MATERNITY MANAGEMENT IN SMEs:
A TRANSDISCIPLINARY REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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Abstract

This paper provides a transdisciplinary critical review of the literature on maternity management in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), embedded within the wider literatures on maternity in the workplace. The key objectives are to describe what is known about the relations that shape maternity management in smaller workplaces and to identify research directions to enhance this knowledge. The review is guided by theory of organizational gendering and small business management, conceptualising adaptions to maternity as a process of mutual adjustment and dynamic capability within smaller firms' informally negotiated order, resource endowments and wider labour and product/service markets. A context sensitive lens is also applied. The review highlights the complex range of processes involved in SME maternity management and identifies major research gaps in relation to pregnancy, maternity leave and the return to work (family-friendly working and breastfeeding) in these contexts. This blind spot is surprising as SMEs employ the majority of women worldwide. A detailed agenda for future research is outlined, building on the gaps identified by the review and founded on renewed theoretical direction.

Keywords: maternity, small businesses, work and family, gendered organizations, breastfeeding

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Introduction

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent 95 per cent of the world's businesses and generate two thirds of private sector employment (ILO 2015). They are frequently the site in which women reconcile the demands of maternity (pregnancy and infant care) and paid work, and managing staff maternity is a common task in SMEs. Yet, gender research on the workplace, and small business management studies, have created scarce and disparate research on SME maternity management. Most governments regulate workplace maternity (Lewis *et al.* 2014) but regulators lack the critiqued evidence needed to grasp the complex interests involved in SME maternity management. While managing maternity is demanding for small firms, calls to exempt them from regulations are simplistic as the practical and moral questions of management remain and because maternity is the single most important event in the gendering of careers (Bradley 2012; Gatrell 2011a). Even where regulations exist, maternity discrimination by small employers is relatively common (Adams *et al.* 2016a,b). Nevertheless, small businesses are not a universally bleak site for maternity management, so it is important to consolidate understanding of how contexts and practices produce better or worse outcomes for SMEs and women (Lewis *et al.* 2014; Rouse and Sappleton 2009).

We offer a transdisciplinary, theoretical review of knowledge that disrupts disciplinary silos (Jones and Gatrell 2014). Our aim is to describe what is known about the relations that shape maternity management in smaller workplaces and to propose a research agenda built on renewed theoretical direction to address clear knowledge gaps. Our paper develops Gatrell's (2011a) review of workplace maternity by considering how masculine workplaces and organizational embodiment shape maternity management in SMEs.

We also embed maternity management in theory about small business management, conceptualising adaptions to maternity as a process of mutual adjustment (employer and employee *ad hoc* bargaining) and dynamic capability (employer re-visioning and re-organization of resources into renewed capabilities). These processes occur in the context of a firm's informally negotiated order (where roles and capabilities are flexible, family-like and not openly debated), limited resource endowments and wider labour and product/service markets.

This review informs key policy debates. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include commitments to value care work via social protection policies, achieve equitable pay, promote equality of opportunity and rapidly reduce maternal and infant mortality. International policy makers are also concerned to increase productivity in small firms (Croucher *et al.* 2013). We suggest these global priorities depend on better understanding of maternity management in SMEs.

Below we first conceptualise SMEs and the maternity management process before setting out our theoretical framework and review methodology. Next, we critically review the knowledge base on maternity management in SMEs. In our discussion and conclusion, we build on our framework and review to develop a research agenda.

Defining and characterising SMEs

Small- and medium-sized firms are commonly defined as having 1-49 and 50-249 employees, respectively (European Commission 2016; OECD 2005). They are heterogeneous, raising questions about their coherence as a conceptual category (Dannreuther and Perren 2013; Micheli and Cagno 2010). Nevertheless, smaller workplaces are characterised by a number of key features and, consequently, research on maternity management in large organizations will not properly explain practice in SMEs.

We work with a *conceptualised* understanding of SMEs (see Kitching and Marlow 2013) concerned with theory about the implications of 'smallness' for employment relations, resources, management capabilities and relations to markets, rather than size itself. We primarily focus on small firms, the most numerous form of SME (ILO 2015). In practice, however, the maternity management literature rarely differentiates small- from medium-sized employers. We tabulate the size of firms reviewed, where this is available (Appendix II). We also include medium-sized businesses because, while formality of management tends to increase with size (Cassell *et al.* 2002), this process is not linear (Marlow *et al.* 2010). Survival is also not assured for growth firms achieving medium size (Anyadike-Danes 2015).

Defining the maternity management process in two phases

Like Gatrell (2011a) we pursue our review questions in relation to pregnancy and the return to work. Within pregnancy we also discuss maternity leave, a phase not covered in Gatrell's

review. We define maternity management as workplace responses to the reproductive labour of pregnant women and new mothers. Our separation of maternity management into phases reflects a western norm of punctuating workplace maternity with a period of maternity leave, rather than essential elements. We acknowledge that maternity leave is short or non-existent in some contexts and discuss the implications of this for return to work (e.g. breastfeeding of very young babies). Maternity leave is also being re-imagined by some regulators, providing fathers and others with leave entitlements; we return to the de-gendering of infant care in our research agenda in the Discussion.

Theoretical review framework

We draw from transdisciplinary literatures on maternity management, gendered workplaces, family-friendly working and smaller business management to advance our theoretical framework in sections on workplace gendering and embodiment and SME employment and market relations and management capabilities.

The effect of workplace gendering and embodiment

Masculine workplaces. Organizational theory stresses that work organizations are not gender-neutral (Acker 1990; Bailyn 2006). They are shaped by a confluence of interest (Bradley 2012) between the forces of capitalism, driving organizations to produce short-term competitiveness in market economies, and pro-masculine gender relations that cause numerous forms of sexual division and devalue or exploit the feminine (Walby 2004). Pro-masculine capitalism rarefies those who devote themselves to market labour unencumbered by domestic work or by maternity related absence (Acker 1990; Bradley 2012). Ideal workers are expected to work full-time, often long hours, and be constantly visible in the workplace (Bailyn 2011), with norms exacerbated by contemporary innovations in information technology and work intensification (Lewis *et al.* 2016).

Pro-masculine workplaces are dominated by a 'business-case' heuristic that de-legitimises the longer-term priorities of social sustainability (Hahn *et al*. 2014). Gendered organizations commonly stereotype pregnancy and infant care as abnormal and disruptive rather than a realistic part of employing human beings (Halpert *et al.* 1993). Women with potential for motherhood suffer detriment (Lips 2013), but it is becoming a mother, rather than gender *per*

se, that creates most disadvantage; much of the gender pay gap is a motherhood penalty (Budig *et al.* 2012; Tharenou 2013).

Of course, ideal worker norms vary across occupational contexts (Aalten 2007; Hall *et al.* 2007). Our review asks what is known about how the gendering of workplace relations and associated 'ideal worker' expectations, shape maternity management in SMEs.

Organizational embodiment and maternal body work. A particular effect of gendered organizations is their valuing of male bodies and hyper-masculine practices of embodiment. Research on the maternal body (see Gatrell 2011a for a review) focuses largely on professional and managerial women and suggests maternal workers struggle to approximate masculine dress and comportment. They are often made to feel out of place (Draper 2003), 'space invaders' whose bodies are interpreted as unprofessional, associated not just with short-term difference but permanently reduced commitment and performance (Gattrell 2007; Haynes 2008a,b). In some contexts, the pregnant body is also caricatured as a site of physical and emotional leakage, and treated with abjection (Gatrell 2011a). Maternal workers manage these stereotypes by performing 'maternal body work' that conceals or disguises the symptoms of pregnant and post-partum bodies and infant care responsibilities, and via 'supra-performance' (performing above expected standards) (Gatrell 2011c; Millward 2006). Displaying the ideal worker norm regardless of corporeality involves 'maternal stoicism' (Gatrell 2013; van Amsterdam 2014), coping with competing physical demands and tolerating discrimination or being side-lined.

Our review asks what is known about how norms of embodiment and women's maternal body work shape maternity management in SMEs

The effect of SME employment and market relations and management capabilities

Mutual adjustment within an informally negotiated order. Smaller employers tend to adopt an informal management style, emergent from the absence of formal human resource management expertise and policies, owner desire for autonomy and flexibility, close spatial and relational working relationships that create a shared sense of belong, inter-dependence and 'family-ness' (Ram *et al.* 2001; Ram and Edwards 2003; Ram *et al.* 2007). As worker grievances are rarely translated into action, small employers are insulated from union or individual activism. However, valued employees have power to withhold labour more subtly,

refusing to work flexibly across roles or peaks in market demand, productively or for low wages (Ram 1999). Mutual (although not equal) adjustment (Edwards and Ram 2006) is the process through which employers and employees strike a bargain over working conditions, pay, fringe benefits and work performance. Study of small firms in sectors as diverse as garment manufacture to professional services suggests that give, take, resistance, coercion, co-option and resigned resentment (Ram *et al.* 2007) emerge through day-to-day, often silent and inter-subjective 'moves' (Wapshott and Mallett 2012), rather than bureaucratic process, to create an informally negotiated order (Holliday 1995; Ram 1994; Ram *et al.* 2007). Managers and employees rely on perceptions about the other party's interests and willingness to adapt. Employer guesswork about the needs and capacities of maternal workers is likely to rely on gendered stereotypes of pregnant incapability and the primacy of mothering. Women's assumptions about employers' capacity and willingness to tolerate their changing bodies or adjust work practices will be influenced by their gendered workplace culture and lack of clear knowledge about resources.

