Role Models and Contagion: Parental Identity Enhances Work Motivation Among Working Mothers

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Abstract

This study challenges the societal stereotype that "childbearing contradicts women's work motivation" and proposes the Parental Identity Gain Theory. It posits that parental identity can serve as a significant source of work motivation for working mothers. This gain operates through two mechanisms: parental role-model motivation (wherein mothers strive to become exemplars for their children) and inspiration derived from children's exploratory spirit (which stimulates work-related curiosity and intrinsic motivation). The study delineates boundary conditions for the parental gain theory from individual, organizational, and familial perspectives, thereby deepening our understanding of the relationship between fertility-related identity and women's work motivation, and offering managerial policy recommendations to enhance the work motivation of women of childbearing age.

Full Text

Setting Examples and Drawing Inspiration: How Parental Identity Enriches Working Mothers' Work Motivation

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Abstract: This research challenges the prevailing social stereotype that "childbearing inherently undermines women's work motivation" by introducing a parental identity enrichment theory. The study demonstrates how parental identity can serve as a significant source of professional motivation for working mothers. This enrichment operates through two key mechanisms: parental role modeling (mothers working diligently to become positive exemplars for their children) and inspiration drawn from children's natural exploratory tendencies

(which stimulates workplace curiosity and intrinsic motivation). The research theorizes the applicability of this parental enrichment theory across personal, organizational, and family domains, offering a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between fertility-related identity and women's professional drive. Additionally, it provides practical management strategies to enhance work motivation among women of childbearing age.

Keywords: parental identity, working mothers, women's work motivation, family-work enrichment

1. Problem Introduction

"Why has my work efficiency actually improved after having a child?" This new mother's surprising discovery reveals a significant gap between academic theory and lived experience. While an increasing number of professional women demonstrate higher work effectiveness and career resilience after childbirth, mainstream theoretical research has long treated motherhood as an obstacle to career development. This disconnect between theory and reality not only fosters workplace bias against women of childbearing age but also forces many women into a dilemma between "childbearing and career" [**?**, **?**], exacerbating China's dual challenges of persistently low fertility rates and limited female career development [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**]. Why does this theory-reality gap exist? Under what circumstances can fertility-related identity enhance rather than hinder women's work motivation? Addressing these questions not only enriches theoretical perspectives on women's work-family interactions but also provides critical insights for transforming the social stereotype of "motherhood-work conflict," driving organizational practice reforms, and promoting equitable family division of labor—thereby creating a social environment where women can choose to have children without sacrificing career development and achieve dual success.

For decades, mainstream theoretical perspectives on the motherhood-career relationship have presupposed inherent conflict. This assumption manifests in two dominant theories: First, the "pushed-out perspective" emphasizes how systematic workplace discrimination forces women to reduce work participation; second, the "opting-out perspective" focuses on women's internalized social role expectations leading them to voluntarily decrease career investment. Though differing in focus, both theories treat motherhood as a career obstacle, making them ill-equipped to explain why some working mothers experience enhanced work motivation. However, recent studies have begun capturing evidence contradicting mainstream theory. For instance, [**?**, **?**]'s longitudinal research found that, contrary to dominant expectations, pregnant women's career motivation generally rises rather than falls. [**?**] captured how mothers derive positive emotional energy from parenting that translates into work investment, while [**?**, **?**] found that multiple roles enhance female managers' work effectiveness. These findings point to a long-neglected possibility—motherhood does not necessarily weaken career motivation and may, under specific conditions, become a positive resource for career development.

Yet, without a systematic theoretical framework to integrate these scattered findings, motherhood's positive impact on careers remains at the margins of research, lacking a clear theoretical pathway. This research gap not only limits comprehensive understanding of the motherhood-career relationship but also hinders the development of effective supportive policies and practices. To fill this void, this study proposes for the first time a systematic third pathway— "parental identity enrichment." This innovative approach transcends the limitations of social role theory by systematically explaining how parental identity can become a source of women's work motivation rather than a hindrance under specific conditions. Family-work enrichment theory posits that family and work identities need not conflict; instead, psychological resources, values, and perspectives accumulated through fulfilling family roles can help individuals better accomplish work tasks [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Integrating social identity theory [**?**, **?**, **?**], we argue that stronger parental identity allows women to derive positive meaning and psychological resources from this identity, which can become sources of work motivation.

This study deeply explores how parental identity becomes a wellspring of work motivation for working mothers through two dimensions. First, we transcend the passive internalization logic of social role theory by proposing "parental role modeling motivation"—an intrinsic drive for mothers to build socialization models for their children through work achievement [**?**, **?**], inheriting social role theory's definition of maternal responsibility [**?**, **?**]. This study transforms the traditional concept of "supporting husband and teaching children" into a more modern "role modeling and nurturing" philosophy. Based on their responsibility to educate children, working mothers hope to set good examples for their children through excellent work performance [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Second, children naturally possess abundant curiosity and intrinsic exploratory motivation [**?**, **?**, **?**], and these precious traits are more easily transmitted to and inspire mothers with strong parental identity, awakening and strengthening their workplace curiosity and intrinsic motivation, thereby significantly promoting work performance and career development.

Notably, the enrichment effect of parental identity does not operate uniformly across all contexts. To clarify the boundary conditions of this maternal enrichment pathway, we systematically examine three categories of key moderating factors from personal, organizational, and family perspectives: First, individual-level gender role attitudes influence how women understand maternal roles, laying a cognitive foundation for identity integration [**?**, **?**]; second, organizational-level supportive factors (workplace mother role models, work autonomy, and family-supportive organizational culture) validate the value of family experience at work, creating environmental conditions for transforming parental identity into work advantages [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**]; third, family-level spousal support reduces role transition conflicts, ensuring women have sufficient resources to translate parental identity experiences into career investment [**?**, **?**, **?**].

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, by systematizing

"parental identity enrichment" theory, it breaks through the pervasive conflict assumption in motherhood research, offering a new theoretical perspective that demonstrates how fertility-related identity not only fails to hinder mothers' workplace motivation but can actually enrich it under specific workplace, family, and individual conditions—thereby enriching understanding of women's fertility-related identity and work relationships. Second, by proposing and validating the new concept of parental role modeling motivation and revealing the children's trait transmission mechanism, this study deepens research on specific mechanisms through which particular family identities enrich work. Finally, by exploring the cross-domain impact of parental identity and its key antecedents, this study expands existing knowledge about parental identity's antecedents and consequences, constructing a more complete and clear theoretical framework.

Practically, this research holds profound significance for resolving the apparent contradiction between childbearing and career development. First, by revealing the positive impact of childbearing on working women's motivation, this study provides strong evidence for organizations to scientifically evaluate working mothers' value, helping transform "motherhood penalty" culture and fully develop the career potential of women of childbearing age. Second, based on findings about parental role modeling motivation and trait transmission mechanisms, this study offers working women concrete strategies for transforming maternal identity into career advantages, empowering them to achieve dual success without sacrificing either domain. Third, by identifying key workplace and family support factors, this study provides practical guidelines for organizations to build supportive workplace environments and offers important insights for families to build mutually promotive egalitarian relationships, emphasizing spouses' critical role in sharing parenting responsibilities and providing emotional support—contributing solutions for working women navigating the dual dilemmas of childbearing and career development.

2.1 Limitations of Traditional Motherhood Theory

Social role theory emphasizes that women and men differ in social labor division, assuming different social roles. Traditionally, society assigned women primarily nurturing roles centered on childbearing and family care, assuming that after pregnancy or childbirth, women would shift focus away from work and lack work motivation [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**, **?**]. Based on this, previous research proposed two main perspectives to explain motherhood's negative impact on women's work.

The "pushed-out perspective" emphasizes systematic external constraints from social structures, focusing on how women are forced to reduce work participation due to external prejudice and discrimination [**?**, **?**]. [**?**, **?**]'s experimental research found that applicants labeled as "mothers" experienced nearly 50% lower hiring recommendations. This concretely demonstrates that working mothers receive fewer career opportunities [**?**, **?**], and may even face significant pay penalties and promotion barriers. At the daily work level, working mothers also encounter more work interruptions [**?**, **?**] and value devaluation [**?**, **?**]. [**?**, **?**] systematically

categorized these discriminations into two major categories: "institutional bias" (such as pay penalties, promotion barriers) and "interpersonal interaction bias" (colleague and supervisor devaluation and discrimination).

