

Professional image maintenance: How women navigate pregnancy in the workplace

Laura M. Little, Ph.D.
University of Georgia

Virginia Smith Major, Ph.D.
The Connection, Inc.

Amanda Hinojosa, Ph.D.
University of Houston, Clear Lake

Debra Nelson, Ph.D.
Oklahoma State University

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**Research
Question:**

Conducted 3 studies:

- 1. Qualitative**
- 2. Scale development**
- 3. Tested the model**

A large black silhouette of a pregnant woman in profile, facing right, is the central focus. Behind her, a smaller silhouette of a business team consisting of four people (three men and one woman) in professional attire stands together. The background is a dark gray gradient.

**How do women manage
pregnancy at work?**

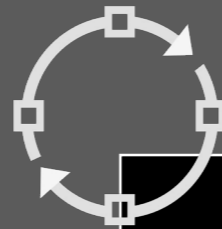


Study 1 - Qualitative



Sample

- **Thirty-five (35) working women who were pregnant or had recently given birth**
- **Wide variety of jobs**
- **From both male and female dominated organizations**



Procedure

- **Participants were asked to "tell a story"**
- **Specific questions guided this process:**
 - **How has pregnancy affected day-to-day life at work?**
 - **How has pregnancy affected others' perceptions of them?**
 - **How has pregnancy affected their view?**



Data Analysis

- **Four stages:**
 - **Coding preliminary interviews**
 - **Grouped concepts and performed reliability checks**
 - **Divided into meaningful units**
 - **Delved deeply into the data and relevant literature**



Study 1 Results

The vast majority of women interviewed

- **Had concerns about their professional image** or their perceptions of others' views of their competence and character at work (Roberts, 2005)
- **Engaged in social identity-based impression management** by strategically influencing others' perceptions of their social identity in order to construct a desired professional image



Strategies

60%

Maintaining her pace

- “I’ve tried consciously to **keep up with my work. . .** And I show them that just because I’m pregnant **doesn’t mean that the quality of my output changes**”

50%

Not request accommodation

- “I didn’t want them to start thinking, ‘Oh, see—she can’t handle it.’ So there were definitely some days where I **dragged myself into the office when I would have been much happier staying in bed all day long.**”

15%

Go the extra mile

- “So I started **busting my butt at work...** because if my boss thought that I wasn’t going to be as driven, then maybe I wasn’t the right person for the position.”

15%

Shorten maternity leave

- “[Because of complications,] I was not someone that people could count on. I felt not good about that. **So I decided to take only a 2 and a 1/2 month leave instead of a 4 month leave.**”



Strategies

36%

Passing

- **“I didn’t want to tell them.** You know, at a small firm, you think about if you’re pregnant, you don’t want to be let go. . . . That’s why I didn’t want to tell them—my fear of their hiring someone to replace me.”

18%

Downplaying the pregnancy

- “It probably comes back to the fact that **I don’t want to focus too much on it,** or—I don’t know, it’s a stereotype that once women are pregnant or have babies that’s all they want to talk about, so maybe I’m overreacting the other way, **trying to quickly steer conversations away from it lest it too often be the topic of conversation.**”



Motives

60%

Prove that same

- “I’m putting in the time to make sure the work is done properly. I’m consciously doing those things **because I want them to know that I’m not just [someone who doesn’t] care about work anymore.**”

25%

Maintain professionalism

- “**I want to be seen as professional**, and I have this perception that as I become rounder, I’m going to become “cuter,” and cuter is not professional. So a little mixed emotion about other people I work with noticing [I’m pregnant].”

20%

Avoid negative career consequences

- “... that was part of why I was a little anxious about telling them because I was kind of worried they might think, “**Oh, she’s probably not planning to come back so we could let her go.**”

25%

Convince others she will not quit

- “I was a little bit worried at they might think, “**Oh, that means she’s going to leave.**”



Higher Order Factors

Strategies

- Image Maintenance - Non-loss Approach Related Strategies
 - Maintaining her pace
 - Not requesting accommodation
 - Going the extra mile
 - Shortening maternity leave
- Decategorization – Avoidance Related Strategies
 - Passing
 - Downplaying the Pregnancy

Motives

- Legitimacy Preservation
 - Prove the same
 - Maintain professionalism
- Devaluation Reduction
 - Avoid negative career consequences
 - Convince others she will not quit



Study 2 – Scale Development



Procedure

- Content Validity – Generated 67 Items and reduced to 40
- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) – Reduced to 33 items
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Convergent and Discriminant Validity Tests



Sample

- **Content Validity:**
 - Undergraduate students (N= 361 for strategies, N=393 for motives)
- **EFA**
 - 264 pregnant women recruited on blogs
- **CFA**
 - 199 pregnant women recruited on blogs

