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The Fact of the Belly: A Collective Biography of Becoming Pregnant as a PhD Student in Academia

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The personal is professional

Those of us who arrive in an academy that was not shaped by or for us bring knowledges, as well as worlds, that otherwise would not be here. Think of this: how we learn about worlds when they do not accommodate us. Think of the kinds of experience you have when you are not expected to be here. These experiences are a resource to generate knowledge. (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 9–10)

In this article, we explore how pregnancy is experienced in an everyday academic setting, and how being pregnant affects the PhD journey. Pregnancy may, at first, be assumed 'private' or 'personal' and, therefore, not relevant in a 'professional' academic context. Yet, it is not unusual that PhD candidates in Denmark (including at our own institution: CBS) decide to have children while enrolled in PhD. One reason may be that a PhD position in Denmark comes with a full salary, pension and benefits, such as 1 year of paid parental leave. In this article, we embark on 'personally relevant research' (Greenberg, Clair, & Lagde, 2018) and think of the private, personal and the professional as *entangled* (Barad, 2007, 2014). They are always-already affecting one another so that it becomes difficult or at least futile to distinguish between them. Becoming pregnant while employed affects not only your private life but also your professional life. And it – as we will show – renders the personal professional. Becoming pregnant while on a professional (PhD) journey will affect that journey. The pregnant body is signified by *the fact of the belly*,¹⁶ it comes to mean something. The pregnant belly cannot *not* signify.

The Danish parental leave system fosters gender inequality, with mothers overwhelmingly taking the responsibility of child-care during parental leave and fathers committing to 10% on average.¹⁷ The imbalance is not necessarily problematic in itself. However, we may problematise the imbalance with reference to studies showing that taking up parental leave diminishes

possibilities of career advancement, access to leadership positions as well as future earnings (Gupta, Smith, & Verne, 2008). The so-called 'child penalty' creates an approximate 20% gender pay gap in earnings in the long run (NBER, 2018). A 2018 report from Boston Consulting Group confirms that the largest leak in the talent pipeline happens from age 30 to 40 (BCG, 2018). This is identified as the period during which career progression and family expansion usually take place, with the latter impacting the former adversely. At CBS, the career path begins to split after PhD level: the graph showing women's and men's representation in academic positions starts opening up like a pair of scissors, with the widest gap at the professor level. Four out of five professors are men (The Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2015). This picture has not changed over the past 20 years. It is our assertion, however, that the implications of having children do not begin with parental leave but when the belly starts to grow, show and imply meaning.

We are interested in understanding the wider implications of pregnancy and in investigating what we will term the *micro-implication of becoming pregnant* as part of the PhD journey. With the microimplications of becoming pregnant we refer to *the meaning of pregnancy ascribed to a pregnant body by someone, as implied by the character of that someone's social interaction with that pregnant body*. We created the concept of microimplication by repurposing Grice's (1975, p. 24) pragmatic concept of 'implicature'. An implicature is something that is not explicitly expressed by a speaker, but implied or suggested. Grice (1975) makes a distinction between 'particular', 'conventional' and 'general' conversational implicatures. Here, we borrow largely from the notion of particular, context- and situation-specific conversational implicatures. We will elaborate on this throughout the article. To this end, we present two memory stories, each a product of a collective biography workshop where all three authors worked together to collectively understand the two memory events. The body of text that makes up the two memory stories should be understood as a form of writing where the basis of knowledge is the embodied experiences of power (Ahmed, 2017).

The article has four parts. (1) We explain collective biography. (2) We present the two memory stories. (3) We spell out the

¹⁶ The concept 'the fact of the belly' is inspired by Frantz Fanon's concept 'the fact of blackness' (Fanon, 1952).

¹⁷ Parents can take 52 weeks of leave in total, of which 32 weeks can be shared between them as the parents see fit (18 weeks are reserved for the parent giving birth, 2 weeks for the other parent). See, for example, '13th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2017' (2017) and 'Køn: Status 2019' (2019).