The "opting-out perspective" focuses on internal individual choice, emphasizing women's subjective decisions after internalizing social role expectations [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**]. This theory describes women's self-selection process from internalizing society's nurturing role expectations to prioritizing parenting responsibilities and ultimately actively reducing work investment or leaving their careers [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**]. Supporting evidence shows that mothers invest substantial time in childcare and housework, reducing time available for work [**?**, **?**, **?**].

However, an increasing number of studies challenge the shared assumption in both perspectives that motherhood and career inevitably conflict. These studies provide multifaceted key evidence showing that motherhood does not necessarily lead to declining career motivation. [**?**, **?**]'s longitudinal research found that, after excluding workplace discrimination effects, pregnant women's career motivation generally increased. [**?**, **?**, **?**] found that working pregnant women actively adopt strategies to maintain professional image, such as keeping work pace, indicating that women do not passively accept identity transformation but actively manage multiple identities and adapt proactively. Research also shows that motherhood can become a positive source of work resources. [**?**] found that mothers can obtain positive emotional energy from parenting that translates into work investment, while [**?**, **?**] confirmed that multiple roles enhance female managers' management capabilities and improve work effectiveness.

2.2 Empirical Findings and Mechanisms of Family-Work Enrichment Theory

Family-work enrichment theory focuses on the mutually promotive relationship between family and work, where experiences in family (or work) roles and identities help enhance performance in work (or family) domains [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**]. Evidence shows that family-to-work enrichment leads to higher job satisfaction [**?**, **?**], greater work engagement, higher work effort [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**, **?**], lower emotional exhaustion and burnout [**?**, **?**], stronger organizational commitment, and weaker turnover intentions [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Furthermore, leaders' family-to-work enrichment also enables them to demonstrate more positive leadership behaviors [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**]. These findings indicate that family roles need not conflict with work roles but can become sources of work motivation and enhance work capabilities.

Regarding specific mechanisms through which family roles enrich work, [**?**, **?**] proposed a three-dimensional construct: gains in skills, knowledge, and perspectives; gains in positive emotions and attitudes generated from family role participation; and gains in time and efficiency. Recent research has gradually focused on the accumulation and transformation of other psychological resources such as cognition and motivation. For example, [**?**] found that due to family-to-work enrichment, employees enhance their cognition of remaining opportunities

and time in their careers, which reduces work depletion and strengthens work engagement. Research also emphasizes that family roles are important sources of work motivation. On one hand, family resources and positive events satisfy individuals' psychological needs, enhance prosocial motivation, and promote positive behaviors [**?**, **?**]; on the other hand, meeting family needs can stimulate motivation to work hard, demonstrate work meaning, and generate family-work motivation—the motivation to work hard to support family—thereby promoting work performance growth [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Family identity refers to the degree to which individuals incorporate family roles (such as parental roles) as a core part of self-definition, reflecting psychological commitment and emotional investment in family roles [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Multiple studies show that family identity is closely related to family-to-work enrichment. Strong family identity brings deeper psychological meaning and more positive emotional experiences, and makes individuals more likely to transfer these psychological resources to work roles \cite{Lapierre et al., 2018; Provost Savard & Dagenais-Desmarais, 2023; Wayne et al., 2006}.

2.3 Comparison Between Family-Work Enrichment Theory and Traditional Motherhood Theory

The core of family-work enrichment theory lies in redefining the relationship between family and work: family is no longer an obstacle to career development but a potential source of resources. Through systematic literature review, we can identify key differences between this theory's characteristics and influencing factors and traditional perspectives:

First, enrichment theory's focus on influencing factors differs fundamentally from traditional theories. The "opting-out perspective" mainly concerns values and preference factors (such as traditional value orientation, motherhood values), while the "pushed-out perspective" focuses on institutional bias and interpersonal interaction bias (such as workplace discrimination, unequal care responsibilities). In contrast, family-work enrichment theory proposes a series of promotive factors: personality traits and cognitive abilities at the individual level [**?**, **?**, **?**], family identity [**?**, **?**], family support resources [**?**, **?**], and positive cross-domain interaction [**?**, **?**]. These are not restrictive factors but resources that can be actively transformed. Among these promotive factors proposed by family-work enrichment theory, family identity [**?**, **?**] occupies a central position as the key link connecting individuals, family resources, and work effectiveness. This identity factor directly triggers the model construction focused on parental identity in this study. We treat parental identity as the core predictor variable, exploring how it positively influences career growth intention through enhanced work motivation, rather than the inhibiting effect expected by traditional perspectives.

In terms of explanatory mechanisms, the three theoretical perspectives are also distinctly different. The "opting-out perspective" adopts a preference-choice mechanism, the "pushed-out perspective" adopts a restriction-exclusion mech-

anism, while enrichment theory emphasizes a resource-transformation mechanism, explaining how family experience translates into work advantages through resource transfer and cognitive expansion [**?**, **?**]. Particularly, enrichment theory clarifies how family responsibilities become sources of work motivation—family roles expand individuals' cognitive horizons and values, endow work with deeper meaning, and enable individuals to transform family responsibilities into career development motivation sources. This motivation transformation mechanism constitutes the core theoretical foundation of this study.

The fundamental difference between family-work enrichment theory and traditional motherhood perspectives lies in theoretical positioning. The two exit theories discussed in Section 2.1 both position motherhood and career development in opposition, forming a binary framework of family versus career, while enrichment theory provides an integrative perspective that can explain why many women achieve career growth while fulfilling maternal responsibilities [**?**, **?**].

2.4 Review of Parental Identity Research

Social identity research answers the question "who am I," emphasizing that people define themselves through social roles they undertake. Social roles contain a series of social expectations that prescribe corresponding beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors [**?**, **?**]. Therefore, part of people's self-definition is constructed based on social roles, and social identity motivates people to exhibit beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with corresponding social roles [**?**, **?**]. Parental identity refers to people defining themselves through parental roles. Higher parental identity means parental role occupies a more central position in self-definition, people have higher commitment to parental roles, more explicit parenting goals, and clearer and more comprehensive understanding of their characteristics as parents [**?**, **?**]. Parental identity development begins with undertaking parental roles. For women, pregnancy marks the start of parental identity formation. Women first experience a period of cognitive confusion about parental identity, then gradually explore self-definition related to parental roles through interaction with their environment and self-reflection, develop cognition about how to raise children, and form commitment to parental identity [**?**, **?**].

Research conclusions show that, on one hand, the sense of meaning, self-worth, and need satisfaction brought by parental identity can promote people's psychological health. Mothers with higher parental identity experience lower anxiety levels [**?**, **?**]. Doubts about parental identity are associated with greater parenting stress [**?**, **?**]. On the other hand, parental identity motivates people to better fulfill parental roles and avoid threats to parental identity [**?**, **?**]. Parents construct positive parenting practices through supportive interactions (such as positive responsiveness and emotional empathy). This parenting style not only enhances daily parent-child relationship pleasure [**?**, **?**] but also significantly improves adaptive resilience in family stress situations [**?**, **?**]. The mechanism manifests as caregivers forming virtuous cycles through positive reinforcement, thereby promoting flexible use of coping strategies.

These findings on parental identity directly echo the family-work enrichment theory discussed earlier. Just as enrichment theory emphasizes that family roles can become resource sources, parental identity research also shows that positive parental identity can bring psychological resources (such as sense of meaning and self-worth). These resources may precisely transfer from family domain to work domain through the aforementioned resource transformation mechanism, becoming motivation sources that promote career development.

2.5 Identifying Theoretical Gaps: The Discovery Value of a Third Theoretical Path

Through systematic review, we identify three key research gaps in existing literature that collectively point to the discovery value of a third theoretical path:

First, the theory on the relationship between motherhood and career development is incomplete. Existing theoretical frameworks explaining career interruption due to motherhood emphasize either preference-based active choice or structural barrier-based passive exclusion as causes of mothers' career interruption. However, an increasing body of research evidence contradicts these presuppositions. Current theoretical frameworks fail to adequately include and explain positive pathways, lacking a systematic theoretical framework to explain how motherhood can actively promote rather than hinder career development. This suggests the existence of a third theoretical path—"parental identity enrichment." This study aims to bridge the gap between existing theory and empirical evidence by proposing and validating parental identity enrichment theory, moving beyond simplistic negative understanding of the motherhood-career development relationship.