Employers are usually the party with greater influence in mutual adjustment but regulation disrupts this power relation. (Owner-)managers may be fearful of unfamiliar regulation and resent time demanded by 'regulatory discovery' (Kitching 2015). Equally, they may feel beholden to staff whose resources are commercially valuable and scarce (Ram 1999, 2001; Wapshott and Mallett 2012), regardless of maternity. Even when employment relations are bleak, women exercise some agency, if only to succumb to exploitation (Ram and Edwards 2003). For example, women may agree to work below their potential in exchange for flexible working (Nadin and Cassell 2004; Ram 1994). Employee voice and processes of mutual adjustment are likely to vary widely in relation to gendered organizing, firm resources, market positions and management capability (Gilman *et al.* 2015).

Our review asks what is known about maternity management as a process of mutual adjustment within the informally negotiated order of smaller businesses.

Market relations, resource constraints and dynamic capabilities. Mutual adjustment occurs in the context of product/service markets in which firms compete and the labour markets from which they hire staff. Weak positioning in markets and resource scarcity means small firms have limited ability to shape contexts and means of responding (Edwards and Ram 2006). Equally, small firms may be less restricted by capabilities than large firms 'hardened' through formalisation and hierarchical control. They may have the 'dynamic capability' to rapidly

adapt to changing labour availability by leveraging resources, envisioning a new arrangement or creative re-integration of existing resources into new routines, to reconfigure capability or adjust market positioning. Dynamic capability is an organisational theory (Danneels 2008, 2010; Bowman and Ambrosini 2003; Teece *et al.* 1997). Its limited application in small firms suggests that renewed vision comes from learning about forces external and internal to the business, creatively imagining how available resource combinations can create competitive advantage and embedding learning through communication and repeatable routines (Jones *et al.* 2014; Jones and Macpherson 2006). However, dynamic capabilities are not a necessary condition of smallness (Edwards and Ram 2006). They rely on a motivated and capable manager able to learn from networks, access resources, create a vision and command competitive change. In smaller firms, management time and skill is often scarce, and pressure to create short-term profits intense (Jones *et al.* 2011). While the cost of learning can be reduced by integrating it with productive activity (Siren *et al.* 2012), not all small business owners learn from *ad hoc* experimentations (Baker and Nelson 2005; Zahra *et al.* 2006) or embed their learning as capabilities. Emergent strategy is often based on short-term reactive approaches (Marlow 2000) adhering to the short-term disciplines of profit and leanness (Timmons 1999). When competitive pressures, scarce resources or precarity are combined with a 'normative business case' heuristic (Hahn *et al.* 2014) and lack of management capability, small business owners may denigrate a maternal worker's value or fail to consider the possibility of productive adaptions.

Our review asks what we know about relationships between small firm market relations, resource endowments and management capabilities and maternity management in SMEs.

Context sensitive approach

Of course, SME maternity management will relate to gender processes in the local socio-cultural context as well as organizational culture (Metcalfe and Woodhams 2012; Tatli and Özbilgin 2012). Gender regimes and economic conditions shape resources, identities and labour divisions in businesses and families. As women and businesses are positioned differently within local relations, contextual accounts should adopt an intersectional and positional analysis (Dy *et al.* 2014). A key element of local systems are the maternity regulations and other welfare or employment law measures that determine rights and obligations for different women and businesses (Lewis 2002; Pascall and Lewis 2004) and shape norms of motherhood and employment (Abendroth and Dulk 2011; Daverth *et al.* 2015). While a full contextual analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, we note the settings

and types of workers covered in the studies reviewed, where these are stated, and discuss those that are neglected in the Discussion (see Table 1).

Method

In recent years, systematic literature reviews (SLRs) have won favour over traditional narrative approaches on the assumption they enhance the validity, rigour and generalisability of reviews (Denyer and Tranfield 2009; Jones and Gatrell 2014). The challenges that SLRs in their conventional form provide to management and organization studies have been recognised (Wang and Chugh 2014). We agree with Mallett *et al.* (2012) that SLRs should be viewed as a means to finding a robust and sensible answer to a focused review question, but not as an end in themselves. Given the fragmented nature and transdisciplinarity of our field of study, we therefore utilise SLR as a 'guiding tool' (Wang and Chugh 2014), and follow an approach characterised by 'compliance and flexibility' (Mallett *et al.* 2012). To provide transparency about our method, an overview of the entire research process is summarised in Figure 1.
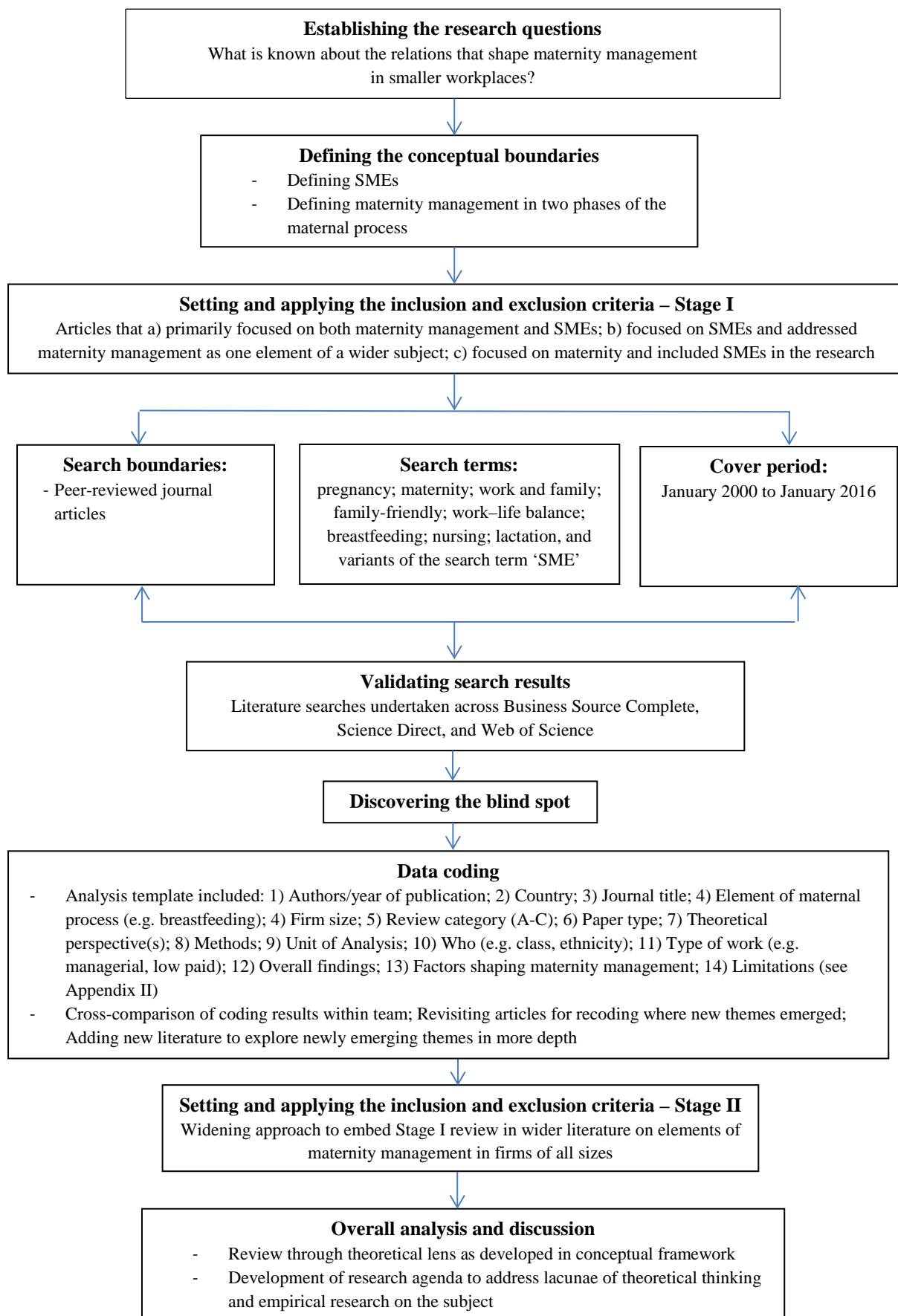
Establishing the research questions

What is known about the relations that shape maternity management in smaller workplaces?