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microimplications of the fact of the belly. (4) We speculate in and discuss what it means to be pregnant in academic settings and what happens to nonconforming bodies in an androcentric academic department, with an overwhelming overrepresentation of men,— especially in senior faculty and management positions.

Collective biography

In collective biography a group of researchers work together on a particular topic, drawing on their own memories relevant to that topic, and through the shared work of telling, listening and writing, they move beyond the clichés and usual explanations to the point where the written memories come as close as they can make them to 'an embodied sense of what happened'. (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3)

The collective biography workshop was inspired by the methodic practices laid out by Davies and Gannon (2012; see also Davies et al., 2013; Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, & Sommerville, 2005; De Schauwer, Van De Putte, & Davies, 2018). In writing a collective biography we are concerned with the more-than-representational in the sense that the memory stories are not presumed to represent the memory events as they 'really' happened. Rather, we are interested in re-presenting the memory stories in a manner that allows us to explore their affectivity by bringing forth the embodied sensations of the memory events. It is the way in which – through “collaborative attention to detail” (Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 360) – the memory stories come to resonate with all of us and become intensely felt that makes them real.

For practical reasons and akin to the adaptation in the work of Basner, Christensen, French, and Schreven (2018), we focused our collective attention on Sara's memories, rather than having all three memory-workers bring their own memories. Sara is the only one of the authors with lived experience of embodying pregnancy. Sharing her experiences of being pregnant during her PhD enabled us all to dive deeper into the microimplications of the fact of the belly. By exploring this topic, it was soon made clear to us all that the decision to have children – to become a parent – affects the journey. Parenthood affects women and men differently. Our sensation was that this differentiating factor of PhD life had its inception during pregnancy. Thomas, one of the male authors, has also experienced becoming a parent in an academic setting. His experience is one of almost becoming invisible, where pregnancy and parenthood are absent in professional life. We may say that to Thomas's body the pregnancy was a non-fact. In stark contrast to this stands the experience of Sara whose pregnancy – as the memory stories will tell – is difficult to hide. She, her body, is highly visible, physically, as her belly sticks out and takes more space than usual. This very fact of the belly translates into a different lived PhD experience, one that is undeniably embodied, giving birth to different affective states.

Our main concern is to examine the embodied sensations and affective states of the memory stories. The purpose is to draw out their affective and material details through descriptions that move and resonate with us as memory-workers. The choice of collective biography begs the question of what the collective mood brings that the autobiographical method (e.g. Daskalaki, Butler, & Petrovic, 2016) lacks? Sara could easily have explored her personal encounters by herself through autoethnographic accounts (e.g. Awasthy, 2015; Hearn, 2003; O'Shea, 2018). The motivation for using collective biography is that we, as a collective of authors, want to dive into and explore the affective implications of the fact of the belly. As the memory events we base this piece on are situated in everyday, informal interactions with colleagues, there are no formal 'field notes' of the exchanges. Moreover, an ambition for the workshop was to move beyond mere reflection, as in mirroring or representing the memory events as something of the past. Working collectively on the memory stories enabled us to bring out, enrich and more vividly describe those affective dimensions, which are easily taken for granted by the memory-holder. While Thomas and Jannick cannot put themselves in the place of Sara, or any other pregnant body for that matter, they wanted to understand the implications of becoming a pregnant body in the context of an academic institution. Sara, on the other hand, wanted not to be alone or isolated with her experience. In our first discussion of this article, she initially relativised her experiences, doubting whether she was 'right' to feel out-of-place. After all, she has a privileged position in the Danish system, benefiting from relatively generous family policies. We wanted to explore and understand the pregnant experience on its own terms *as a collective* without judging it, juxtaposing it with or relativising it to any other PhD experiences.