Second, there is a gap in exploring specific influencing factors and mechanisms of family-work enrichment. Existing research generally adopts broad concepts (such as family roles, family identity), rarely focusing on specific family identities (such as parental identity) and their unique enrichment mechanisms. Parental identity differs essentially from other family identities (such as spousal identity): it involves responsibility for raising the next generation, which may influence work motivation and behavior in special ways. Current literature lacks systematic exploration of how parental identity positively influences work motivation through specific mechanisms. This gap limits our fine-grained understanding of family-work resource transformation.

Third, there is a gap in understanding parental identity's cross-domain impact. Previous parental identity research has focused mainly on its impact on fertility behavior and family domain outcomes [**?**, **?**], with very limited exploration of its cross-domain effects, especially parental identity's role in the work domain: for instance, how parental identity affects motivation and behavior in the work domain, and under what conditions parental identity leads to positive career outcomes rather than career interruption.

3.1.1 Core Theoretical Assumptions and Concept Definitions

The core assumption of this study's parental identity enrichment theory is that parental identity can be transformed into working mothers' work motivation and career advantages through specific psychological mechanisms. This core assumption challenges the basic presuppositions of both opting-out and pushed-out theories, proposing that parental identity and career development may have a mutually promotive rather than zero-sum relationship.

In this theory, parental identity refers to the degree to which women incorporate parental roles into self-definition, manifested as internalization of and commitment to parental responsibilities. Parental identity enrichment refers to the process through which this identity promotes work motivation and career performance via specific mechanisms. The fundamental difference from traditional theories lies in mechanism differences: opting-out theory adopts a preference-choice mechanism, pushed-out theory adopts a restriction-exclusion mechanism, while parental identity enrichment theory emphasizes a resource-transformation mechanism, explaining how parental experience translates into work advantages through resource transfer.

3.1.2 Dual Transformation Mechanisms: Role Modeling Motivation and Trait Transmission

Role Modeling Mechanism: This mechanism stems from reinterpreting parental education responsibilities within social role theory. Traditional social role theory suggests women's parenting responsibilities lead to decreased work motivation [**?**, **?**]. However, we propose that precisely this parenting responsibility, particularly the responsibility to educate children to adapt to society, may motivate mothers to become role models for their children through career achievement. Women with strong parental identity place greater importance on educating children [**?**, **?**, **?**], more eagerly demonstrating professional competence and values to set socially adaptive examples for their children, thereby transforming parental identity into a source of work investment motivation. This mechanism strengthens as parental identity emerges and develops during pregnancy, gradually enhancing women's role modeling motivation and promoting postpartum career participation and work performance.

Trait Transmission Mechanism: This mechanism can be interpreted through family systems theory, where family members unconsciously regulate each other's behavioral cognition through continuous interaction, forming trait internalization. This mechanism originates from family systems theory's insight into mutual family member influence [**?**, **?**]. Traditional theories focus on how parents influence children, neglecting children's reverse influence on parents. We propose that children's natural curiosity and intrinsic motivation can be "transmitted" to mothers with high parental identity through daily interaction [**?**, **?**, **?**], and be internalized as intrinsic drive and exploration

motivation at work. Parental identity makes mothers more sensitive to capturing and internalizing children's positive characteristics, transforming these into psychological resources in the work domain. This mechanism is particularly evident during the parenting period; as daily interaction with children increases, mothers' curiosity and intrinsic motivation absorbed from children can stimulate work motivation, improving work performance and innovation.

These two mechanisms are complementary: the role modeling mechanism explains how parental identity endows work with more profound meaning, while the trait transmission mechanism explains how parental identity provides specific psychological resources. Together they constitute the complete psychological pathway of parental identity enrichment, running through women's entire reproductive process from pregnancy to parenting.

3.1.3 Boundary Conditions for Parental Identity Enrichment Effects

In traditional motherhood research, the opting-out path mainly applies to individuals with conservative gender ideologies, with decisions often influenced by: strong gender role identity, high parenting pressure, absence of family support systems, and normative social expectations of motherhood [**?**, **?**]. The pushed-out path applies to discriminatory environments. When women face workplace mother bias [**?**, **?**] and rigid work arrangements [**?**, **?**], even if they hope to balance family and career, they can only reduce work participation. Organizational support factors can significantly reduce this forced exit risk [**?**, **?**].

Indeed, the parental identity enrichment effect in this study does not occur automatically but must rely on the synergistic effect of triple support systems. First, individuals need egalitarian gender attitudes that define motherhood as multidimensional roles (combining caregiver and professional roles). Second, organizations must provide family-supportive culture that grants legitimacy to identity integration and creates flexible space for resource transformation through work autonomy. Third, family support (such as spousal sharing of parenting responsibilities) must alleviate the consumptive pressure of role conflict.

Unlike the "voluntary sacrifice" of opting-out theory and "helpless compromise" of pushed-out theory, parental identity enrichment theory reveals that motherhood may become a catalyst for career development, representing a paradigm shift from "conflict-exit" to "resource-enrichment." This theory not only challenges the stereotype that "motherhood necessarily weakens career motivation" but also proposes a "motherhood-career compatibility conditions model," providing a dynamic perspective for understanding women's career performance across different stages of childbearing.

Table 1 Comparison of Three Theoretical Paths in Motherhood-Career Relationship

Dimension	Opting-Out Theory	Pushed-Out Theory	Parental Identity Enrichment Theory
Core Driving Factors	Gender role ideology internalization	Structural barriers (discrimination, institutional constraints)	Cognitive integration and environmental support
Mechanism	Preference-choice mechanism	Restriction-exclusion mechanism	Resource-transformation mechanism (role modeling, trait transmission)
Applicable Context	Traditional gender ideology-dominated environment	High workplace discrimination, low work flexibility environment	Egalitarian gender attitude, high organizational support, high spousal support environment
Outcome	Actively reducing work investment or leaving	Forced reduction in work participation or leaving	Enhanced work motivation, improved performance
Core Assumption	Motherhood and career necessarily conflict	Motherhood and career incompatible	Embracing parental identity can benefit career

3.2.1 Growth of Parental Identity During Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a critical moment when women begin forming new identity [**?, ?, ?**]. According to social identity theory, when people undertake new social roles, they develop new identity accordingly. Undertaking new roles requires learning new skills, behavioral patterns, cognition, and values to meet new role demands. During this process, people gradually internalize new role requirements as autonomous requirements, incorporating developed values, behavioral patterns, and skills into self-cognition, leading to profound changes in self-definition [**?, ?, ?, ?, ?**].

During pregnancy, women receive numerous important signals reminding them of their impending parental role. These signals include hormonal changes, fetal movement, and family attention. Women realize that pregnancy means not only welcoming new life but more importantly, shouldering parenting responsibilities [**?, ?, ?**]. Preparing for childbirth and welcoming newborns gradually become particularly important roles in women's minds [**?, ?, ?**]. Throughout pregnancy, women explore different methods to cope with uncertainties and challenges brought by new roles, establish and clarify standards, expectations, and requirements for parenthood, internalize them into self-concept, and grad-

ually form parental identity [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: Throughout pregnancy, women's parental identity will strengthen.

3.2.2 Pregnancy Parental Identity Growth's Promotion of Parental Role Modeling Motivation Growth, Postpartum Career Participation, and Work Performance

Social identity plays a key role in stimulating identity-related motivation. It endows people with strong meaning, prompting active investment in specific social identities. Social identity is associated with standards and expectations individuals should achieve; the strength of identity determines how much they value these standards and expectations. Higher identity leads to greater perceived importance of achieving these standards and expectations, thus greater effort to meet identity requirements [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**, **?**].

Parental identity strength directly affects investment in children. People with higher parental identity place greater importance on investing in children and feel stronger responsibility for children's survival and development [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Therefore, parental identity motivates people to seek benefits for children's survival and development. Particularly during pregnancy, women's parental identity actively motivates them to participate in activities promoting healthy birth, development, and growth of children, such as adopting healthy lifestyles, following professional advice, and learning how to care for and educate children [**?**, **?**, **?**].