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Defining the conceptual boundaries
- Defining SMEs
- Defining maternity management in two phases of the maternal process

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Setting and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria – Stage I

Articles that a) primarily focused on both maternity management and SMEs; b) focused on SMEs and addressed maternity management as one element of a wider subject; c) focused on maternity and included SMEs in the research

Search boundaries:	**Search terms:**	**Cover period:**
- Peer-reviewed journal articles	pregnancy; maternity; work and family; family-friendly; work–life balance; breastfeeding; nursing; lactation, and variants of the search term 'SME'	January 2000 to January 2016

Validating search results

Literature searches undertaken across Business Source Complete, Science Direct, and Web of Science

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Discovering the blind spot

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Data coding
- Analysis template included: 1) Authors/year of publication; 2) Country; 3) Journal title; 4) Element of maternal process (e.g. breastfeeding); 4) Firm size; 5) Review category (A-C); 6) Paper type; 7) Theoretical perspective(s); 8) Methods; 9) Unit of Analysis; 10) Who (e.g. class, ethnicity); 11) Type of work (e.g. managerial, low paid); 12) Overall findings; 13) Factors shaping maternity management; 14) Limitations (see Appendix II)
- Cross-comparison of coding results within team; Revisiting articles for recoding where new themes emerged; Adding new literature to explore newly emerging themes in more depth

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Setting and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria – Stage II

Widening approach to embed Stage I review in wider literature on elements of maternity management in firms of all sizes

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Overall analysis and discussion
- Review through theoretical lens as developed in conceptual framework
- Development of research agenda to address lacunae of theoretical thinking and empirical research on the subject

Figure 1: Summary of the review process

Scope and boundaries of the review

We started the review process by establishing the research objectives and conceptual boundaries of the review. Our paper addresses the following review questions: What is known about the relations that shape maternity management in smaller workplaces? More specifically, what do we know about how maternity management in smaller firms is affected by a) workplace gendering and embodiment and b) small business employment, market relations and management capabilities?

Our selection criteria are stated in Appendix I. Apart from some earlier theoretical contributions, we only included works published in the 21st century. To meet minimum scholarly standards we included only publications in peer-reviewed journals (Nolan and Garavan 2016). In response to calls for more transdisciplinarity in management and organization studies (Gatrell 2011a; Jones and Gatrell 2014), we adopted an inclusive approach rather than focussing our search on a number of pre-selected disciplines. The literature identified included publications in a wide range of specialist fields, including journals focusing on business management, HRM, labour relations, work and family, gender studies and lactation (see Appendix II). One of the contributions of our review is thus to bring together publications on SME maternity management from a varied and rather disjointed body of literature (Nolan and Garavan 2016). We exclude grey literature in the main review, but discuss its importance in our Discussion (Table 1 on future research directions).

Data collection and analysis

Our review was conducted in two key stages. Stage I was systematic. We conducted an initial key words search in the large international literature banks (Business Source Complete, Science Direct, Web of Science), to identify all literature addressing the subject of maternity management and support in the SME workplace, in different phases of the maternity process (see Figure 1), as defined earlier. We searched the Title and Abstract fields (and Keywords where available) using Boolean logic, breaking down 'maternity management in SMEs' into the components pregnancy, maternity leave and return to work, including the search terms listed in Figure 1 and Appendix I. Following our in/exclusion criteria, the articles identified were then screened for relevance by the research team, resulting in 20 papers being included, divided into three categories (A-C) (see Appendix II). We identified three papers with a core focus on both maternity management and SMEs (Category A) and thereby revealed a huge

gap in the literature. We decided to include another two categories in our review at this stage: first, papers with a focus on SMEs that addressed the subject of maternity in SMEs as one element of a wider subject, such as regulation or family-friendly policies (Category B); and second, studies with a focus on maternity management in firms of all sizes that explicitly included but did not focus on SMEs (Category C). As part of this process, another 17 papers were included in the review.

Templates were used to code the articles and aid a systematic analysis of the key themes identified (see Figure 1 and Appendix II). The papers were coded manually and, despite careful reading, the information to be collated systematically was often not explicitly stated (e.g. firm size). Although we searched particularly for work focused outside the developed world, most of the literature identified in the review is Anglo-American and European (see Appendix II) and care needs to be taken with respect to the generalisability of the work presented to other national contexts (see Appendix II).

In Stage II, we embedded the Stage I review in the wider literature on maternity management (i.e. papers that excluded SMEs or did not mention firm size). For those phases where we had identified literature on SMEs (maternity leave and return to work), we purposefully selected additional key literature to further explore emerging themes from our Stage I review. Where there was no or very limited literature on SMEs (pregnancy and breastfeeding), we searched for themes in the wider literature on these topics and applied our review framework to theorise differences between maternity management in firms of different sizes and reasons for the gap in the SME literature. The SLR method was not applied in this stage as the aim was to identify themes, patterns and gaps in past research and develop an agenda for future research (Wang and Chugh 2014).

Our analysis goes beyond descriptive reporting of the evidence as we aim to re-interpret and explain results (Denyer and Tranfield 2009), guided by our theoretical framework.

Maternity management in SMEs

Below we first review the literature on the management of pregnancy including maternity leave, and then the return to work including family-friendly working and breastfeeding in SMEs.

Pregnancy management at work

As maternity is often anticipated as troublesome by employers in organizations of all sizes (Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Woodhams and Lupton 2009), employees often worry about announcing their pregnancy at work (Gatrell 2011c; King and Botsford 2009). In smaller firms, these views are often exacerbated by manager perception that maternity management is unaffordable (Alewell and Pull 2011; Carter *et al.* 2009; Edwards *et al.* 2004). However, we did not identify any research with a core focus on how pregnancy is managed in SMEs, suggesting a significant research gap.

In the wider literature, research indicates that pregnant workers are often subjected to comments and inferences from managers and colleagues about pregnant women being unreliable, emotional, and unpromotable and expectation that motherhood reduces career motivation (Gatrell 2011a; Haynes 2008a; Millward 2006; Pas *et al.* 2011). In these gendered cultures, women feel progressively side-lined and disempowered during pregnancy and following maternity leave (Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Houston and Marks 2003; Liu and Buzzanell 2004; Mäkelä 2009; Millward 2006). For instance, in a UK case study (size of business unreported), Millward (2006) found that pregnant women in a range of jobs felt increasingly invisible and devalued. This was exacerbated by exclusion from decision-making regarding maternity cover, and reassignment to less responsible work when maternity cover commenced. In small firms, flat hierarchies and close inter-personal working may protect women's visibility in some contexts, but there is no research on this.

Direct and indirect messages from managers and colleagues also communicate the inconvenience of pregnancy and women can internalise these narratives, feeling guilty about 'burdening' colleagues with extra work and the need to arrange cover. These tensions worsen as pregnancies progress (e.g. Gatrell 2011a,b, 2013; Liu and Buzzanell 2004; Millward 2006). Many respond by supra-performing. This demands maternal body work and stoicism (Gatrell 2007, 2011c). However, this literature either focuses on large organizations (e.g. Haynes 2012; van Amsterdam 2014) or does not mention firm size (e.g. Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Gatrell 2014). It often refers only to professional and managerial women. Smaller, less hierarchical workplaces may include a wider range of women.

Lack of research on pregnancy in SMEs signifies a gap in knowledge about how conditions of informality may combine with different gendering cultures to create mutual adjustments between small employers and maternal workers, in contexts where workers can be particularly conscious of resource constraints and obligations to maintain their role in the

informally negotiated order (Edwards and Ram 2006). Edwards *et al.* (2004) observed that UK SMEs coped with maternity leave by intensifying co-workers' roles. This may heighten maternal workers' concern to minimise the 'disruption' caused by their pregnant bodies by over-performing to earn credit that can be exchanged with the adjustments of leave and return to work on changed terms. Supra-performing and maternal body work might be silent, inter-subjectively determined 'moves' in mutual adjustment. There is some evidence that earlier disclosure of pregnancy supports better planning and adjustment to pregnancy (Houston and Marks 2003; Jones *et al.* 2013) and it is possible that the close working relations in small firms also support communication. Firms that adopt a 'family-like' culture or actually employ family and friends may also respond to pregnancy with an ethic of care. We currently lack evidence about whether and when such an ethic is enabling or paternalistic (Ram 1994), disguising the capabilities of pregnant women (Carlier *et al.* 2012).