The collective biography workshop, effectively, is a methodology for affective research. And as Knudsen and Stage (2015, p. 3) suggest:

The development of methodologies for affect research should be regarded as an interesting zone of inventiveness, a zone raising reflections about what 'the empirical' produced tells us about the world and about the research setting, and a zone allowing us to generate new types of empirical material and perhaps to collect material that has previously been perceived as banal or unsophisticated.

Knudsen and Stage (2015) specifically mention accounts of researchers' bodily states as an example of inventive ways for generating empirical material. In the remainder of this section, we present a walkthrough of how we went about conducting our collective biography workshop.

Ahead of the memory workshop, Sara wrote a first iteration of her memory stories for Thomas and Jannick to read in preparation for the workshop. They, in turn, added initial questions to the text. At this stage, questions were mainly points of

clarification about passages in the text where the words and formulations seemed distant to Thomas and Jannick where the sentences were complete, yet with the sensory descriptions lacking in detail in order to touch the affective dimension. A telling example of this is from Memory Story I, in which Sara describes that she is pregnant and that she can no longer hide this fact of the belly. But as neither Thomas nor Jannick has any bodily recollection of what that entails, both curiously asked for a more detailed account of what the pregnant body in the memory event feels like, what it looks like, and what emotional labour goes into trying to hide this growing fact of the belly. Asking questions with a “strong situational specificity” is, as Knudsen and Stage (2015, p. 3) also argue, a necessary step for grounding, empirically, the analysis of affective processes. The explication of gender in both memory stories is another and equally telling example: initially, none of the memory events provided any explicit mentioning of gender; the terms ‘they’ and ‘their’ were used as gender-neutral pronouns to refer to Sara’s colleagues. As Thomas and Jannick began probing, gender came forth as entangled, affectively, with the bodily reactions and changes. The men in both memory stories (i.e. Sara’s male colleagues), in short, distance themselves when confronted with the fact of the belly – by means of irony and ridicule. The woman addresses the fact of the belly directly, trying to connect with it through own embodied experience. We are, of course, not suggesting any generalisation based on this reading; we merely point to how the entanglement of certain things begin to ‘glow’ (MacLure, 2013a, 2013b) and show greater significance for our thought and writing as the memory workshop progressed.

We collectively decided to begin the workshop with Sara reading her memory stories aloud. Listening to Sara’s voice and watching her as she re-lived the events when sharing them prompted Thomas and Jannick to probe the text before them not in chronological order but in accordance with the different affective intensities it created in the room. We recorded the entire session (3 h) for us to listen through and use as a companion when re-writing the memory stories. The final iterations of the memory stories – as included in this article – are thus the product of several re-workings and re-shapings of the body given to the text. The said re-workings are a collective endeavour: Having elaborated on the initial version of the memory stories based on the collective attention to details at the workshop, we continued to circulate the text among us until none of us felt we had any more to say. At this critical stage the body given to the text is saturated with the affect that resonates with all memory-workers and not just the original memory-holder.

The situation of a woman sharing a story with two men (who do not share any experiences with microimplications of pregnancy) could easily become a classic setup, where a woman’s bodily and emotional experiences are explained by

men. There are two things to say to this: (1) this is a collective project concerned with collectively understanding a single person’s lived experience; insofar as the work of analysis and conceptualisation is concerned, there is no opposition between the members of the collective. Thus, we humbly suggest that in coming together to work collaboratively we turned the moment of the collective biography workshop into movement towards translating lived experience (de Beauvoir, 1953) into shared experience. Lived experience, given that it is about a particular and hence subjective experience, is not necessarily shareable. Yet, Davies et al. (2013, p. 684, italics in original) point to how collective biography work is where the memories become and “are the subject”, not “of the subject”. This brings us to the second point: (2) the men are not explaining the woman what her experience means; the men involved are not able to have an experience of the fact of the pregnant belly, but they are willing to appreciate its affects and understand its ramifications. It is an occasion for empathetically learning about an experience they are unable to have and to develop a sensitivity to this particular situation and to similar situations.