Family-work enrichment theory points out that although fulfilling family expectations requires time and energy, it can provide valuable psychological resources, perspectives, meaning, and goals for work [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Strong motivation to benefit children does not necessarily reduce women's work investment but may become a source of work capability. Parental identity provides enormous meaning for seeking benefits for children's survival and development. This meaning not only makes women deeply engaged in family domain but also provides motivation for their work identity investment, especially when career development benefits children's cultivation. For example, good career development, excellent work performance, high salary, respected social status, and rich interpersonal networks not only provide better material life for children but also demonstrate to children how to adapt to society. Research shows that people's desire to contribute to family can lead to increased work effort [**?**, **?**, **?**].

Women and men differ in social identity-prescribed responsibilities [**?**, **?**]. Women's social roles require them to undertake education responsibilities—cultivating children's social adaptation abilities, including transmitting social norms and values, teaching problem-solving methods, and imparting social skills [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Social learning theory indicates that parental behavioral modeling is the main method for educating children, demonstrating ideal

behavioral patterns, abilities, and skills to motivate children to imitate and learn social adaptation [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Women typically value parental identity more than men, investing more attention and energy in childbearing and education [**?**, **?**]. Parental identity provides women with enormous meaning, giving them greater motivation to undertake children's education responsibilities. Consequently, women have greater influence on children and are more likely to become children's learning models [**?**, **?**]. Therefore, women internalize the responsibility to educate children and self-motivate to become role models for children's development.

To fulfill this role model role, women need to acquire desirable skills, perspectives, and behavioral patterns, accumulate human capital, and prove they can adapt to contemporary society. However, these abilities and capital may not be obtainable solely through family roles. Traditional household tasks such as laundry, cooking, and cleaning mainly involve routine, repetitive, simple domestic labor. Compared with workplace tasks, family tasks involve less challenge and lower teamwork. Without workplace experience, women may not understand how to handle complex tasks, stand out in competition, cooperate with different people, or lead teams—all important indicators of social adaptation. Research shows that mothers set examples for children in career aspirations and adaptability [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Therefore, working mothers' parental identity may become a source of work motivation, inspiring them to work hard in the workplace with the aim of educating children about social adaptation through their own role modeling.

This study terms this new form of work motivation "parental role modeling motivation," defined as the motivation to exert work effort to become a learning model for children. This differs from traditional family motivation, which is mainly driven by family economic pressure [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Parental role modeling motivation focuses on children as beneficiaries and aligns better with women's nurturing and education responsibilities. As parental identity develops during pregnancy, women are more likely to internalize education responsibilities, desire to become role models for children, thereby strengthening parental role modeling motivation. This motivation makes them more likely to return to work after maternity leave and improves work performance. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: Changes in parental identity during pregnancy are positively related to changes in parental role modeling motivation.

Hypothesis 3: Changes in women's parental identity throughout pregnancy are positively related to post-maternity leave return-to-work and work performance through changes in parental role modeling motivation.

3.2.3 Workplace Factors Strengthening Pregnancy Parental Identity Enrichment: Moderating Effects of Workplace Mother Role Models and Family-Supportive Organizational Culture

Role models are crucial for women's career development [**?**, **?**, **?**]. According to social learning theory, role models' behaviors and personal styles embody appropriate behavioral patterns, norms, and values in specific environments. To better adapt to environments, people observe and imitate role models, learning their behaviors and styles [**?**, **?**].

For pregnant women, workplace role models are mother colleagues who successfully return to work after maternity leave, achieving good balance between family and work roles—being good mothers while completing work tasks. These role models are exemplars of successfully integrating family and work identities; their cognition, attitudes, and behavioral patterns are enlightening for pregnant women [**?**, **?**]. Pregnant women learn how to be good mothers and good employees by observing these working mothers' styles and coping strategies. The existence of workplace mother role models makes it easier for pregnant women to recognize that work and mother identities can be organically combined, enhancing their confidence in simultaneously undertaking both roles. Under these circumstances, pregnant women more easily derive meaning from mother identity for hard work—that is, working hard is for children's better development and to become children's role models. Therefore, their developed parental identity better promotes parental role modeling motivation growth, thereby strengthening motivation to return to work and improve work performance after childbirth.

Conversely, if other female colleagues either no longer fully invest in work or resign after becoming mothers, pregnant women may receive a strong signal: in this environment, good mother and good employee roles are incompatible. Lacking role model inspiration, they find it difficult to believe they can simultaneously undertake both roles well [**?**, **?**] and find it hard to derive work motivation from parental identity. Under these conditions, strengthened parental identity is less likely to promote increased work motivation and improved work performance. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 4a: Workplace mother role models moderate the relationship between changes in parental identity during pregnancy and changes in parental role modeling motivation. The positive relationship between identity change and motivation change is stronger when workplace mother role model levels are higher.

Hypothesis 4b: Workplace mother role models moderate the indirect relationship between changes in parental identity during pregnancy and postpartum career participation (a) and work performance (b). The positive indirect relationship between changes in parental identity throughout pregnancy and post-maternity leave career participation and work performance through changes in

parental role modeling motivation is stronger when workplace mother role model levels are higher.

Family-supportive organizational culture specifically refers to organizational support and value for employees' integration of work and family identities, reflected in organizational basic assumptions, shared beliefs, and values [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Family-work culture originates from the overall organization [**?**, **?**], manifested in formal policies, organizational communication, and information transmission among managers and colleagues. Family-supportive organizational culture is mainly reflected in three aspects: organizational expectations for work hours, career consequences of using family-friendly policies, and management support for employees' family needs. In highly supportive cultures, organizations do not excessively expect employees to prioritize work over family, using family-friendly policies does not bring negative career consequences, and managers demonstrate understanding, support, and flexible adaptation to employees' family responsibilities.

This study focuses on family-supportive organizational culture rather than specific organizational policies or particular interpersonal support forms in the workplace, based on the following considerations: First, culture provides an integrated framework for understanding family-work relationships. Family-supportive organizational culture includes three dimensions—work time expectations, policy use consequences, and management support—that can comprehensively reflect organizational stance. Research shows that even when formal policies exist, if culture implies usage will bring negative career consequences, employees actually dare not use these benefit mechanisms [**?**, **?**]. Second, regarding management support, although it is a dimension of culture, the culture concept is more systematic. Organizational culture includes systemic factors beyond specific leaders, such as time norms and career development paths; management support behavior itself is shaped by culture [**?**, **?**], and culture represents shared understanding across multiple levels, reflecting consistent expectations of "ideal employees" from executives to frontline staff [**?**, **?**]. Third, through organizational culture, we can understand the actual implementation of company policies and the attitudes generally held by managers and colleagues [**?**, **?**], particularly its "career consequences" dimension directly focuses on whether family policy use brings career penalties, which is crucial for parental identity expression and integration. Based on this analysis, this study proposes that family-supportive organizational culture will strengthen the pathway through which pregnancy parental identity influences work performance via role modeling motivation.

Family-supportive organizational culture provides a cultural legitimacy foundation for parental role modeling motivation mechanisms by redefining the "ideal employee." Traditional organizational culture often implicitly assumes that ideal workers should devote themselves wholeheartedly to work, placing work above personal and family life [**?**, **?**, **?**]. This assumption treats parental identity as a signal contradictory to career commitment. In such environments, even if

pregnant women internally develop motivation to set professional examples for children, they may suppress its expression and practice due to concerns about organizational non-recognition. In contrast, family-supportive organizational culture explicitly recognizes setting examples for children as a legitimate reason for career investment, granting role modeling motivation cultural recognition at the organizational level [**?**, **?**]. In supportive cultures, employees using family support policies are not seen as lacking career commitment, and organizational demands on work hours are more respectful of employees' family life [**?**, **?**]. This recognition enables pregnant women to more confidently develop parental role modeling motivation, thereby enhancing their postpartum return-to-work intention and work performance.