Management of maternity leave

As most countries provide maternity leave rights, this phase is most shaped by regulatory context, although length of leave and cash benefits vary considerably (Addati *et al.* 2014). It is widely assumed that SMEs cannot afford maternity leave supports (Alewell and Pull 2011; Carter *et al.* 2009; Edwards *et al.* 2004), especially in countries where employers are solely responsible for funding maternity leave pay (Barrett and Mayson 2008). In developed economies, excluding the US, pay is commonly state funded and in some contexts (e.g. UK) small firms are also paid an administration fee for processing maternity pay. Crucially, then, firms must cope with the effect of leave on the labour process but may be relieved from direct costs. In the US, paid maternity leave is provided in only five States, and firms with less than 50 employees are exempt. In some countries, maternity leave legislation appears generous (e.g. Ghana) but pay must come from employers and this right is not effectively enforced, especially among informal workers (Addati *et al.* 2014).

Small business research on employment regulation (Appelbaum and Milkman 2011; Atkinson and Curtis 2004; Carter *et al.* 2009; Chittenden *et al.* 2000; Edwards *et al.* 2004) commonly refers to small employers perceiving maternity regulations as administrative burdens. The tendency to reject regulation (Atkinson *et al.* 2014; Carter *et al.* 2009; Edwards *et al.* 2004; Harris 2002) reflects ignorance of its productive benefits in enabling markets to function (Kitching *et al.* 2013). In fact, attitude surveys commonly include employers with no recent experience of managing maternity (Carter *et al.* 2009). (Owner-)managers' fears and

resentments may reproduce gendered norms of ideal work in delegitimising maternity as a business concern, attitudes that may be exacerbated by limited resources and competitive environments. Although qualitative and large-scale survey work in the UK demonstrates that employers with recent experience of staff pregnancy generally have a more positive attitude (Carter *et al.* 2009; Edwards *et al.* 2004), research fails to explore attitudes to maternity leave in any depth across firms with different gendered cultures, employment relations and market conditions.

Evidence about the real costs of maternity leave to small businesses is limited, contradictory and problematic. Alewell and Pull 's (2011) review of costs of maternity leave regulations in Denmark, Germany, the UK and US, for instance, found that small employers were amongst those most likely to report maternity leave related problems and costs. Drawing on dated evidence they argue that smaller employers are seldom able to recruit maternity cover internally and more dependent on costly external recruitment. In contrast, other research reports that small firms are most likely to adapt by reallocating duties to existing staff (Carter *et al.* 2009; Edwards *et al.* 2004). This suggests the potential for dynamic capability to create productive solutions in response to maternity leave in the flexible context of the small firm. It is possible that once small employers commit time to regulatory discovery (Kitching 2015) and strategic review (Jones *et al.* 2011), they learn how to re-organize resources productively.

The wider literature on aspects of maternity leave (e.g. Aitken *et al.* 2015; Brugiavini *et al.* 2013; Rossin 2011) draws mainly on quantitative data, providing only partial insights into the highly complex nature of the 'transition to motherhood' (Millward 2006). In-depth examinations of how maternity leave is managed in the workplace are limited, particularly in relation to small firms. We identified only one paper focussing on maternity leave and small businesses (Barrett and Mayson 2008) and another with a wider focus that discusses an interesting example from a small firm (Buzzanell and Liu 2007). Barrett and Mayson (2008) draw on both employer and employee perspectives and provide important insights into the context dependent nature of SME maternity leave management. They demonstrate how, before statutory paid maternity leave was introduced in Australia, concerns about resource scarcity and the need to reduce costs dominated both smaller employers' provision of support and employees' sense of entitlement. None of the employers provided paid maternity leave, which they regarded as a threat to competitiveness. Support was mostly limited to mutual adjustment to enable unpaid leave, a regulatory entitlement, and flexible working on the return to work for those who had previously proven themselves valuable.

As expected, 'give and take' or 'reciprocity' between employers and employees emerges as the main approach for managing maternity leave absences in small firms (e.g. Barrett and Mayson 2008; Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Dex and Scheibl 2001). However, the SME literature pays limited attention to how these processes function. The wider literature indicates that negotiations are influenced by asymmetrical power relations between employers and employees (Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Liu and Buzzanell 2004; Millward 2006). The onus to initiate negotiation often lies with employees (Houston and Marks 2003) and availability and take-up of supports are influenced by women's agency and negotiation power (e.g. Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Greenberg *et al.* 2009; King and Botsford 2009; Ladge *et al.* 2012; Liu and Buzzanell 2004), sense of entitlement to support (e.g. Charlesworth 2007; Millward 2006), as well as workplace culture, including (owner-)manager and co-worker attitudes (e.g. Buzzanell and Liu 2007). Other aspects of maternity leave support, such as keeping in touch days (Baird *et al.* 2012), are not considered in the SME research.

Buzzanell and Liu (2007) and Liu and Buzzanell (2004) present examples of employees (business size not specified) who felt more or less able to negotiate conditions of their leaves, illustrating the case-by-case nature of such negotiations (Millward 2006). They also demonstrate that women's negotiation power during pregnancy and after return to work from maternity leave is weaker than before pregnancy, providing further support for the conclusion that maternal workers are progressively disempowered. They discuss maternity leave as gendered management conflict and "a process whereby organizational systems make women's bodies generally suspicious", in comparison to the ideal worker norm (Buzzanell and Liu 2007: 324). Furthermore, they emphasise the influence of cultural views about women's 'proper roles' as new mothers rather than paid workers, in shaping women's sense of entitlement and the negotiation process (Buzzanell and Liu 2007).

Barrett and Mayson's (2008) study suggests that close inter-personal relations in small businesses make women feel more able to discuss leave arrangements with managers, but these negotiations are founded on shared perceptions of what provisions are unaffordable for the firm (e.g. paid maternity leave). This is the inter-subjective nature of mutual adjustment (Wapshott and Mallett 2012), likely to be founded on wider social norms regarding gendered responsibility for reproductive labour. A lack of explicit conflict should, however, not be interpreted as absence of underlying tensions within gendered organizing.

Although employers tend to dominate management processes, Buzzanell and Liu (2007) provide a useful example, highlighting how dynamic capability may arise from maternal

workers' agentic power to respond to maternity leave productively. In this case a pregnant employee was able to use her management experience and negotiation skills to craft mutual adjustments by being firm about her personal goals as well as taking account of business needs, leading to mutually beneficial leave arrangements. However, the limited research literature on maternity management in SMEs provides little knowledge about the contexts that favour such empowerment and dynamic capability.

In summary, despite substantial wider research on the maternal body at work, research on smaller firms neglects pregnancy management. Maternity leave management research in SMEs is also limited. There is consistent evidence that (owner-)managers fear and resent the costs of maternity leave management but limited and contradictory evidence about actual costs. There are indications that small firms cope with staff absence through mutual adjustments. However, we know little about how the burden of reciprocity is spread across actors, or varies in relation to a woman's role, organizational culture, resources and market context, or the conditions which support employers in creating dynamic capability in response to maternity leave.

Management of the return to work

Studies on the return to work after maternity leave in the wider literature show that mothers often continue to feel side-lined and undervalued (Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Liu and Buzzanell 2004; Millward 2006), struggle with resocialisation into work and identity issues as working mothers (Ladge and Greenberg 2015), and have concerns about breastfeeding, especially in contexts of short maternity leaves (Chuang *et al.* 2010, Guendelman *et al.* 2009). Yet most research on this phase focuses not on these issues, but on so-called workplace family-friendly policies (FFPs). FFPs are incorporated in the International Labour Organization's category of maternity protection and include maternity and other leaves beyond statutory provisions, work-based childcare support, and flexible or reduced hours on the return to work (Addati *et al.* 2014). Initially FFP research focused on mothers of young children (Scheibl and Dex 1998; Waldfogel 2001), implying the need for pro-masculine workplaces to adapt, if not transform, to accommodate maternal workers. However, a more recent shift in terminology from FFPs to work-life balance (WLB) broadened the focus to all workers (Todd and Binns 2013), thereby risking marginalising the post-birth maternal body. For example, research on WLB workplace policies, while rightly including eldercare, excludes breastfeeding supports in FFP policy analysis (Lewis *et al.* 2014). WLB suggests

gender neutrality (Lewis *et al.* 2007; Smithson and Stokoe 2005) but formal policies involving a reduction in working hours or visibility at work are widely viewed as policies for women and stigmatised (e.g. Daverth *et al.* 2015; Stone and Hernandez 2013). Mothers who reduce their working hours, absenting the maternal body from the masculine workplace to perform mothering, often stoically accept side-lining as a response to transgressing pro-masculine working patterns (Herman and Lewis 2012).

The large research literature on FFPs (and WLB) is predominantly based on formal HR policies in large organizations or fails to mention organizational size (e.g. Butts *et al.* 2013; Lewis *et al.* 2016). Research commonly observes an implementation gap between policy and informal practice (e.g. Herman and Lewis 2012; Kossek *et al.* 2011) attributed to gendered workplace culture (Kossek *et al.* 2014; Lewis 2010) and line manager discretion (e.g. Dulk and Ruijter 2008; Fiksenbaum 2014). This is of limited relevance to SMEs that are much less characterised by formal policies and management hierarchies.