Memory story I

My old department has recently merged with another department, and I have got a new office and new colleagues. I am a PhD student halfway through my studies. And I am also pregnant.

Simultaneously with getting the new office and new colleagues, it started to become impossible for me to hide my growing belly.

Having experienced pregnancy before, the changing of my body was not new to me. I was not reacting to the change with amazement, curiously inspecting the belly in the mirror when changing clothes as I did the first time. The bump was just there. And it was growing. It was an expected fact. A tangible, physical fact.

Starting as a feeling of bloatedness, it began manifesting itself as a more solid extension of my body, going from a rounding of the belly to an actual bump, bulging out over the lining of my pants.

The bump hindered me from wearing my normal trousers and it made the clothes I could wear fit differently. I became aware how different material of the clothes could disguise or reveal the bump. The urge to hide my pregnancy was strong. I did not want the focus to go from me as a person to my pregnant body, with all the conversations, tips, sharing of experiences and pieces of advice that come with it.

The winter season gave me all kinds of excuses to wear big sweaters, and I became a master of layering clothes – all as a means of disguising the growing belly.

I became painfully aware of how I was sitting, standing and walking. How I was carrying my body. Counterposing. Arching and rounding the back, to let the belly sink in and not pop out.

Always sitting straight, never leaning back. It exposes the front, and the belly.

Crossing my arms in front of me. But not too much. It is a commonly known telling sign that pregnant women touch their bellies. So never, *never* touch my belly, hold my belly or in any way draw attention to that part of the body.

Always keeping in mind how to carry my body in a way that could hide the belly occupied my mind space, and sometimes it made me lose focus of what was said in meetings or conversations. It is like when you are thinking about the fact that you are lying, and then trying to hold a steady gaze, looking the other person in the eyes. Because you know that straying eyes are a sign of lying. But being too conscious and overdoing the steady look will also expose you as a liar.

I was focused to find the right balance between acting relaxed and natural in my bodily actions without being obviously hiding something. The winter season was not just an excuse to wear oversized clothes, it also meant Christmas parties and get-togethers, all including alcohol. Being a married woman in my early 30s saying 'no' to alcohol, in private or professional settings, is guaranteed to get pregnancy rumours started.

I shamelessly exaggerated my son's bad sleeping habits, to give me an excuse to not drink alcohol and leave early, alternatively not to attend alcohol-related Christmas activities at all.

I specifically remember how unfairly treated I felt when I had to present excuses and explanations to saying 'no' to beers at the Christmas party, while my female colleague with an Arabic name was left without questions. I could not lean up against my colleagues' assumptions of religious reasons; in their eyes, the only reason why I was not drinking could obviously be that I was pregnant. But there was also something else.

I have always been uncomfortable with comments to my body in professional settings as they limit my space of action.

I have been sexualised and made aware of my body at every workplace I have had since I was 14, ranging from well-intended compliments to straight out sexual harassments.

It feels like I cannot escape being my body, that what I say and do cannot stand alone but always are accompanied by my body. Hiding my pregnancy was a way to postpone or avoid this feeling.

It was the beginning of March, the belly had grown to a point where no back arching, arm crossing or big sweaters could hide the obvious fact that I was pregnant, and this was stressing me out.

The stressy feeling, enforced by being in a new professional environment, gave me a vague tension or ache in my stomach, always expecting a confrontation or uncomfortable conversation.

Many times, I tried to avoid presumed questions or comments by proactively taking control over conversations, asking the other a lot of questions or talking without space for interruptions.

Though sometimes I gave in to the feeling and kept to myself, I could not be bothered to play the game...

It is close to lunch time. I can hear the early lunchers rummaging around in the kitchen, but I cannot see who it is from my office. My stomach rumbles and makes loud noises.