Conversely, low family-supportive organizational culture inhibits the process of parental identity influencing work behavior through role modeling motivation. When organizational culture implies that using family-friendly policies brings negative career consequences or requires employees to prove career commitment by sacrificing family, pregnant women face cultural barriers to identity integration. Low family-supportive organizational culture intensifies role conflict by reinforcing the binary opposition between "ideal worker" and "ideal parent." When organizational culture implies that truly committed employees should not be affected by family factors, women perceive stronger identity incompatibility [**?**, **?**]. This cultural environment makes it difficult for women to integrate parental identity with career achievement, weakening the transformation from parental identity to parental role modeling motivation and ultimately reducing postpartum return-to-work intention and work performance.

Hypothesis 5a: Family-supportive organizational culture moderates the relationship between changes in parental identity during pregnancy and changes in parental role modeling motivation. The positive relationship is stronger in high family-supportive organizational culture and weaker in low family-supportive organizational culture.

Hypothesis 5b: Family-supportive organizational culture moderates the indirect relationship between changes in parental identity during pregnancy and postpartum career participation (a) and work performance (b). The positive indirect effect is stronger in high family-supportive organizational culture and weaker in low family-supportive organizational culture.

3.2.4 Personal Factors Strengthening Pregnancy Parental Identity Enrichment: Moderating Effect of Gender Role Attitudes

Gender role attitudes, as deep-level personal values, refer to individuals' degree of endorsement of gender-related social roles and behavioral expectations [**?**, **?**]. These attitudes distribute along a continuum: one end represents traditionalist beliefs—that women should primarily be responsible for family care while men focus on work domain; the other end represents egalitarian beliefs—that family

and work responsibilities should be equally shared regardless of gender [**?**, **?**]. This study argues that gender role attitudes significantly moderate the impact of pregnancy parental identity on work motivation.

First, gender role attitudes influence women's understanding and definition of mother roles. For women with traditionalist attitudes, mother roles are primarily defined as providing full-time family care and prioritizing family needs [**?**, **?**]. This role definition views good mother and successful professional as mutually exclusive identity choices. As pregnancy progresses, traditional role expectations are continuously reinforced through physical changes and social interactions [**?**, **?**, **?**], prompting traditionalist women to gradually shift energy from work to the upcoming family role. In contrast, women with egalitarian attitudes tend to define mother roles as multidimensional, encompassing family care responsibilities but not limited to them, while emphasizing the necessity and importance of setting examples for children through career achievement. This more inclusive role definition provides a cognitive foundation for parental and professional identity integration. Second, gender role attitudes shape the specific content of role modeling motivation. Parental role modeling motivation—the desire to set positive examples for children—is the key mechanism transforming pregnancy parental identity into work motivation. However, women with traditionalist attitudes may understand good role models as demonstrating selfless dedication and family-first values [**?**, **?**, **?**], thereby weakening the importance of career achievement as role modeling content. Conversely, women with egalitarian attitudes are more likely to view career achievement, economic independence, and self-actualization pursuit as important values to demonstrate to children, thereby strengthening the connection between role modeling motivation and work investment. This difference in role modeling content explains why parental identity of the same intensity may produce different directional effects on work motivation.

Hypothesis 6a: Working mothers' gender role attitudes moderate the relationship between changes in parental identity during pregnancy and changes in parental role modeling motivation. This positive relationship is stronger among working mothers with egalitarian attitudes.

Hypothesis 6b: Gender role attitudes moderate the indirect relationship between changes in parental identity during pregnancy and postpartum career participation (a) and work performance (b). For working mothers with egalitarian attitudes, this positive indirect effect is stronger; for those with traditionalist attitudes, this positive indirect effect is weaker.

3.2.5 Family Factors Strengthening Pregnancy Parental Identity Enrichment: Moderating Effect of Spousal Support

During the identity transition process in pregnancy, spousal support, as the most influential proximal factor, has critical impact on integrating parental

and career identities [**?**, **?**, **?**, **?**]. This study proposes that spousal support significantly strengthens the positive impact of pregnancy parental identity on parental role modeling motivation and further strengthens the indirect effect on work performance through parental role modeling motivation. First, spousal support provides validation and confirmation of parental identity. Previous research indicates that family-related identities require validation through social interaction between spouses to stabilize and exert influence [**?**, **?**]. When spouses explicitly affirm the value of career achievement as part of parental roles, women can more confidently incorporate setting examples for children into their core parental identity definition. This identity confirmation effectively dissolves cognitive opposition between parental identity and career achievement, enhancing transformation efficiency from parental identity to role modeling motivation. Second, [**?**]'s research found spousal support is extremely critical for predicting family-to-work enrichment. High spousal support conveys expectations of shared future parenting responsibilities, reducing concerns about resource depletion. This enhanced sense of family control enables women to allocate limited resources more effectively [**?**, **?**], more freely constructing positive connections between parental and professional identities, thereby catalyzing parental role modeling motivation formation and promoting women's postpartum return to work and performance.

Conversely, low spousal support weakens the process of transforming parental identity into role modeling motivation and influencing work performance. First, low spousal support leads to identity conflict. When spouses do not support or question women's inclusion of career achievement as part of parental roles, women may face identity conflict [**?**, **?**]. This conflict makes it difficult for women to integrate setting examples for children into parental identity, instead potentially reinforcing the binary opposition between family caregiver and professional, weakening transformation from parental identity to role modeling motivation. Second, when spouses show unwillingness to share family responsibilities, women anticipate bearing most parenting work alone in the future, perceiving higher role overload risk [**?**, **?**]. This expectation of insufficient resources inclines women to associate parental identity with reduced work investment rather than improved work performance, thereby weakening parental role modeling motivation formation and inhibiting postpartum return to work and performance.

Hypothesis 7a: Spousal support positively moderates the relationship between growth in pregnancy parental identity and growth in parental role modeling motivation. Specifically, this positive relationship is stronger under high spousal support conditions and weaker under low spousal support conditions.

Hypothesis 7b: Spousal support positively moderates the indirect effect of pregnancy parental identity growth on postpartum work performance through parental role modeling motivation growth. Specifically, this positive indirect effect is stronger under high spousal support conditions and weaker under low spousal support conditions.

Study 1's theoretical model is shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

3.3 Study 2: Parenting Period Parental Identity Enrichment—The Promotional Effect of Parenting Period Parental Identity on Working Mothers' Work Motivation and Performance

3.3.1 Relationship Between Parenting Period Working Mothers' Parental Identity and Curiosity/Intrinsic Motivation

Family-work enrichment theory posits that individuals' family identities can bring new resources, skills, and perspectives to work identity, promoting work performance [?, ?]. Research shows that the more women invest in family identity, the more psychological resources they can obtain [?, ?, ?]. Identity endows people with purpose and meaning, motivating women to wholeheartedly invest in that social identity. Parental identity manifests as more invested parenting, more active fulfillment of parental responsibilities, and greater attention to children's status [?, ?]. Research indicates that parental identity brings not only more tasks and pressure but also opportunities for challenge, emotional experience, and problem-solving and self-reflection, promoting parents' development of social cognition, personality and emotional maturity, responsibility, and clearer values [?, ?, ?]. The more investment in parental identity and parenting, the deeper personal development [?, ?].

However, previous research has focused more on parenting's impact on parents' own development, less on how parental identity becomes a source of work motivation, and even less on how parents are influenced by children. Family systems theory points out that emotions, states, cognition, and behavior cross-influence from one subject to another within families [?, ?]. As core family subjects, children also influence parents [?, ?]. Parents not only improve themselves to meet children's needs but are also influenced by children's personalities, states, and characteristics during long-term interaction [?, ?], such as showing emotions similar to children or having work states affected by children's status [?, ?]. Higher parental identity leads to more invested parental role fulfillment, greater ability to capture children's states and characteristics, and greater susceptibility to children's influence.

Curiosity is children's nature, involving humans' basic motivation to seek knowledge, manifested as interest in new experiences and information. This interest arises from gaps between current knowledge and desired knowledge [?, ?]. Environmental characteristics of novelty, complexity, ambiguity, challenge, and uncertainty can stimulate curiosity [?, ?]. Children's limited cognitive abilities face family environments full of novelty, complexity, and uncertainty, requiring them to learn cognitive methods, values, and behavioral patterns to adapt. This strong experience beyond cognition stimulates intense curiosity, manifested in constantly asking "why" and enthusiasm for learning new knowledge [?, ?, ?].