The return to work in SMEs

The narrow research focus in the 'malestream' FFP or WLB literatures, and its effect in obscuring maternal body issues in the return to work, is also reflected in the SME literature. Our search revealed 12 studies of family-friendly or WLB practices in SMEs which included those that could support new mothers (see Appendix II). However, none focused solely on maternity and some failed to specifically mention mothers, illustrating how maternal issues have become side-lined in this research. Outside the FFP literature we identified two further studies examining breastfeeding support in smaller firms.

Although the SME literature does not explicitly address maternal body issues or the gendering of organizations, it does begin to demonstrate some of the ways in which the return to work phase may be managed differently in smaller businesses. The qualitative literature in particular, confirms that the return to work, like maternity leave, tends to be managed informally, characterised by processes of mutual adjustment (Atsumi 2007; Dex and Scheibl 2001; Townsend *et al.* 2016). Arrangements are typically made on an *ad hoc* basis, involving agreements between individual employees and (owner-)managers or adaptations at the team level (Dex and Scheibl 2001; Townsend *et al.* 2016). Individually negotiated adjustments may in some cases become part of a firm's culture or emergent policy (Lewis and Cooper 2005). Equally, however, adjustment may depend on women earning "credit" as a scarce or

valued worker, or by "proving themselves" in individual 'balance sheet' systems used in reciprocal negotiations (Dex and Scheibl 2001).

SME mutual adjustments are often made silently and rely on presumptions of the other party's interests (Wapshott and Mallett 2012) and, in maternity management, are likely to be shaped by gendered assumptions about mothering work and mothers' capacities. The literature on maternity management in SMEs largely neglects these silent negotiations although there is evidence of small employers' biased expectations of mothers (Woodhams and Lupton 2009) and that women's assumptions about organizational resource constraints and colleagues' interests can curtail their expectations of adjustments (Atsumi 2007; Whyman and Petrescu 2015).

Where mutual adjustments are made, they illustrate smaller firms' potential to adapt resources dynamically to change business routines competitively, and develop labour for the future. This dynamic capability is suggested by a number of quantitative studies, demonstrating associations between family-friendly practices or cultures and positive business outcomes in SMEs (Adame *et al.* 2015; Atsumi 2007; Baughman *et al.* 2003; Cegarra-Leiva *et al.* 2012; Whyman and Petrescu 2015). However, only Atsumi (2007) explores the processes of mutual adjustment, describing cases of female dominated firms in Japan that employ locally and are characterised by close relationships and a long-term view of performance. In these small, non-hierarchical firms, skills and roles were exchanged flexibly, enabling innovative solutions to absence management and, in some cases, an informal work ethos enabled mothers to bring infants to work. We can interpret this as a negotiated order founded on localism, pro-motherhood and informality, combined with dynamic organizational capability, which subverts stereotypes about new mothers deviating from ideal worker norms of full-time work sharply divided from domestic life.

Cegarra-Navarro *et al.* (2015) argue that achieving dynamic capabilities via WLB measures in SMEs depends on managers creating a learning process to critically reflect on old assumptions and explore new ways of achieving results. This may be particularly necessary where WLB measures are not culturally established, as in this Spanish context (Adame-Sanchez and Miquel-Romero 2012). However, dynamic capability can also mean simply exploiting mothers' limited employment options by paying them lower wages, rather than 'unlearning' gendering. A quantitative US study (Baughman *et al.* 2003) suggests that mutual adjustment can rely on reciprocating childcare support and flexibility with low pay. New mothers may accept such trade-offs, particularly in the contexts of minimal maternity leave

entitlements, but this ultimately reproduces the gendering of FFPs and reinforces gender wage gaps.

Research on FFPs in SMEs confirms mutual adjustment theory's claim that (owner-)manager attitudes have powerful effects on organizational cultures and negotiations. For example, Dex and Scheibl (2001) described one small firm owner as a family-oriented man predisposed to be supportive if it does not harm the business. He developed a culture of support and a long-term business case based on reciprocity but also accepted some short-terms costs. However, this informality creates the conditions for discrimination as well as accommodation and for adjustments to be perceived as inequitable (Dex and Scheibl 2001; Townsend *et al.* 2016). However, the research tells us little about (owner-)manager and co-worker motivations to make adjustments for women in different occupational roles or contexts. Precariously employed and low-skilled women are particularly absent from the literature.

There is some indication that ownership and governance structures may affect SME adjustment to maternity. Family- versus non-family ownership was studied by Moshavi and Koch (2005) in the USA and Adame-Sanchez and Miquel-Romero (2012) in Spain, but produced contradictory findings on the likelihood of developing family-friendly practices, reflecting the need to grasp complex variations in context and processes. Townsend *et al.*'s (2016) study of Australian small not-for-profit organizations found that insecure funding and changes to leadership that alter reciprocal expectations act as a constraint to informally negotiated family-friendly practices, while commitment to social justice creates commitment from employers and employees to make mutual adjustments. This confirms that product/service and employment market positions will affect maternity management, and adds a further mechanism: company governance structures and associated values. These examples point to the complex range of issues in any one organization or maternity case and subsequent heterogeneity of experience.

Norms of mutual adjustment are also shaped by local cultures. Carlier *et al.* (2012) provide some cross-national insights into the intersection of organizational and national context in SMEs, comparing WLB policies including maternity support, in Spain and in Latin America. Although formal FFPs were more common in large firms in Spain, informal family-friendly arrangements were more common in SMEs in Latin America. The authors suggest this informal practice reflects family-oriented cultural values that encourage Latin-American (owner-)managers to support new mothers. This may, however, reflect gendered

presumptions of mothering and protection (rather than rights or careers) in a culture of high machismo (Merkin 2013).

Breastfeeding support in the workplace

Despite considerable literature on the influence of women's return to work on breastfeeding duration and practices worldwide (e.g. Amin *et al.* 2011; Bai *et al.* 2014; Cattaneo *et al.* 2005; Danso 2014; Mensa 2011a,b), business size is rarely specified. Much of the literature on breastfeeding and lactation support at work is quantitative, whereas in-depth qualitative explorations are limited (notable exceptions e.g. Gatrell 2007; Turner and Norwood 2013). Breastfeeding research is often embedded in health debates (e.g. McCarter-Spaulding *et al.* 2011; Ogbuanu *et al.* 2011a,b) and, although emphasising the need to improve workplace breastfeeding support, particularly where infant mortality is high (e.g. Danso 2014; Hirani and Karmaliani 2013a), it provides little detailed knowledge about how breastfeeding and lactation are managed in different workplaces, and particularly smaller firms.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that business lactation programmes in larger organizations, including both time and private space to express breastmilk, can reap short- and long-term rewards including reduced maternal absenteeism and improved morale, retention and recruitment (Galtry 2003; Mensah 2011a,b; Ortiz *et al.* 2004, Tuttle and Slavit 2009). However, we only identified one academic paper on breastfeeding at work that differentiated between findings in small and large firms (Brown *et al.* 2001) and even here reference to small firm specific practice is sparse. Other articles also specify that they included SMEs in their sample but fail to disaggregate the findings by business size (e. g. Anderson *et al.* 2015; Chow *et al.* 2011). In their US study, Brown *et al.* (2001) found that some larger firms had formalised systems, including dedicated lactation rooms, while small firms re-deployed existing facilities, including vacant offices or bathrooms, more informally. This reflects the resource constraints and *ad hoc* adjustments typical of small business management and may be a cost free way of developing dynamic capability. It may, however, create outcomes that are inadequate but that women mutually accept, such as breastfeeding or expressing in bathrooms, possibly reflecting gendered denigration or under-valuation of the work of lactation as well as workers' close association with business resource constraints. Thus informality and mutual adjustment create the conditions for transforming the traditional separation of work and home, as well as for gendered exploitation.