I looked at the clock. Maybe I could just go to the kitchen, get my lunch box and eat it at the office, but that would be weird, I should socialise with my new colleagues. That is what professional, well-mannered people do. They socialise and build networks, creating future opportunities.

I waited a bit longer. Maybe more people will come, and there will be someone I know.

The noise from the voices in the kitchen was increasing as the informally agreed lunch time approached.

I was too hungry to get any work done; I could not deny my body food any longer. I took a deep breath, braced myself and closed the office door walking out to the kitchen. There were new faces sitting at the lunch table, and I could not see anyone familiar. I smiled and said a general 'Bon appetit' to the table. I walked to the fridge and grabbed my lunch box. Voices were muttering and chattering at the lunch table. While putting my food on a plate to heat it in the microwave oven, a new colleague, a woman in her 40s, approached me:

'Oh that food looks great'.

'Yeah, I generally prefer to bring my own food, the canteen gets less exciting after a couple of years at CBS', I answer. The new colleague smiled. I relaxed. This is a nice conversation.

'You are one of the new ones, no? Where are you from?' she asked me. Good. This is not as bad as I expected it to be. I decided to take the opportunity to present myself.

'I am from the Department of Business and Politics, my PhD is funded by the AlterEcos Project, do you know it? We look into alternative forms for organizing within the financial sector'.

'Ah DBP. Nice. And I can see that you are expecting. Congratulations! How far are you? Isn't it the best experience ever to be pregnant?'

I freeze mentally and the surprise makes me hesitant. How do I answer? I really do not want to talk about my pregnancy with someone I do not know. I do not think that being pregnant is the most amazing thing, but I know by experience that saying such thing will cause strange looks and an even longer conversation about being pregnant and motherhood.

I smile stiffly. How can I get the conversation back to professional stuff? And what do I answer? I'm stressing out, I must say something now or it becomes socially awkward.

'Yes. I'm having a baby in July'. Not really knowing where to look. Hoping for the microwave oven to be signalling that the food is ready. Fuck. I should have asked her something. Stupid. I had the chance to take control over the conversation. I missed it. I feel stressed and disappointed with myself, for not taking control over the situation I was dreading...

'Oh that is just great. Summer babies are just the easiest. You do not need that much clothes, and you will just have vacation all summer. My two kids are from May and June. It was such a great experience. But I guess you should be careful; the heat last summer was crazy. Might not be a dream scenario, neither being pregnant or having a small baby. Fingers crossed it was just a one-time thing, right?'

I am torn between the feeling of just taking my food and leave and being polite and acknowledge what my stranger colleague said, maybe ask some questions about her children. Why is it so hard to say stop that I am not comfortable in this situation? I'm smiling politely, take my food and say:

'That sounds nice. Hope you will have a productive afternoon' and go the few meters to the lunch table. It is nearly full, but there is a spot between two senior staff, both men and both, unfamiliar to me. I aim for that spot.

'Is this seat free?', I said as I got closer to the table. They both nodded and smiled but continued their ongoing conversation.

Sitting down, I felt awkward and misplaced. Invited to the table but not included in the conversation, which would be common courtesy at a lunch table in the workplace.

Eating my food silently, I tried to follow the conversation to get a chance to contribute, or at least make myself visible.

There is no break in the conversational flow, like the conversation between old friends. One starts filling in before the first one has finished. Internal references mixed with half-finished sentences and laughter.

I gave myself some slack and gave up the attempt of being part of this conversation. I finished my food. Feeling disappointed, but also angry for the impoliteness and exclusion. I thought of the expression 'It takes two to tango'. It is not just my responsibility. I stood up intending to leave the table. One of the men turned and said directed at me:

'Can you pass with that big belly of yours?'

Looking smilingly at the colleague at the other side of me, I froze again. Stopping for an instant, the motion of pushing the chair back under the table.

Surprised.