In addition to curiosity, children also demonstrate strong intrinsic motivation to explore the world—engaging in activities for the enjoyment of the activities themselves [**?**, **?**]. When children encounter experiences beyond their cognition and attempt to understand them, intrinsic motivation emerges. Starting from late infancy, children show strong interest in new experiences, which continues growing into adulthood [**?**, **?**, **?**], leading children's play, exploration, and knowledge-seeking behaviors to have strong intrinsic motivation [**?**, **?**, **?**]. In these activities, children acquire new skills and knowledge, enhancing sense of mastery and self-efficacy, increasing enjoyment of activities, and further strengthening intrinsic motivation [**?**, **?**].

Mothers with high parental identity invest more in parenting and pay more attention to children's status, making children's curiosity and intrinsic motivation more easily transmitted to them. On one hand, through empathy in intimate relationships, mothers can observe and experience children's feelings [**?**, **?**]. Curiosity is accompanied by excitement, joy, and desire to fill cognitive gaps from exploring new knowledge [**?**, **?**], while intrinsic motivation activities are accompanied by strong interest and happiness [**?**, **?**]. These strong emotions produce interpersonal transmission effects; the more frequent the contact and the more intimate the relationship, the deeper the emotional transmission. Parental identity makes mothers frequently pay attention to children's status and perceive children's emotions, thus resonating more with children's excitement and happiness during exploration. On the other hand, parental identity motivates mothers to accompany children's learning and growth, responding to their thirst for knowledge, such as answering "why" questions or responding to new ideas. This participation brings new experiences and challenges to mothers, stimulating their desire and interest to explore, enhancing curiosity and intrinsic motivation [**?**, **?**]. According to family-work enrichment theory, these psychological resources accumulated from family can spill over to work domain [**?**, **?**, **?**], making mothers more willing to accept uncertainty and challenges at work, viewing them as opportunities to enjoy problem-solving, create novel work experiences, and development opportunities [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Therefore, mothers with higher parental identity can better perceive children's characteristics, which can influence their work motivation. We propose:

Hypothesis 8: Working mothers' parental identity is positively related to their own curiosity through perceived children's curiosity.

Hypothesis 9: Working mothers' parental identity is positively related to their own intrinsic motivation through perceived children's intrinsic motivation.

3.3.2 Relationship Between Parenting Period Working Mothers' Parental Identity and Work Performance/Career Participation

Curiosity can significantly improve work performance. It drives people to learn new knowledge and skills, enhancing adaptability to work environments [**?**, **?**], promoting practitioners to better undertake job requirements and improve task

performance [**?**, **?**]. Meanwhile, curious people face challenges with positive attitudes, search for information in new environments, learn new skills, explore new problem-solving methods, propose new ideas, and enhance innovative performance [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Additionally, curiosity motivates practitioners to actively face different job requirements, seek diverse solutions, discover work enjoyment [**?**, **?**], not be satisfied with single family environments, and be more willing to undertake career challenges, improving career participation.

Similarly, intrinsic motivation can also significantly improve work performance. When people find work tasks enjoyable, they are more likely to accept and actively execute them [**?**, **?**], investing more in tasks driven by intrinsic motivation [**?**, **?**]. Intrinsically motivated people have greater work engagement intensity; research shows that enjoyment of work tasks and learning new skills makes them contribute more in complex environments [**?**, **?**]. Moreover, intrinsically motivated people work more persistently, maintaining longer duration in work tasks and striving for better results [**?**, **?**]. Intrinsic motivation improves task performance by promoting the direction, intensity, and persistence of work effort [**?**, **?**].

Intrinsic motivation also drives innovative performance because it immerses people in tasks, makes them enjoy learning, acquire more relevant knowledge and skills, brings more positive emotional experiences, and makes cognition more flexible and elastic. Therefore, intrinsically motivated practitioners are more likely to generate innovative ideas and achieve higher innovative performance [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Additionally, intrinsic motivation brings high psychological satisfaction to practitioners, making them more engaged in current work [**?**, **?**, **?**] and increasing career participation. Since working mothers with high parental identity have curiosity and intrinsic motivation influenced by children, and these motivations can promote work performance, we propose:

Hypothesis 10: Working mothers' parental identity is positively related to task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through perceived children's curiosity and mothers' own curiosity.

Hypothesis 11: Working mothers' parental identity is positively related to task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through perceived children's intrinsic motivation and mothers' own intrinsic motivation.

3.3.3 Workplace Factors Strengthening Parenting Period Parental Identity Enrichment: Moderating Effects of Work Autonomy and Family-Supportive Organizational Culture

Work autonomy refers to the degree of decision-making and action freedom practitioners have in their work [**?**, **?**]. Research shows that work environments with strong autonomy allow working mothers to reasonably arrange work and family affairs, enhancing work control and promoting work-family balance [**?**, **?**].

Work with strong autonomy allows practitioners to freely choose task processing methods, problem-solving approaches, and decision-making processes. This autonomy and sense of control motivate practitioners to fully invest in work and encourage deep exploration and learning. Autonomous work also allows practitioners to choose work content or methods that interest them and are meaningful, helping align work with personal interests and providing more enjoyment [**?**, **?**, **?**]. These conditions are conducive to stimulating practitioners' curiosity and intrinsic motivation [**?**, **?**, **?**].

Work with strong autonomy can strengthen working mothers' family-work enrichment, promoting the transformation of psychological resources accumulated in parenting to work domain. This creates favorable conditions for working mothers to apply curiosity and intrinsic motivation inspired by children to work, stimulating work exploration enthusiasm and improving career participation and work performance. Therefore, in high work autonomy environments, working mothers with strong mother identity can more easily transform children's transmitted characteristics into work motivation, improving work performance.

Conversely, work with weak autonomy limits working mothers' enthusiasm for autonomous exploration and learning, making them lack conditions to choose interesting work content and problem-solving approaches. Under these circumstances, curiosity and intrinsic motivation that working mothers with high parental identity acquire from children lack space for expression at work, are less likely to spill over to work domain, and are less likely to promote work performance and career participation. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 12a: Work autonomy moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and their own curiosity through perceived children's curiosity. The positive relationship between parental identity and workplace curiosity is stronger when work autonomy is higher.

Hypothesis 12b: Work autonomy moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through perceived children's curiosity and their own curiosity. These indirect relationships are stronger when work autonomy is higher.

Hypothesis 12c: Work autonomy moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and their own intrinsic motivation through perceived children's intrinsic motivation. The positive relationship between parental identity and workplace intrinsic motivation is stronger when work autonomy is higher.

Hypothesis 12d: Work autonomy moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through perceived children's intrinsic motivation and their own intrinsic motivation. These indirect relationships are stronger when work autonomy is higher.

High family-supportive organizational culture strengthens the positive spillover effect of parenting period parental identity. First, high-support culture legitimizes the value of family experience at work [**?**, **?**, **?**], recognizing that parenting experience can bring positive value to work, such as enhancing employees' patience, empathy, and multitasking abilities. This cultural environment enables working mothers to confidently introduce curiosity and intrinsic motivation learned from child interactions into the workplace without worrying about being labeled "distracted" or "lacking career commitment" [**?**, **?**]. Second, high-support culture reduces psychological barriers to role transition. When organizational culture recognizes the coexistence and complementarity of family and work identities, practitioners' psychological stress during role transitions significantly decreases [**?**, **?**], allowing parental identity's influence to more naturally integrate into work roles and promoting expression of curiosity and intrinsic motivation at work.

In contrast, low family-supportive organizational culture inhibits parenting period parental identity's positive spillover. First, low-support culture reinforces role segregation, implying that family and work should be strictly separated and any attempt to bring family experience to work may be seen as unprofessional. This segregation consciousness makes working mothers unwilling to express traits learned from child interactions at work, even when these traits may benefit work. Second, low-support culture increases identity transition costs. When workplace culture emphasizes incompatibility between ideal worker and family caregiver identities, working mothers must pay higher psychological costs when transitioning between family and work roles [**?**, **?**], hindering the pathway from parental identity to work performance through curiosity and intrinsic motivation.

Hypothesis 13a: Family-supportive organizational culture moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and their own curiosity through perceived children's curiosity. The positive relationship between parental identity and workplace curiosity is stronger when family-supportive organizational culture levels are higher.