Breastfeeding studies often focus on contexts where maternity leaves are short, such as the US where women in small firms have no paid leave entitlements in most states (e.g. Kozhimannil *et al.* 2016; Ortiz *et al.* 2004). Breastfeeding arrangements are rarely researched in contexts with longer statutory leave periods, such as the UK (Gatrell 2007), denoting societal norms of appropriateness of breastfeeding duration. Apart from regulation, we have seen that small firms are particularly sensitive to local cultural context (Carlier *et al.* 2012) and, as breastfeeding is a socio-cultural construct (Afoakwah *et al.* 2013; Turner and Norwood 2013), it is important to understand whether and how women can negotiate mutual adjustments for breastfeeding in diverse cultural settings. The paucity of research on breastfeeding at work in the management and organizations literature is likely to be related to masculine ideas about workers and abjection to leaky maternal bodies in the workplace (Gatrell 2007). Such ideas also influence managers' perceptions of the feasibility of combining breastfeeding with work (Turner and Norwood 2013). Breastfeeding is a 'taboo' subject in many workplaces (Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Gatrell 2007) and, in cultures where 'decent' breastfeeding is confined to domestic space (Kukla 2006), any visibility of breastfeeding activity is transgressive. Mutual adjustment theory emphasises that employees are agents in the negotiation process (Edwards and Ram 2006), and this is also reflected in the management of breastfeeding support (Anderson *et al.* 2015; Turner and Norwood 2013). However, employees are differently positioned and skilled to exercise power. This 'taboo' element of maternity management is particularly likely to silence any communication between employers and employees (Anderson *et al.* 2015; Gatrell 2011c). In such cases, mutual adjustments will be informed by employer guesswork about what a new mother needs and this may rely on personal attitudes towards support, underpinned by either personal experience or complete lack of knowledge about breastfeeding (Brown *et al.* 2001). Negotiation in a male-dominated small workplace may be particularly challenging (Anderson *et al.* 2015; Chow *et al.* 2011; Haynes 2008a,b), especially in very traditional gendered contexts, as Hirani and Karmaliani (2013a,b) found in Pakistan. The small research base tells us little about how cultural conceptions of breastfeeding combine with small business relations to enable or constrain breastfeeding in SMEs.

Buzzanell and Liu (2007) do cite an example of a woman in a small US firm who defied organizational embodiment by making the silent 'move' of bringing her baby to work, setting up a playpen and breastfeeding. Her employer and colleagues seemed to acquiesce to this in silent mutual adjustment. It is unclear if this dynamic re-organization of work would have been agreed through more formal negotiation. This example raises the potential for

promoting mutual adjustment through women's creative agency, albeit within the limits of context and involving risk; a less receptive employer may have responded negatively, especially to a low status woman.

Again, the role of (owner-)manager is important. The wider literature demonstrates that organizational culture and managers' attitudes towards breastfeeding at work influence willingness to provide support (e.g. Chow *et al.* 2011; Johnston and Esposito 2007; Turner and Norwood 2013). Managers with personal experience of breastfeeding are more accommodating (Brown *et al.* 2001; Chow *et al.* 2011) but male managers tend to be more suspicious that breastfeeding distracts from immediate productivity (Libbus and Bullock 2002; Witters-Green 2003), reflecting a pro-masculine expectation of ideal workers. It may be that women (owner-)managers, who are more supportive of family-friendly cultures (Adkins *et al.* 2013), also tend to support breastfeeding, but this has not been researched.

Mutual adjustment in small firms will involve co-workers and not just mothers and their employers. The broader literature tells us that breastfeeding support can lead to co-worker jealousy when it is perceived as favouritism (Chow *et al.* 2011; Seijts 2004) but this effect is suppressed within organizational cultures that widely support family-friendly measures (Suyes *et al.* 2008). Breastfeeding workers tend to be sensitive to co-worker feelings and under pressure to demonstrate sustained productivity (Anderson *et al.* 2015). We know little about how co-workers affect mutual adjustment in different small firms or how they can be managed to envision the value of transgressing workplace embodied norms and investing in mothers returning from maternity leave, as a gender-equal form of dynamic capability.

Even where breastfeeding policies exist, manager discretion means that greater adaptions are made for high performers (Chow *et al.* 2011). Mutual adjustment in SMEs via a balance sheet approach (Dex and Scheibl 2001) raises concerns that women in lower skilled or precarious employment, and those subjected to disadvantage due to the intersecting effects of ethnicity, disability or sexuality (Bradley 2012), may lack power to negotiate breastfeeding adjustments. Qualitative breastfeeding research in both large and small firms largely neglects these groups (Boswell-Penc and Boyer 2007). Equally, women who have taken maternity leave with the same employer for an earlier pregnancy, who suffered ill health and sickness absence during pregnancy or return to work, whose infant has a disability or health difficulties or who encounter childcare problems, may have invested their "credit" as good workers, in seeking adjustments to these earlier maternity events and lack resources with which to reciprocate adjustments for breastfeeding. Again, however, we have no research at

all regarding how breastfeeding in small workplaces emerges historically from current and prior maternity management events.

To summarise, the review again confirms an important research gap. Most research on the return to work in firms of all sizes focuses on flexible or shorter hours, usually in quantitative studies, while ignoring the maternal body, especially breastfeeding. There is some evidence that family-friendly flexible working practices and breastfeeding supports tend to be developed informally via mutual adjustment in SMEs, which can potentially develop dynamic capability to create productive benefit out of labour resources. Nevertheless, the research again raises more questions than it answers, particularly about more focused maternity-friendly practices, including breastfeeding support, and in heterogeneous SMEs trading in varied sectoral, regulatory and cultural contexts. The focus on the business case in most of the literature leaves a huge gap on women's experiences of the return to work, and about processes of gendering or potential for subverting masculine expectations in smaller firms. In addition, the current dearth of research examining organizational breastfeeding support in SMEs represents a missed opportunity to highlight support that is practicable and cost-effective in developing dynamic capabilities in SMEs, particularly, but not exclusively, in national contexts with short maternity leaves.

Discussion and research directions

This is the first transdisciplinary review of knowledge regarding maternity management in SMEs. Our aim was to lift research out of disciplinary silos (Jones and Gatrell 2014) and ask what is known about how gendering and small business relations shape maternity management in diverse SMEs.

Summary critique. SMEs are differently characterised to large organizations. Yet research on SME maternity management is very limited and dated, neglecting varied and changing social and regulatory conditions. This blind spot relates to weakness in the contributing disciplines. SME management research ignores gendering and embodiment in employment relations. The family-friendly literature has given way to gender-neutralised 'work-life balance' research that neglects the embodied gendered processes that make maternity a time of heightened tension between paid and reproductive work. Research on gendered organizations focuses on larger firms, professional workers and the West (e.g. Gatrell 2007; Turner and Norwood 2013); a minority of the world's female labourers. In studies that observe SME maternity

management, methodologies are often poorly detailed, limiting understanding of how findings relate to business size and product/service market. Moreover, research rarely shows engagement with SME employment relations and management theory. Below we outline key research directions and priorities (summarised in Table 1).

Key Issue	Key Research Questions	Priorities
Gendering, embodiment and maternal body work	How do managers and co-workers interact with maternal workers' pregnant, lactating and caring bodies in different SME contexts, what are women's embodied responses and what are the effects for woman/infant wellbeing and organizational cultures?	Include vulnerable maternal and infant bodies (e.g. women suffering pregnancy related illness and premature babies).
Mutual adjustment	What practices characterise mutual adjustment in different SMEs? For example, how is pregnancy, maternity leave, return to work and breastfeeding communicated, responded to and managed in an interactive round of 'moves'? How does mutual adjustment to staff maternity in SMEs emerge from complex systems of influences relating to place, business size, growth trajectory, market, management capability, organizational gendering/maternal body work and mother's negotiating power? How do maternity management practices in SMEs, as forms of mutual adjustment, emerge from broader social relations, influenced by the position occupied by women and business owners in intersecting social relations? What effect do different forms of mutual adjustment have on social relations?	Conduct action research, to develop knowledge about how regulation, business support or other interventions can shape a dual agenda of productive *and* fair mutual adjustments to staff maternity. Include empowerment of women to negotiate with employers. Ensure research takes a longitudinal view to observe the social antecedents and outcomes of mutual adjustment across employment relationships, business and management learning, and careers. Examine processes of explicit or implicit negotiation by observing and interviewing multiple actors and examine factors empowering maternal employees.
Markets, resources and management capabilities	How is maternity management in SMEs shaped by the competitive context in which (owner-)managers must build profitability, particularly relating to resource scarcity, labour markets and product/service markets? How does co-creation between	Explore how business size and growth mediates the effect of competitive context on maternity management. Use methods that gather data from multiple perspectives. Compare findings across organizations of different sizes, ages, with different

	managers, maternal workers, co-workers and external advisors aid (owner-) managers' understanding of regulations and potential for productive re-organization of resources as a response to staff maternity?	governance structures (e.g. third sector, family firms) and longitudinally (to observe the effect of manager and organizational learning. A comparative case study of small firms embedded in diverse contexts would be particularly appropriate.
Regulatory context and policy innovations	How can business support enable regulatory discovery and adaption to produce dynamic capability in SME maternity management? How can interventions that inform both employers and employees of their rights and obligations, and those that create dialogue between involved parties, lead to practical solutions for the management of maternity and infant care?	Research on interventions that develop negotiation skills and, where possible, co-creation of productive adjustment through early dialogue between managers, maternal workers and co-workers.
Cost/benefit analysis	How do costs from SME maternity management accrue to women and infants, as well as SMEs and governments, in different contexts?	Research productive impact of staff maternity according to regulatory and market contexts, firm resources, staff role and management practice. Compare different maternity policy contexts (e.g. government or employer funded, mixed schemes etc.).
Intersectionality and positionality including place	How does a maternal worker's power to influence SME maternity management relate to her resources and career as these are shaped by her position within intersecting structures of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability? How is a woman's capacity to negotiate with her employer shaped by wider social divisions in infant care, including domestic divisions of care labour and availability/affordability of professional childcare? How does maternity management in different kinds of SMEs relate to place (regulation and enforcement, local economy, culture and society, particularly as this creates a gender regime)?	Research precarious (including informal) and low-skilled workers for whom long-term labour development may be neglected and whose wellbeing may be endangered. Research policy interventions to de-gender infant care by facilitating paternity, shared parental care, grandparental care and access to professional childcare. Focus on the Global South where research is scarce, women may be most vulnerable and small employers may be least subject to enforced regulation. Specific focus on places with high infant and maternal mortality/morbidity and poor access to fertility control.