Did he really just say that? I felt perplexed. There is more than plenty of space around the table to pass my colleague, so this must be a joke and not a considerate remark. The colleagues laughed in unison. Continuing their conversation. I left with the feeling of never wanting to have lunch at that table and with those men again. The lunchroom has become a minefield, where I never know when something will blow up in my face.

Memory story 2

I have agreed to eat early lunch with a colleague from my former department, as I have a meeting at 12:30.

As we were eating, more and more colleagues were gathering around the lunch table. My colleague and I talked about his

teaching and plans for the coming weekend. As I had finished my food, I prepared for leaving the table.

'Oh well, I think it is time for me to get going so I get to that meeting in time', I said, collecting my stuff. My old colleague looked at me, smiling, and asking:

'Wasn't your meeting at 12:30? Where was it? It is just 12:10 now'.

'Yes, at *Kilen*', I answered, getting up and starting to put my dirty dishes into the dishwasher. A new colleague looked at my old colleague laughingly and said:

'You know, pregnant women are very slow. It is best to give them their time'.

I felt angry. My heart started beating, and I felt the blood flow to my neck and face. Reddening, getting warm cheeks. They knew nothing about what I had to do before the meeting and how much time it takes. I also have my bike, so my pregnancy does not impair my ability of transporting myself around campus. I know saying all that will just incite comments on how I do not understand jokes or that I am being sensitive and emotional as a pregnant woman. It makes me frustrated. There is no good way of answering. My old colleague picks up on the joke.

'Yes. With all that extra weight. It is good you are taking your time. We do not want you to be late'.

Common laughter. Other colleagues around the table started laughing as well. I felt super uncomfortable. It embarrassed me, this unwanted attention from the lunch table. I was also disappointed with my colleague that I knew from my former department, to participate and contribute to the joke. I became the laughingstock of the lunch table. Like a stab in the stomach, I felt an urge to defend myself. But I did not know how.

'Maybe I should call you a taxi? I can arrange with the Head of Department to put aside some funds for pregnant taxis. What time do you want me to order the taxi?'

Even more laughter. My thoughts were running wild. How could I get out of this situation without being even more made fun of even more?

'Well, I do need to finish some stuff at the office before I leave for the meeting'. Polite again. Explaining. Trying to render approval or acceptance for my actions. Not showing the disappointment, anger or discomfort. Not having the strategies for how I can put my foot down in a constructive way. Leaving the situation in status quo. Not making them aware of the impact of their sayings and doings. Not standing up for myself. Angry and disappointed.

'Have a nice weekend', I said, leaving the lunch table.

The microimplications of co-workers

As already mentioned in the Introduction, microimplication grasps the meaning ascribed to something (Sara's pregnant belly) by someone (Sara's colleagues) as expressed by that someone's interaction with that something. A microimplication

is when actual action betrays the implied meaning. The notion of microimplications was developed in the course of our workshop. While familiar with the concept of microaggressions (see, e.g., DeSouza, Wesselmann, & Ispas, 2017; Sue et al., 2007), we needed a different term in order to conceive what we could sense happening in the memory stories. The sense of unease is grounded in those small details, those tiny acts that are not aggressive but affective. We acknowledge that some of the interactions from the memory stories can be interpreted as microaggressions. What we suggest is that even if we interpret them as such there is more to these microaggressions than merely aggression, and we want to challenge this feeling of the offensive that comes with naming something as an aggression.

Let us examine the situations in the memory stories: what other strategies could the woman at the microwave have chosen given the implication that she knows that the other part (Sara) is pregnant? She could have ignored it; she could have asked open questions (rather than normative, closed ones that imply a correct answer) if she was adamant to make pregnancy the topic; she could have waited for an invitation to converse about the pregnancy. How could the male senior staff have acted on the implication? They could have ignored the pregnancy; they could have struck up conversation with the new colleague (Sara); they could have abstained from making jokes as well as from participating in laughing; one could have asked the other to stop laughing. How could the colleague that Sara knew from her former department have acted on the implication of the pregnant body relative to the time of the meeting? He could have been quiet; he could have checked his assumptions; he could have abstained from participating in building a joke; he could have checked his moral compass; he could have checked whether Sara validated the joke by laughing with them; or he could have countered the first statement made about the speed of pregnant women. In all three instances there were other viable options available; therefore, the particular courses of action are in no way necessary ones. They are actions made legitimate by the implied meaning of the fact of the belly.

