knew the risk when he hired me.”

The announcement situation itself appeared not to be a very traumatic experience and this ‘disappointment’ the supervisor expressed was probably done in a very polite manner as Beth describes her supervisor as being very discreet and polite throughout both of her stories and defines the long-term work relationship between them as being good in quality. Anyhow, Beth refers to the announcement as a turning point after which the discrimination started:

“And after that [pregnancy announcement], there weren’t any assignments available for me in the meetings”.

Discrimination

Beth experienced tangible discrimination and was dismissed from work assignments after informing about her pregnancy. Beth’s explanations about the discrimination are constructed into a narrative of lack of professional contribution to the organization and also as a financial burden that the pregnancy causes to the organization.

Even though Beth experienced tangible discrimination and practically lost her job, it was interesting to note how she remained very understanding and polite towards her employer throughout, representing only minor complaints about the situation. Indeed, she referred to “an employer” during the interviews when she was in fact talking about her supervisor. In referring to him not as a supervisor but as “an employer”, Beth was highlighting her supervisor’s role as an entrepreneur and as the responsible organization’s representative in that particular situation. In that way she removed the supervisor’s personal character, not blaming him on a personal level but instead talking about her perceptions and experiences of the inappropriate treatment due to her pregnancy. Moreover, she sometimes used “they” when talking about the cause of her negative experiences. Beth did not represent the situation as an insult to her as a person or as an employee, but attributed the issues to the nature of her assignments and related demands.

“They found it pointless to maintain my vocational proficiency, for instance, there is a need for training all the time so that I can do my job. In a certain way I understand this very well as there are four or five updates for

the software' [related to her assignments] and my work contribution would not be 100 %. I understand this, but there would have been other assignments as well which would have been possible to do part-time. [...] it was cheaper to them to take on some student or trainees to do the jobs”.

Beth made sense of her discrimination experiences in a very analytical and practical manner and tied the discussion together with the organization culture but also to the structures of society as a whole. Through these, she distanced herself as a person from these negative experiences but represented in her narratives that she found meaningful ways to manage the situation.

Managing with discrimination -entrepreneurship

Beth adopted a very active strategy to manage this discriminatory situation and set up her own business. During the first interview she represented entrepreneurship as more of a situation into which she had been pushed, but also as a possibility to do something that she was satisfied with.

At first she says: “We then came up with another way; since I have my own business, if there is something I can do, I can do it under a subcontractor agreement. It is more transparent to them. But as I said, I didn't get very many assignments after that [pregnancy announcement].”

Later in the first interview: “I am satisfied with what I have done by myself [as entrepreneur].”

Values were present in both Beth's personal narratives. There was an interesting contrast when she talked about the strain and use of time caused by work. Several times she emphasizes her family orientation and unwillingness to take the children to daycare for full weeks. In this way, entrepreneurship is represented as a possibility to better achieve work-life balance and satisfy her own values. On the other hand, Beth represents entrepreneurship as being very hectic, but rewarding, increasing her self-confidence.

At first she represents the strain caused by her previous assignments to be one reason to start up her own business: “I had decided not to take my children to daycare for five days a week and go back to my previous assignments [...] I already said that some alternative had to be found.”

Later she tells how popular she became very soon and represents strain as being positive: “I am sure there is enough work assignments for me, I have noticed that there is a lot of demand. Even though during the week I was 'having' Jeanna (giving birth to her baby) at the hospital, there was a big

hurry going on [in my business] and people were calling and asking me to work, and I said ‘I am giving birth at the moment, I just can’t do it right now. Please come back after a few months.’”

After maternity leave, at first Beth suggested returning part time, but the employer was not willing to support that. So Beth resigned, and again offered the company the opportunity to purchase her services as a subcontractor. Even though her previous employer did not use Beth’s services very much, she had other clients. Beth no longer represented entrepreneurship and starting up her own business as something she has been forced into, but instead an opportunity that she capitalized on.

“[Entrepreneurship was] something I had considered for a long period of time.”

Also her future as an entrepreneur was construed very optimistically when we talked for the second time: “I have been extremely satisfied, I haven’t regretted it for a day [the decision to start her own business] and I don’t think I ever will”.

Entrepreneurship played a strong role within Beth’s personal narratives, and during the second interview, talk about it was dominant compared to her talk about previous experiences of discrimination.

Making sense of discrimination in the second narrative

During the second interview Beth did not sound very insulted or hurt, instead she talked about previous (discrimination) experiences in quite an analytical way, and also on a very general level, for example, in terms of the law relating to family leave and payments and employer responsibilities. She did not talk about her supervisor very much, but again, used the terms “employer” or “those in the organization” when talking about her supervisor and discrimination. Altogether, Beth appeared to be self-confident and has found new direction in her career through these discrimination experiences. She represented her situation as being better than it would have been without this turning point.