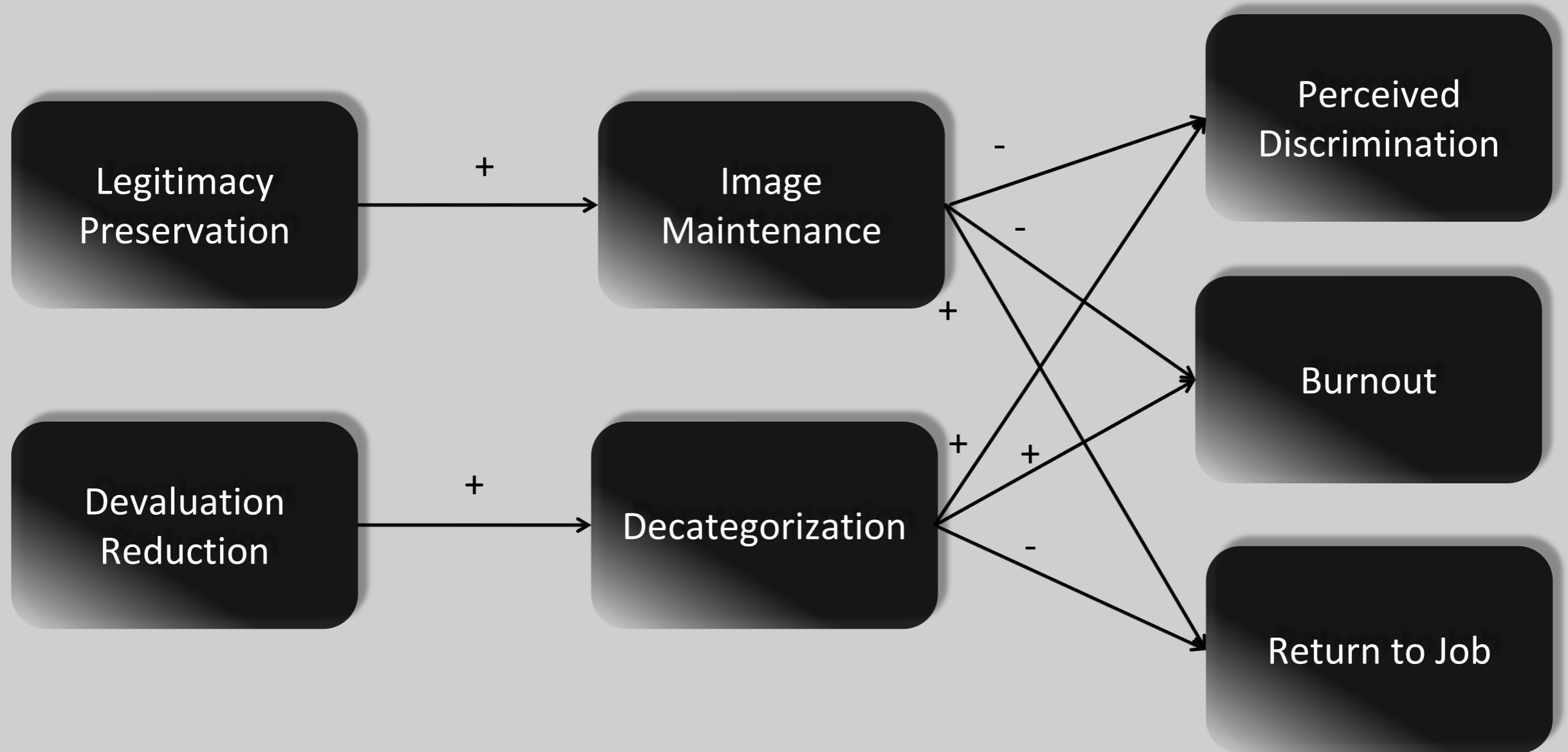


Data Analysis

- Analysis supported 33 item scale and proposed factor structure.
- Mean and Covariance Structure Analysis to test mean differences across time.
 - Found no significant differences in means of SIMp strategies and motives across time.



Study 3 -Theoretical Model



Study 3 – Theoretical Model

Sample

- **200 pregnant working women recruited using blogs**
 - 63% first pregnancy
 - 68% non-management
 - Average 30 years old (SD=4.28)
 - Wide range of jobs