Hypothesis 13b: Family-supportive organizational culture moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through perceived children's curiosity and their own curiosity. These indirect relationships are stronger when family-supportive organizational culture levels are higher.

Hypothesis 13c: Family-supportive organizational culture moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and their own intrinsic motivation through perceived children's intrinsic motivation. The positive relationship between parental identity and workplace intrinsic motivation is stronger when family-supportive organizational culture levels are higher.

Hypothesis 13d: Family-supportive organizational culture moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and task perfor-

mance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through perceived children's intrinsic motivation and their own intrinsic motivation. These indirect relationships are stronger when family-supportive organizational culture levels are higher.

3.3.4 Strengthening Parenting Period Parental Identity Enrichment: Moderating Effect of Gender Role Attitudes

Egalitarian attitudes strengthen the importance of professional identity and motivation to prove oneself. Working mothers with egalitarian attitudes highly value their own career development, believing that women can achieve as much as men in the workplace [?, ?]. This emphasis on professional identity drives them to more actively seek various resources to improve work performance, including positive resources obtained from family domain. Egalitarian attitudes enhance working mothers' identification effectiveness of workplace resource transformation potential. Due to emphasis on professional identity, egalitarian mothers can more accurately identify and value the potential value of psychological resources obtained from parenting processes for career development [?, ?]. Egalitarian mothers can not only draw curiosity and intrinsic drive from interactions with children but, more importantly, recognize the legitimacy and practical value of these precious traits as workplace resources. Holding this cognition that equally values family resources, they consciously view positive traits obtained from interactions as advantages applicable to work and actively apply them in workplace practice.

In contrast, working mothers with traditionalist attitudes believe women's primary value lies in family care, with career achievement being relatively secondary, thus the parental identity enrichment effect is not manifested or is weaker among them. Traditionalist attitudes reduce the psychological importance of professional identity. Traditionalist mothers tend to view mother roles as the core of female identity, while professional roles are secondary or supplementary [?, ?]. This role priority setting makes them less inclined to transform family resources into career advantages. Based on limited emphasis on professional roles, traditionalist working mothers have difficulty identifying the interoperability of resources across two domains [?, ?]. They are less likely to recognize the positive impact and potential contribution of parenting experience and traits absorbed from children to career development, more inclined to believe these traits only apply to family domain rather than being effective resources in professional environments. This underestimation of family resources' value in the workplace hinders family-work enrichment effects and inhibits potential positive spillover from parental identity.

Hypothesis 14a: Working mothers' gender role attitudes moderate the indirect relationship between parental identity and their own curiosity through perceived children's curiosity. This positive relationship is stronger for working mothers with egalitarian attitudes and weaker for those with traditionalist attitudes.

Hypothesis 14b: Gender role attitudes moderate the indirect relationship between parental identity and task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through children's curiosity and mothers' own curiosity. These positive indirect relationships are stronger for working mothers with egalitarian attitudes and weaker for those with traditionalist attitudes.

Hypothesis 14c: Gender role attitudes moderate the indirect relationship between parental identity and their own intrinsic motivation through perceived children's intrinsic motivation. This positive relationship is stronger for working mothers with egalitarian attitudes and weaker for those with traditionalist attitudes.

Hypothesis 14d: Gender role attitudes moderate the indirect relationship between parental identity and task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through children's intrinsic motivation and mothers' own intrinsic motivation. These positive indirect relationships are stronger for working mothers with egalitarian attitudes and weaker for those with traditionalist attitudes.

3.3.5 Strengthening Parenting Period Parental Identity Enrichment: Moderating Effect of Spousal Support

In addition to personal and workplace factors, family environmental factors, particularly spousal support, have important moderating effects on parenting period parental identity enrichment. High-level spousal support significantly strengthens the positive effect of working mothers' parental identity on work motivation and performance through children's trait transmission mechanisms. First, high spousal support reduces family resource consumption, creating foundational conditions for resource transfer. When spouses actively share housework and parenting responsibilities, working mothers' time, energy, and psychological pressure are significantly reduced [**?, ?, ?, ?**]. This resource conservation gives mothers sufficient psychological space to focus on and experience children's curiosity and intrinsic motivation, and adequate resources to bring these inspired positive traits into the work environment. Conversely, under low spousal support conditions, resource depletion may prevent mothers from focusing on children's positive traits or lacking energy to transfer traits to work. Second, high spousal support promotes psychological availability of positive family experiences. When spouses affirm and support the value of mother identity for career development, mothers more easily view family and work as mutually promotive rather than opposing domains [**?, ?**]. This positive frame enhances psychological availability of family experience in work environments, making it easier for mothers to extract and apply curiosity and intrinsic motivation obtained from child interactions in workplace practice, deepening these traits' impact on work behavior. Third, high spousal support reduces psychological burden of role transition [**?, ?**]. Spousal emotional support and recognition reduce mothers' psychological conflict and guilt during work-family role transitions [**?, ?**]. This reduced psychological burden enables mothers to more freely express positive

traits inspired from family interactions in professional environments without worrying about being seen as neglecting family roles.

Certainly, low spousal support weakens parental identity's positive spillover effect. Low spousal support increases resource depletion risk. When spouses provide limited help with housework and parenting, mothers need to invest more time and energy in family demands, facing higher resource depletion risk [?, ?]. This resource scarcity state makes it difficult for mothers to direct attention to children's positive traits; even when they perceive these traits, they lack sufficient resources to bring them into work environments. Low spousal support strengthens role segregation. Lack of spousal recognition of career importance makes working mothers more likely to view work and family as competing domains [?, ?]. This role segregation reduces psychological availability of family experience in work environments, weakening the possibility of curiosity and intrinsic motivation inspired from children spilling over to work domain.

Hypothesis 15a: Spousal support moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and their own curiosity through perceived children's curiosity. The positive relationship between parental identity and workplace curiosity is stronger under high spousal support conditions and weaker under low spousal support conditions.

Hypothesis 15b: Spousal support moderates the indirect relationship between parental identity and task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through children's curiosity and mothers' own curiosity. These positive indirect relationships are stronger under high spousal support conditions and weaker under low spousal support conditions.

Hypothesis 15c: Spousal support moderates the indirect relationship between working mothers' parental identity and their own intrinsic motivation through perceived children's intrinsic motivation. The positive relationship between parental identity and workplace intrinsic motivation is stronger under high spousal support conditions and weaker under low spousal support conditions.

Hypothesis 15d: Spousal support moderates the indirect relationship between parental identity and task performance (a), innovative performance (b), and career participation (c) through children's intrinsic motivation and mothers' own intrinsic motivation. These positive indirect relationships are stronger under high spousal support conditions and weaker under low spousal support conditions.

Study 2's theoretical model is shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper].

4. Theoretical Construction

This study challenges the long-standing traditional view that women inevitably reduce work motivation due to motherhood, proposing an innovative theoretical framework: parental identity enrichment theory. The core argument of this theory is that parental identity can become an important source of work

motivation for working mothers, promoting rather than hindering their career performance and participation under appropriate conditions. Based on integration of family-work enrichment theory and identity research, this framework explains how working mothers obtain work motivation through parental identity and how organizational environments facilitate this positive relationship. The overall framework of this study is shown in Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper].

4.1 Parental Identity: Transformation from Work Burden to Work Motivation Source

Traditional motherhood research's opting-out theory [**?**, **?**] argues that women actively reduce work investment due to internalized motherhood identity. However, this view lacks consistent empirical support [**?**, **?**]. Conversely, increasing evidence shows that working women's work motivation during pregnancy and parenting periods may rise rather than fall [**?**, **?**]. This study proposes that parental identity not only fails to weaken work motivation but can promote its enhancement by providing meaning and psychological resources [**?**, **?**].

Family-work enrichment theory [**?**, **?**] and identity research [**?**, **?**] provide important foundations for understanding how parental identity positively influences work. This theory points out that resources obtained in one role can enhance performance in another role. Unlike traditional conflicting family-work views, the enrichment perspective suggests that multiple role participation not only consumes resources but also creates new resources. Personal traits, skills, and perspectives, as well as social and material resources obtained through multiple role participation, can promote positive reciprocity between roles. This perspective acknowledges individuals' tendency to pursue growth and self-improvement, not just resource conservation. Family-work enrichment specifically focuses on how family roles provide resources for work roles [**?**, **?**, **?**]. Identity theory indicates that strong identity motivates individuals to actively fulfill identity responsibilities and behavioral expectations [**?**, **?**]. High-level parental identity increases women's investment in children's development and education. This investment is not limited to caregiving activities within family domain. Instead, children's long-term development requires parents to set socially adaptive examples, demonstrating abilities to cope with challenges, solve problems, and achieve self-worth. When women internalize parental identity as a core part of self-definition, they place greater importance on creating good development environments for children, including setting positive examples through their own career achievements.