I have to say, I was quite confused about Beth’s stories at first. I found her situation problematic and unfair, but Beth appeared to adopt a very calm stance towards it. After several rounds of reading the interview transcripts, I thought I had found ‘a key’ to that contradiction; on the one hand Beth’s belonging to her supervisor’s in-group, and on the other hand, her guilty feelings about becoming pregnant so soon after joining the company. In addition, Beth seemed to have a

distinct inclination towards entrepreneurship and thus she found a solution to her situation rather easily, and that in turn made her attitude towards the constructive dismissal she experienced predominantly neutral. Next, two other personal narratives, told by Sarah and Helen, are reflected with Beth's individual narrative.

Sarah and Helen both had high-quality relationships with their leaders over the long term. Sarah was 27, and was expecting her second child. She was working in a retail sector organization and had a female supervisor who lived in the same neighborhood as her, and had children almost the same age. The acts of discrimination Sarah presented during her narratives were the supervisor's negative reaction towards her announcement, and some problems with holiday timing and training arrangements. Sarah told that she was very surprised about her supervisor's reactions but made sense of these acts by explaining her supervisor's practical problems in organizing work. Sarah also thought that her leader was scared of the possibility that Sarah would be on sick leave as much as during her first pregnancy. Sarah returned back to the same position after her leave. During the second interview discrimination was the subject a few times, but the overall atmosphere and narration were very positive.

Helen was 35 years old and was pregnant with her first child. She worked in a medical sector organization and the discrimination, or inappropriate treatment, which she represented within her narratives related to tangible discrimination committed by other persons in the organization, including her supervisor. The supervisor himself dismissed Helen from one important training event designed to improve Helen's professionalism. During the first interview Helen represented her supervisor in a very positive manner, but of course, was frustrated about the supervisor's acts. At the time of the latter interview, Helen's supervisor had set up another business. He had also asked Helen to join the new company after her leave, but Helen returned to the previous organization and worked there with another supervisor. During the second interview Helen questioned her supervisor's acts more than in the first interview.

Both Sarah and Helen talked about their work life during pregnancy in generally very positive terms, but did highlight some individual negative or inappropriate events for which their supervisors were responsible. They made sense of these events by relating them in a way that I interpreted as being anecdotal or as some kind of tricky event for them.

Next, I will draw out some interesting points which emerged from within these individual narratives, comparing the two low LMX stories (Mary & Cathy) with the three high LMX stories (Beth, Sarah, Helen).

What can we learn from these personal narratives?

As these narratives represent, even being a partner in a long-term high quality leader-follower relationship does not necessarily protect working women from pregnancy-related discrimination from their own supervisor. The types of discrimination, or inappropriate behavior, committed by the immediate supervisors differed greatly between the narratives. It can be said that tangible and direct discrimination was present within these stories, as illustrated by financial conflicts (bonuses, salaries), changes in work assignments, problems with obtaining information, denial of training opportunities and problems with holiday arrangements. Other types of discrimination identified were such things as cruel comments about appearance, bad reactions towards the announcement of the pregnancy and nasty comments in general (meetings etc.). Each woman made sense of these events in their own personal way, but it can be concluded that those who had long-term, high-quality relationships did not find these situations to be as bad as those with low-quality relationships did.

All of the women referred to their supervisor's personality or other personal characteristics when attributing the reasons behind the discrimination. When low-quality LMX participants referred to these, they used very negative and derogatory remarks throughout their stories. Even though those with long-term, high-quality LMXs also referred to some negative characteristics or traits of their supervisors, all of them also used very positive and kind descriptions of their supervisor's personality and in doing so made the discrimination experience softer. As we can see from the high-quality LMX narratives, each of these women attributed the discriminatory practices very strongly to external reasons, much more so than to the supervisors themselves.

For all of the women whose relationships with their supervisors was low in quality, narration was focused on their professionalism and contribution to the organization which were not valued, whereas those with long-term, high quality LMX's represented the situation from the perspective of their own dismissal from professional development.

Some differences can be noticed between low- and high-quality relationship stories if we consider how the women made sense of managing the discrimination (or inappropriate supervisor behavior). When Mary and Cathy (low LMX quality) told their stories, narration was defensive and forced. On the contrary, when problems appeared within stories featuring high-quality relationships, especially Beth's, the explanations represented proactive measures and the woman's own choice, even though the situation itself appeared very challenging and unfair. Moreover, low LMX participants related themselves as well as supervisors as

persons involved in discriminatory situations – but those with high LMX levels looked beyond the explanations of the events that had happened, and by doing so changed their emotions from negative to positive by sensemaking by the time they were telling their stories in the interviews.