A microimplication is an implied meaning made explicit via the act it legitimises and motivates. The implied meaning is not articulated; it is not tested for verity or falsity, but acted upon. So, we have to ask *what microimplications can be read from the particular acts?* They all share the implied meaning that addressing the pregnant body is both a socially and intersubjectively acceptable thing to do – and also in ways that would not seem legitimate, were the female body not pregnant. They differ in the rest: the first act suggests that it is implied that pregnancy is a good thing. The second act implies that it is okay to make a comment on how the pregnant body moves in a room and to joke about the assumed (in)abilities of the pregnant body, but also that to make that comment is appropriate to begin with in light of the prior non-communication between the parties. The laughter implies that it is a fun situation and unless it is

read as an act of belittling cruelty, that it is an innocent joke. The third act implies that the speakers know what it means to be pregnant, that they know its capacities and inabilities sufficiently to be able to construct a joke *in situ*.

The microimplications that are linked to the fact of the pregnant belly point to a fundamental problem of self-determination. By being made to mean pregnant in a certain sense by the microimplications of co-workers, Sara is effectively not able to *not* signify pregnancy. She does not determine the meaning of her pregnancy; it has become a social signification. The fact that the meaning ascribed to her as a PhD student is intersubjective is not the issue. The issue is how the implied meaning is acted upon and the short- and long-term effects these carry. Will she, for example, be left out of the Outlook calendar invitation to the next project meeting? During the workshop Sara spontaneously shared a third memory story about one such instance of 'benevolent discrimination' (e.g., Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007; Romani, Holck, & Risberg, 2018), where presumptions about the fact of the pregnant belly resulted in her being excluded from a meeting – as if she were already on parental leave. Will she be treated as more of a body to take care of than as a skilled mind to interact with? In other words, will she be sidelined, not out of her own actions, decisions and wishes, but by the actions of others based on what they think she means, needs and wants as a pregnant woman?

Strategic dichotomies

There are several semiotic dichotomies emerging from the memory stories: personal/professional, private/professional, body/brain, old/new, familiarity/strangeness, senior/junior, inclusion/exclusion and recognising/ignoring. The point to using the concept of microimplication is to draw attention to how these dichotomies come to be actualised when they inform people's concrete actions. They are not just analytical distinctions (which they certainly also are); they are practical distinctions effectively made by the members of the situation. The sign that organises these various practical distinctions is the visibly pregnant body, the fact of the belly. Sara is effectively interacted with as a junior; as a personal and private person; she is ignored as a professional mind but recognised as a physical body. The opening paragraphs in Memory story 1 spell out the emotional labour (see, e.g., Ashfort & Kreiner, 2002; Coupland, Brown, Daniels, & Humphreys, 2008; Hochschild, 1983) that goes into hiding the fact of the belly in order for Sara's body not to come to the fore at the expense of her brain. And, similarly, her strategy of asking questions to avoid inquiries about her body. Sara's pregnant body is taken as an open invitation for commenting on her body in ways that otherwise seem inappropriate to most people, especially in a work context. Perhaps it, for that reason, is no coincidence that both memory stories are situated in an informal lunch setting.