Procedure

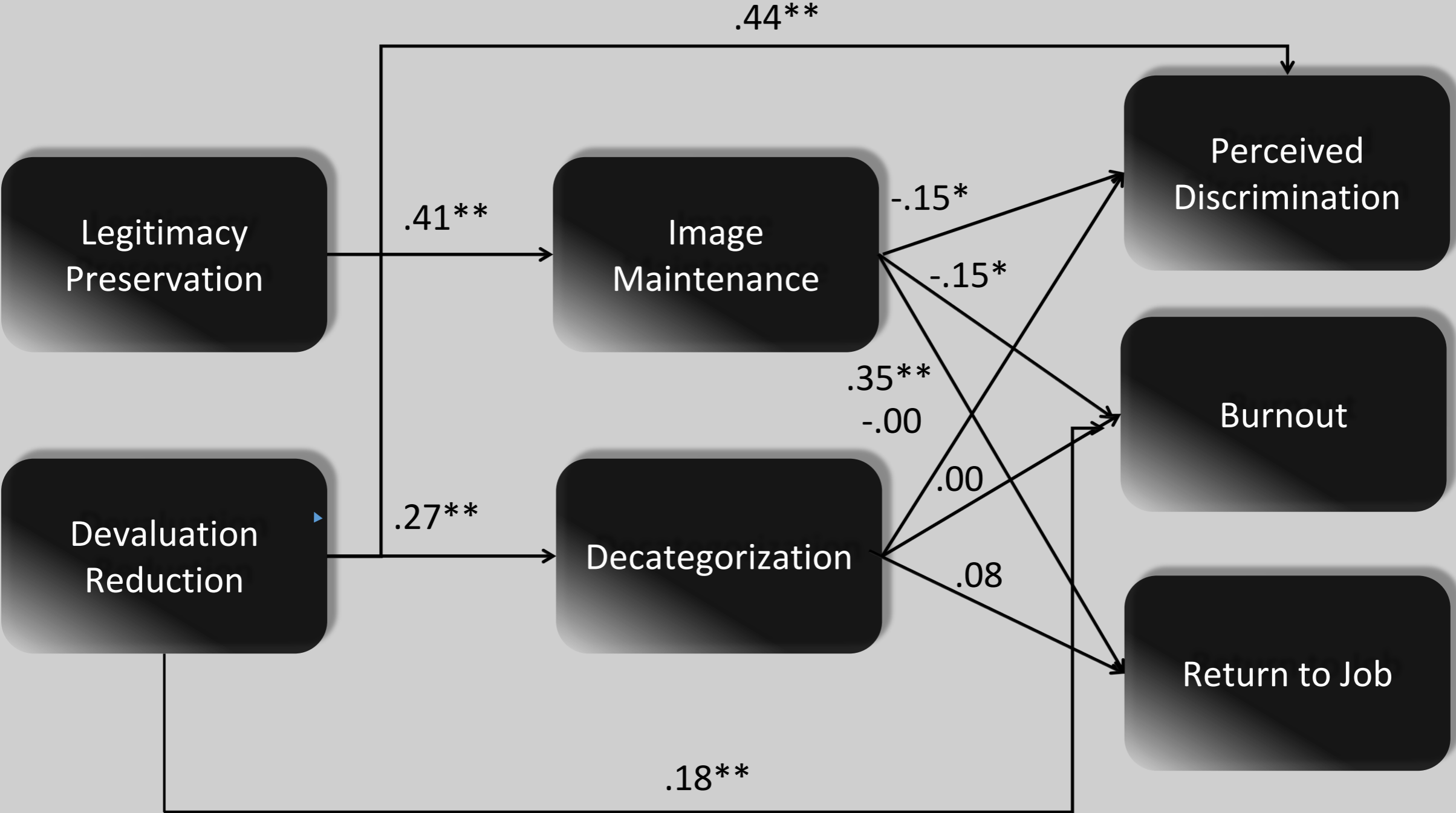
- Time-lagged design
 - Survey 1 - 2nd half of pregnancy
 - Survey 2 - 41 weeks
- Measures
- Study 2 Scales
- Modified version of Sanchez & Brock's (1996) adaptation of Mena and colleagues (1987) **Perceived discrimination scale**
- Shirom-Melamed **Burnout Measure (2006)**
- **Return to work** - asked if returning to work

Data Analysis

- **Two models for categorical versus continuous outcomes**
- **Path Analysis in Mplus.**
- **Direct effects of SIMp motives on strategies**
- **Indirect effects of SIMp motives on outcomes**



Study 3 Results



Contributions

- Provides specific understanding and actionable knowledge on how women navigate pregnancies at work
- Provides an understanding as to how individuals manage changing identities/images.
- Suggests that the stereotypes regarding women and pregnancy are not accurate
- Women take steps to mitigate discrimination and burnout and increase their chances of staying in the workforce
- Fear of discrimination can have very negative effects in regard to burnout and perceived discrimination



Current and Future Research

- Disclosure experiences of pregnant workers
 - Little, Hinojosa, & Lynch, *Organization Science* – In press
- How do pregnant women manage family unsupportive environments?
 - Hinojosa, Little, Paustian-Underdahl, & Zipay
 - 3rd round revision at *Journal of Applied Psychology*
- What are the implications of image management for parents?
- *Are there negative implications to image maintenance?*