To summarise, the sensemaking of discrimination due to pregnancy was studied here using individual narratives. The paper also discussed the similarities and differences between the high- and low-quality subordinate-supervisor relationship stories. The final part of this paper discusses the findings and presents some conclusions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper was to represent different forms of pregnancy-related discrimination committed by immediate the supervisor and to increase our understanding of women's sensemaking of these experiences. This study also sought to explore whether the quality of the leader-follower relationship is related to the sensemaking process. The importance of leadership and leader-follower relations emerged from the current literature on pregnancy and work. One main stream in leadership research that focuses on dyadic vertical relationships in organizations is Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, which contributes interesting viewpoints on organizational leader-follower relationships. The narrative approach adopted here provided a novel way to shed light on personal experiences in depth. The research drew on five personal narratives, collected via two rounds of interviews conducted with women who were pregnant at the time of the first interview, and who had recently returned to work when interviewed for the second time. These five stories were selected from a wider set of twenty interviewees' stories due to their providing examples of pregnancy-related discrimination committed by the subjects' direct supervisors.

In this paper, women faced pregnancy-related discrimination despite the long-term quality of their work relationship with their immediate leader. Women made sense of their different discrimination experiences in many ways. They spoke about different kinds of discrimination practices, such as problems with bonuses and salaries, assignment changes and denial of training, use of bad language and denigration. The long-term nature of the dyadic relationship with the leader (the quality of the LMX) appeared to affect the women's sensemaking processes. More specifically, those with a long-term, high-quality relationship represented their experiences in more positive ways than those who were partners in a low-quality relationship. Furthermore, the latter group also attributed the discrimina-

tion to external reasons rather than to a personal trait of their supervisor, which those functioning within a low LMX relationship did. This may also relate to emotional reactions which have been found to affect employees' representations of negative events (Dasbrough, 2006).

The findings of this study clearly indicate that pregnancy is a very critical point in a woman's working life. This study highlights the importance of an ethical and moral stance towards pregnancy (and an individual's personal life in general) in organizations and in leadership practices. Furthermore, these findings place importance on becoming aware of different forms of discrimination and, through that, preventing these acts in organizations. The findings of this study also support the view that negative discrimination against women is not a question of the discriminator's gender, but instead, it means that men and women treat women worse than they treat men (Czarniawska, 2006). On the other hand, the findings of this study also encourage the development and maintenance of high quality leader-member relationships in organizations.

It has been suggested that pregnancy-related positive or negative experiences are largely related to the relationship between the woman and her immediate supervisor (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007). As this study shows, even being a partner in a good quality LMX relationship does not necessarily protect women from pregnancy-related discrimination and inappropriate behavior from the supervisor. These findings also challenge the traditional view of the unchanging and stable quality of dyadic relationships. Moreover, good quality work relationships between leader and follower are argued to be based on positive and balanced exchanges between relationship parties, but pregnancy seems to undermine that reciprocity and can result in undesirable behaviors.

However, experiences of discrimination differ as do the ways of making sense of it. Overall, this study has broadened our knowledge of the phenomenon of pregnancy-related discrimination and the process of maternity leave in the workplace. Even though discrimination and inappropriate behavior have been widely focused upon in previous research (Major, 2004, McDonald et al., 2008), this study deepens our understanding of how women make sense of the discrimination experience, and aids the identification of the means with which they manage these challenging situations.

These five personal narratives do not provide the whole, or even a definitive picture of the issues occurring in the workplace. Fundamentally, the personal narratives interpreted and represented in this study are first and foremost evocations and perceptions from the participants' perspectives and thus give only a partial view of the dyadic leader-member relationships and discrimination. Secondly, the

narratives are the researcher's interpretation of these women's stories as told over two interviews. Despite the limitations of this study relating to its sample or method, the findings challenge the traditional way of thinking about pregnancy-related discrimination and its consequences, and highlight the importance of the nature of the LMX relationship. This conclusion about the relationship between LMX quality and sensemaking could open up a new avenue for future research in the field of discrimination. For example, studies using broader samples and different methods might be able to illustrate more widely the discrimination occurring in working life and methods adopted to cope with it. Moreover, even though moral and ethical aspects of discrimination are not taken into consideration in this particular paper, these are part of the phenomena and thus remain very valuable in further studies. One interesting and rather new avenue for future research also emerged from this study – new mothers as entrepreneurs. This may contribute to the discussion of entrepreneurship as a social activity constrained by time and place (Hytti, 2005). For future research within the LMX field I would argue that even though it is possible to categorize the nature and quality of the relationship, the complexity of these dyadic relationships demands more attention in leadership studies. Furthermore, it could also be valuable for LMX studies to study longitudinally what kind of decisions individuals make within their work life and the role LMX plays. For instance, do people with low quality relationship start their own businesses to get out of the whole supervisory relationship (Schyns, 2008, in press)?

The practical implication of this study is the need to apply a multifaceted understanding of different issues that discrimination creates in working life. I estimate that all of those supervisors who were the other party in the LMX relationships studied here did not even realize that they had committed discrimination or behaved in an inappropriate manner. Therefore, by increasing leaders' understanding and knowledge of discrimination-related experiences and emotions through training and development, leaders might be able to perform better with their followers in different situations. Furthermore, understanding that pregnancy and maternity leave may be a very important decision-making time for women, leads to challenges for organizations and supervisors to create procedures to maintain the commitment of female staff and their willingness to return to the organization after maternity leave.

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