This text builds on an individual experience, expanded into a collective biography where the affective dimensions of

microimplications are in focus. Our intention is not to generalise this experience as a universal conclusion or explanation of the experience of being pregnant as a PhD student in academia. Nor do we regard this as a stand-alone experience locally produced in the specific academic setting. In this final part, we bring back attention to what happens to bodies entering into an academia not shaped by nor for them. Bodies and subjectivity are traditionally seen as problematic in an academia where logic and objectivity are incontestably held in highest regard as good research practice, shaping the academic culture. Although more and more embodied alternatives are emerging in academia (our piece of writing is just one example of many – see, e.g., Gilmore, Harding, Helin, and Pullen [2019] special issue of *Management Learning* on writing differently), the embodied accounts are just drops in a sea of conventional research norms, cherishing objectivity, distanced/neutral positioning and logic detached from emotion.

The mainstream research norm is objective and disembodied, but the actual university, we contest, is very much embodied. In the concrete setting of the two memory stories, academic embodiment is male (and heteronormative), the type of body suitable for academic work. The standardisation and homogeneity of this particular embodiment universalise the male body, rendering it invisible in an academic context. A body that temporarily (such as a pregnant belly) or constantly does not conform to the embodiment that is academia becomes a visibly present body because it differs from the academic embodiment. It pokes and challenges the traditional academic culture simply by being. In Ahmed's (2012) words, we may say that Sara's pregnant, non-conforming body inhabits an institutional space that does not give her residence. This involuntary being-out-of-place or not-at-home animates resistance to the pregnant body in the androcentric academic department. People act and react to the very present body – the fact of the belly, leaving little or no room for that body to define and act on its own behalf, a process we have described by using the concept of microimplications. From the memory stories we know that people use different strategies to handle a very present body, like the pregnant belly. Individuals with embodied experiences of pregnancy might see it as an opportunity to exchange experiences or a point of connection. Others, with no physical experience of being pregnant, might use jokes and witty comments to cope with the fact of the belly. Although the strategies are different, they have at least one thing in common: the fact of the belly merges the private sphere with the professional, and by that forecloses opportunities for the pregnant PhD student to act as an academic subject that can engage in and hence live the PhD journey.

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Entangled in Scholarly Institutionalising – The Travails of the 'Mature Age' PhD Student

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Today's society is no longer Foucault's disciplinary world of hospitals, madhouses, prisons, barracks, and factories. It has long been replaced by another regime, namely a society of fitness studios, office towers, banks, airports, shopping malls, and genetic laboratories. Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society. Also, its inhabitants are no longer 'obedience-subjects' but 'achievement-subjects'. They are entrepreneurs of themselves. (Han, 2015, p. 8)

When I was asked to contribute a piece to the Unplugged section of *M@n@gement*, I did not think that I would write about what follows. But as I wait the approval of an extension to my PhD, I am contending with what it means to be a 'mature age' student entangled in the institutional affordances and constraints of the situation I find myself in.

Last week, I was chatting with 'Krista', a peer PhD student, while waiting for my youngest daughter to turn up for lunch. We are both in Politics and International Relations, and she, like me, is a 'mature age' student, coming to the end of her time as a doctoral student. We randomly grab moments in corridors, kitchens and outside buildings to chat and compare our

experiences and frustrations with what feels like an infantilising of our position as doctoral students, women who have substantive and extensive professional experience outside academia (in the institutions of the public sector). As we stood outside the library, my daughter turned up at the point we were moaning about the impact of doing a PhD on our sense of embodied selves – the institutionalising practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) that we feel have deconstructed who we are and that are affecting our bodies in the form of loss of confidence, anxiety and even joint pain. My daughter quipped about how relieved she was to not have to go to a class or write assessments, having just come out of 19 years of educational institutionalisation – she graduated last week with an honours degree in Biochemistry from another university. In response, we described what happens when you hand in the printed copy of your thesis in our esteemed seat of learning – you literally get a lollipop – admittedly quite a large piece of candy with the university logo impressed in it and you get to pick from two flavours. We suggested that after all the intellectual, physical and emotional labour accompanying the production of a thesis, a lollipop for women of our age was

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