Table 1. Key Research Directions and Priorities

Gendering, embodiment and maternal body work. The workplace maternity literature consistently reports on the side-lining and devaluing of pregnant women and new mothers and taboos regarding fecund and breastfeeding bodies that call upon women to adjust via maternal body work (Gatrell 2007; Buzzanell and Liu 2007). Yet we found no evidence concerning smaller firms' responses to the maternal body. Maternity leave was not included in Gatrell's (2011a) review of maternal body management and one of our contributions is to raise this in the SME context where it can be regarded as especially problematic (Kitching *et al*. 2013). Knowledge about gendering and embodiment during return to work and breastfeeding is also very limited. There is an urgent need for research to move beyond the 'malestream' of predominantly quantitative surveys and engage in the complex and embodied transition from pregnancy to maternity leave and then paid work.

It is not clear whether and in what contexts informal, family-like relations in smaller firms counteract taboos, or support or exacerbate masculine subjection. Some evidence suggests that proximity in small third sector firms may encourage more long-term approaches to labour development in general, although precarious funding and changes in leadership can disrupt this (Townsend *et al.* 2016). Similarly, in private sector businesses, dynamic capability may be mediated by competitive pressure and resource scarcity, such as shortage of space, obfuscating willingness to support breastfeeding (Brown *et al.* 2001). Public breastfeeding may be socially acceptable in some SME workplaces (Buzzanell and Liu 2007) but challenges deeply held gendered views about decency in others (Hirani and Karmaliani 2013a,b; Kukla 2006). Where firms directly employ family and friends, informality may support 'favouritism' but maternity research on family businesses is sparse and contradictory (Adame-Sanchez and Miquel-Romero 2012; Moshavi and Koch 2005). We need qualitative research to explore gendering and maternal body work in SME maternity management in a range of market, organizational and community settings.

Mutual adjustment within an informally negotiated order. Research on maternity leave and return to work suggests management through *ad hoc* mutual adjustment. Negotiations are often initiated by workers (Houston and Marks 2003; Wapshott and Mallett 2012) and access to managers may be easier in smaller firms. However, SME employers often delay regulatory discovery (Kitching 2015) and are reluctant to invest management time in dynamic capabilities (Jones *et al.* 2011). Moreover, some women lack negotiation power or skills (Buzzanell and Liu 2007; Liu and Buzzanell 2004; Millward 2006) and SME employees often accept manager reluctance and capacity to adapt (Edwards and Ram 2006). Ram and Edwards (2003) argue that the informally negotiated order of small firms rests on concealing

exploitation at the heart of the employment relationship; a firm's resistance to adaptation may be accepted without full knowledge of employer profit-making or critical questioning of masculine working practices. While small employers may, in some cases, be prepared to make innovative, individually tailored 'i-deals' (Atkinson and Sandiford 2015), these are likely to be premised on gendered presumptions about mothers' capabilities and ambitions, and rely on credit from a balance sheet of past performance or projected value (Barrett and Mayson 2008; Dex and Scheibl 2001). Family-friendly working practices in SMEs are commonly combined with lower pay or status (Baughman *et al.* 2003). Maternity regulations attempt to prevent this form of mutual adjustment in some, but not all, contexts.

A mutually adjusting rather than rights based approach to maternity management in SMEs creates conditions for gendered disadvantage and discrimination, as well as co-creation of mutually beneficial practice. It may discourage women from moving jobs before becoming pregnant to accrue credit in an employment relationship, disadvantage mothers in new roles or low-skilled work (including the precariously employed), encourage 'supra-performing' during pregnancy, or stoic acceptance of side-lining (Gatrell 2011a,c), and exploitation on return to work in exchange for work adjustments. Policy makers in various contexts are experimenting with maternity regulation innovations that support communication (e.g. right to request flexible working) and flexible working during maternity leave (e.g. keeping in touch days). We need to know how these measures interact with the *ad hoc*, often silent, inter-subjective and gendered nature of mutual adjustment in SME maternity management (Wapshott and Mallett 2012), within different organizational cultures, markets and firms. Longitudinal, qualitative case research is needed to explore how mutual adjustment emerges from work biographies and relationships and creates long-standing effects. Comparison of mutual adjustment is needed across regulatory contexts, especially where regulation and/or its enforcement is weak and small firms are exempted.

Markets, resources and management capabilities. Positioning mutual adjustment in the broader lens of small business capabilities and market contexts is an important research direction. We know little about how adjustment to working practices forms part of wider business systems that create dynamic capabilities to re-combine resources or re-position trade in light of staff maternity. Crucially, we also have poor understanding of how more strategic responses to staff maternity emerge from learning, networks, organizational culture and stakeholders, including co-workers, managers and maternal workers. There is some limited evidence to support dynamic capability theory's proposition that costs may be reduced when managers engage in learning about context and creative re-organization of resources (Atsumi

2007; Cegarra-Leiva 2012). With experience, managers may find regulation useful in responding to the practical and ethical dilemmas created by staff maternity and discover ways to re-organize resources productively. More evidence is needed about the conditions supporting SME (owner-)managers to take a long-term view of labour development, as a dynamic capability focused on future business success, and the incentives required to encourage this investment when markets create short-term pressure or employment is precarious.

Regulatory context and policy innovations. How can business support regulatory change to produce dynamic capability in SME maternity management? Rouse and Sappleton (2009) proposed co-ordination of information services to ease regulatory discovery and maternity coaching to enable reflexive space for maternal workers and their managers to co-create new working practices. Kitching (2015) and Edwards *et al.* (2002) emphasise learning to adapt to regulation through local business communities, although masculine networks may reinforce negative stereotyping of maternal workers. Conceptualisation of negotiation as gendered management conflict (Buzzanell and Liu 2007) reflects the tension between capital and labour within labour process theory, on which mutual adjustment is developed (Ram and Edwards 2003). Interventions that develop negotiation skills are warranted, as are advice services that inform both parties of their rights (where they exist) and obligations. In informally negotiated orders, direct conflict is often suppressed (Eakin and MacEachen 1998), however, and women progressively disempowered by poor maternity management may acquiesce to discrimination (Edwards and Ram 2006; Ram and Edwards 2003). Third party enforcement of regulation seems necessary but has not been researched. More positively, co-creation of productive adjustment through early dialogue between managers, maternal workers and co-workers may be possible in some settings via mutual adjustment. Given the complexity of SME maternity management, action research that creates knowledge through intervention may be a productive methodology.

*Cost/benefit analysis. (*Owner-)managers, particularly those without direct experience of managing maternity, tend to perceive maternity adjustments as unaffordable (Edwards and Ram 2006; Kitching *et al.* 2013; Carter *et al.* 2009; Edwards *et al.* 2004). Yet, our theoretical framework suggests variations in productive impact of staff maternity according to regulatory and market contexts, firm resources, staff role and management practice. Costs arising from recruitment of replacement labour, for example, may be offset by intensifying co-workers' labour in the short-term (Edwards *et al.* 2009) or reaping longer-term labour flexibility and productivity. Focus on short-term costs, or gendered denigration of maternal labour, may

obscure such benefits (Woodhams and Lupton 2009), however, and resistance may undermine productive adjustment (Rouse and Sappleton 2009). Costs may also vary according to business size and growth pattern. Our knowledge about these relations is scarce. The costs of maternity pay and administration are also compensated by some, though far from all, governments. We know little about conditions under which some SMEs voluntarily fund maternity pay without or beyond statutory provision, nor how costs and benefits from SME maternity management accrue to women and infants, as well as SMEs.