Based on this, we propose "parental identity enrichment theory": parental identity can promote workplace women's career performance and development through role modeling motivation mechanisms and trait transmission mechanisms. Parental identity developed during pregnancy motivates women to become successful career role models for children, driving them to exert more effort at work and demonstrate abilities and values for social adaptation. This intrin-

sic drive to set examples for children transcends traditional economically pressured work motivation, forming a unique psychological mechanism. Women's social roles have traditionally emphasized education and nurturing responsibilities [?, ?], which aligns with role modeling motivation, making parental identity an important source of work motivation.

Parenting period parental identity makes working mothers more sensitive to capturing and internalizing children's positive characteristics such as curiosity and intrinsic motivation. Family systems theory shows that cross-influences of emotions, states, and behavior exist among family members [?, ?]. When mothers interact with children, children's natural curiosity and intrinsic motivation can be transmitted to mothers through transfer and observational learning processes [?, ?]. Higher parental identity strengthens this trait transmission effect; mothers can better transform these characteristics into psychological resources in work domain, enhancing work motivation and performance.

These mechanisms differ from general spillover effects in early family-work enrichment research, specifically pointing to unique psychological dynamics processes inherent to parental identity, filling theoretical gaps previous research failed to explain. Traditional research focused on how family roles consume work resources, neglecting unique psychological resources parental identity may generate and their positive impact on work.

4.2 Cross-Domain Identity Integration: Positive Integration of Parental and Work Identities

Unlike traditional views that treat motherhood and work as competing roles [?, ?], this study, based on identity integration perspective [?, ?], proposes that parental and work identities can achieve positive integration rather than a zero-sum relationship. This integration process stems from parental identity providing two unique sources for work motivation: role modeling motivation and trait transmission mechanisms. On one hand, high parental identity can stimulate women's role modeling motivation, prompting them to work harder to present successful images for children to learn from. On the other hand, interaction with children enhances mothers' ability to be inspired by children's curiosity and exploratory spirit, migrating these positive traits to work environments and enhancing work motivation.

These dual motivation sources enable parental and work identities to form a positive mutually promotive relationship rather than the mutual exclusion in traditional concepts. The parenting value sensed in parental identity and work achievement complement each other, jointly satisfying individuals' pursuit of self-worth [?, ?, ?]. In this integrated relationship, parenting is no longer an obstacle to career development but a unique source of work motivation, driving working mothers to perform better at work.

4.3 Theoretical Integration: Longitudinal Research Across Pregnancy and Parenting Periods

The unique contribution of this study's theoretical framework lies in tracing parental identity enrichment throughout different stages of women's childbearing, revealing this theory's dynamic development over time and its influencing mechanisms. This longitudinal perspective breaks the limitation of existing research that mostly focuses on single time points, providing more complete and scientific theoretical explanations.

During pregnancy, the emergence and gradual strengthening of parental identity [?, ?] mainly functions through role modeling motivation mechanisms. Pregnancy is a critical period for women's parental identity formation, accompanied by hormonal changes, fetal movement perception, and social role transitions, as women begin incorporating prospective parental identity into self-concept [?, ?]. This development process challenges traditional assumptions that pregnant women inevitably reduce career investment [?, ?, ?]. Parental identity may enable women to maintain work enthusiasm during pregnancy and increase the likelihood and positivity of returning to work after childbirth.

During the parenting period, parental identity mainly functions through trait transmission mechanisms. The core change in this stage is children's actual presence and interaction with mothers. Children's natural curiosity and exploratory spirit are transmitted to mothers through daily interaction [?, ?], transforming into positive psychological resources in work environments and improving task performance and innovative performance. This explains why working women with children are more likely to possess unique work advantages [?, ?].

The core breakthrough of this theory lies in revealing that parental identity may become a key link promoting positive integration of working mothers' childbearing willingness and work performance. When parental identity is no longer viewed as an obstacle to career success but an important source of work motivation, working women's concerns about childbearing may decrease and childbearing willingness may increase. By examining parental identity's role throughout women's entire childbearing process, this study compensates for previous research's limitation of examining parental identity in pregnancy or parenting periods separately, constructing a more complete theoretical explanatory framework.

4.4 Boundary Conditions for Parental Identity Enrichment: Triple Support System of Personal, Organizational, and Family Factors

The mechanism through which parental identity promotes work motivation does not operate equally effectively in all contexts but is influenced by factors at personal, organizational, and family levels. This multi-level support system shapes the boundary conditions for parental identity enrichment effects, explaining why the same level of parental identity produces differential impacts on different women.

Personal Level: Gender role attitudes profoundly influence the interpretation and transformation direction of parental identity. Women with egalitarian attitudes tend to define parental identity as multidimensional roles including career role models, making parental identity more easily transformed into work motivation; while women with traditionalist attitudes are more likely to narrowly define parental identity as full-time family caregiver roles, causing the same level of parental identity to lead to reduced work investment [**?**, **?**]. This cognitive framework of gender attitudes determines whether parental identity can be viewed as a source of work motivation rather than a burden.

Organizational Level: Supportive factors in organizational environments provide key conditions for positive transformation of parental identity. Family-supportive organizational culture [**?**, **?**] provides cultural legitimacy for parental identity by redefining the "ideal employee." Unlike traditional organizational culture that treats parental identity as contradictory to career commitment, supportive culture recognizes the work value of family experience, reducing "motherhood penalty" concerns and enabling women to more confidently integrate dual identities [**?**, **?**, **?**]. When women can successfully integrate professional and parental identities, they more easily view setting career examples for children as an important way to fulfill parental responsibilities, thereby strengthening role modeling motivation mechanisms. Additionally, supportive culture reduces role transition costs, facilitating effective realization of trait transmission mechanisms [**?**, **?**].

Workplace mother role models demonstrate to pregnant women the possibility of successfully integrating dual identities through social learning mechanisms, reducing identity uncertainty [**?**, **?**] and strengthening the connection between parental identity and role modeling motivation. Work autonomy provides flexible space for parenting period working mothers to transform children's traits into work advantages [**?**, **?**], enabling full play of trait transmission mechanisms. Workplace environments lacking these supportive factors may hinder positive transformation of parental identity, weakening its enrichment effects.

Family Level: Spousal support, as a core family support factor, provides guarantee for parental identity enrichment effects. High spousal support reduces women's resource consumption pressure through shared family responsibilities and emotional support, creating psychological space for transforming parental identity into work motivation; while low spousal support may cause the same level of parental identity to lead to resource depletion, hindering its positive transformation [**?**, **?**]. This key family resource determines whether parental identity transforms into work motivation or becomes an additional burden.

This moderating framework reveals that parental identity enrichment does not occur automatically but requires support from specific conditions. When women possess egalitarian gender attitudes, are in supportive organizational environments that provide workplace mother role models and work autonomy, and simultaneously receive high spousal support, parental identity is more likely to promote work performance through role modeling and trait transmission mech-

anisms; conversely, lacking these conditions, the same level of parental identity may lead to the reduced career investment outcome predicted by traditional theories.

This framework not only explains contradictory findings about motherhood's impact in existing research but also provides clear direction for organizational practice: by creating appropriate conditions, parental identity can be transformed from a career obstacle in traditional concepts to a positive source of work motivation, promoting women's childbearing willingness and achieving multiple wins for individuals, organizations, and society.

Overall, this study constructs an integrative theoretical framework by revealing parental identity as a source of working mothers' work motivation, along with its multiple mechanisms, contextual conditions, and temporal dynamics. This framework not only explains contradictory findings in existing research but also provides new approaches for organizational practice and social policy to promote win-win outcomes for women's childbearing willingness and career development, offering theoretical foundations for breaking the social stereotype of "motherhood-work conflict."

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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