Intersectionality and positionality. Contexts studied are limited as are theoretical connections to the complexities of layers of context, further demonstrating the radically under-developed nature of the field. Conceptual engagement with ideas of intersectionality and positionality are absent (see Metcalfe and Woodhams 2012; Özibilgin *et al.* 2011) but necessary if we are to understand how maternity management emerges from, and effects, social relations and causes variation in maternity management.

Women's action frames differ according to their positioning within structures such as ethnicity, religion and age (Crenshaw 1989), as well as those of gender and capital. These structures may have specific effects and also reinforce, subvert or mediate one another to produce varied contexts (Clegg 2016). We suggest our framework as a core of relations governing maternity management, from which additional intersecting forces can be researched. For example, a study of pregnant low caste factory workers in rural India could usefully focus on the effect of workplace gendering, small firm employment, market relations and management capabilities, while also detailing how religion, caste and place bring their own effects and mediate those of gender and capital. Current focus on professionals or workers in unspecified roles, living in the West, particularly neglects the intersectional structures constraining women in low-skilled, feminised, precarious or informal employment, who may be excluded from maternity regulation and undervalued by (owner-)managers (Woodhams and Lupton 2009). Especially important is study of workplace maternity for women living in the most marginal places, for whom maternal or infant death are looming risks. Every day in 2015, about 830 women died due to pregnancy and child birth related complications, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia (WHO 2015), and yet we have little understanding of how workplaces are implicated in, or can help to prevent, such tragedies.

Conclusion

We have identified blind spots in the literatures on maternity and small business management that neglect and marginalise the maternal body in SME workplaces. As SMEs employ the majority of women worldwide, maternity is a primary cause of gender inequality and maternity management is a common dilemma for small employers. A new programme of research is thus crucial. We have proposed a theoretical framework and related research directions. Comparative study of varied SME contexts and practices is a research priority, particularly as it relates to management capabilities, resources, mutual adjustment and workplace gendering and embodiment. Better understanding of how SME maternity management affects the most vulnerable women and babies is crucial.

As both women and businesses occupy varied positions within complex open systems, maternity management in SMEs is heterogeneous. A useful way of developing knowledge that can be compared, supporting knowledge accumulation, is for individual studies to conceptualise how practices are embedded in multi-level systems of maternity management. All events are influenced by global relations of gender and capitalism, but differ in the meso-level regulatory and other institutional systems that mediate gender and employment relations, and are specific to the practice relations at work in any maternity event.

Of course, women and employers are not fully determined by their circumstances and modern contexts rarely provide singular or static recipes for action (Clegg 2016). The positions taken by employers, women and other actors (colleagues, advisors, spouses) mediates the tendency for social relations to create specific outcomes. Hence, there is potential for change through micro-level interactions that support respect, negotiation and co-creation, as well as interventions at the meso- and macro-levels of regulation, enforcement and culture. We call for action research that reveals the potential, and limitations, of approaches that work with women and employers to shape more empowering maternity management.

A renewed programme of research requires an international network of SME maternity researchers, located in different places and able to engage stakeholders in varied contexts. Patterns emerging from the grey literature – focused on describing policy and practice (e.g. Adams *et al.* 2016a,b) – may be an important source of knowledge and efficient way of growing the research community. Standpoint theory (Harding 1991) and engaged scholarship (King and Learmonth 2014) are likely to be important in making sense of marginalised women's experiences and – crucially – ensuring that research promotes improvement.

Feminist activism must also play its part when change can only be achieved through collective discrediting of exploitative employment relations.

A global programme of comparative research is ambitious, but so is the importance of the key international policy objectives that depend on understanding and improving SME maternity management. We hope this paper contributes a clear view of existing knowledge and renewed theoretical direction for research vital to the wellbeing of women, infants and SMEs.

Finally, we have focused on SME maternity management relating to pregnancy labour and the dominant social relation of mothers managing infant care. This latter is a social construction and we encourage research that considers changing divisions of labour that position fathers, same sex parents and others, including professional and informal services, as providers and/or co-ordinators of infant care. Thus, we encourage research on SME management of paternity, shared parental and grandparental care, situating pregnancy and maternal care within a broader view of labour relations (Glucksmann 1995) and suggest our theoretical framework as a means of conceptualisation.

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Appendix I – Boolean Search Terms and Selection Criteria

Element of the maternity process	Keywords	Strings
(1) Maternity (divided in 2 more specific phases below)	Maternal; mother; motherhood; mothering; childbirth; birth; becoming a mother	Matern* OR (mother* w/5 (transition* OR becom*)) OR (birth w/3 (child* OR baby OR babies)) OR "giv* birth"
(2) Pregnancy and maternity leave	Pregnant, pregnancy, antenatal Maternity leave; maternity cover; maternity related absence; pregnancy leave; pregnancy cover; pregnancy related cover; pregnancy related absence	Pregnan* OR antenatal Pregn* OR matern* OR "matern* leave" OR "matern* cover" OR "matern* protection" OR "matern* management" OR "pregn* leave" OR "pregn* cover"
(3) Return to work	Return to work; workforce re-entry; after the birth of a baby; work and family; family-friendly; work–life balance Breastfeeding; lactating; lactation, nursing	(Return* w/3 work) OR (workforce w/3 (reent* OR re-ent*)) OR ((after OR following) w/3 (birth OR childbirth)) OR "work and family" OR "family-friendly" OR "family friendly" OR "work-life balance" OR "work life balance" "breastfe*" OR "breast-fe*" OR "breast-fe*" OR "lactati*" OR *nurs*

Table 1. Maternity related keywords

Firm size	Keywords	Strings
(4) Small Business/SME	Small business, small organisation, small employer, small firm, small enterprise, small workplace, SME, small and medium sized enterprise, small and medium sized organisation, small and medium sized firm, small and medium sized enterprise, micro business, micro	"small* organi*ation*" OR "small* employ*" OR "small* business*" OR "small* enterprise*" OR "small* firm*" OR "small* workplace*" OR "SME" OR "small and medium sized enterprise*" OR "small and medium sized firm*" OR "small and medium sized organi*ation*" OR "small and medium sized business*" OR micro* OR medium*
(5) Large (no mention of small business/ SME)	Large business, large organisation, large employer, large firm, large enterprise, large workplace	"large* organi*ation*" OR "large* employ*" OR "large* business*" OR "large* enterprise*" OR "large* firm*" OR "large* workplace*"
(6) Workplace (size not mentioned)	Workplace, place of work, office, factory, field, employer	work*OR office* OR factor* OR field* OR employ*

Table 2. Workplace related keywords

Combining Searches	(5) Small Business/SME	(6) Large	(7) Size not mentioned
(1) Maternity	1 AND 5	1 AND 6	1 AND 7
(2) Pregnancy and maternity leave	2 AND 5	2 AND 6	2 AND 7
(3) Return to work	3 AND 5	3 AND 6	3 AND 7

Table 3. Searches

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Relevance for review questions	*Stage 1 – Category A* Research with a core focus on both maternity management and SMEs *Stage 1 – Category B* Research with a focus on SMEs that addresses the subject of maternity in the workplace as one element of a wider subject (such as regulation or family-friendly policies) *Stage 1 – Category C* Research with a focus on maternity management in firms of all sizes, that explicitly included SMEs *Stage 2* Research with a focus on maternity management at the workplace that either excludes SMEs or does not mention firm size	Papers not focusing on both maternity management and SMEs Papers qualifying for Stage 2, but not Stage 1 Papers not focussing on examining issues of maternity *in the workplace*	Provides information that helps to answer the review questions and to theorise about differences between maternity management in firms of different sizes.
Date of publication	January 2000 – January 2016	Literature published before this date	Would have increased likelihood of studies having been conducted in different regulatory context with implications for the relevance and currency of findings.
Language	English	All other languages	Knowledge of languages and resource constraints of research team.
Type of publication	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Books, book chapters, reports, conference papers and proceedings, press articles, theses, working papers	To ensure adherence to minimum scholarly standards. Other types were excluded due to the limited peer review process. We exclude grey literature in the main review and discuss means of using it in our discussion.
Journal ranking	All	None	Due to the subject area, we expected unranked or lower ranked journals to be important sources of information, particular regarding studies undertaken in low income countries.
Disciplines	All	None	In response to calls for more transdisciplinarity in management and organization studies (Gatrell, 2011a; Jones and Gatrell, 2014), we adopted an inclusive approach rather than focussing our search on a number of pre-selected disciplines.
Type of research	Theoretical, Empirical, Literature reviews	None	All types of research were identified as relevant in answering the review question.
Methodology	All	None	All methodologies were considered in the review.
Cultural context	All	None	Research originating in all cultures was considered in the review.
Sample	Women in paid employment across sectors and all levels of the occupational hierarchy	Self-employed women Not fathers	This review excludes maternity in self-employment, as related processes were expected to be subject to different social relations to managing staff maternity in SMEs. Our review focused on managing the maternal body at the workplace.

Table 4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria