

Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research  
Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 2018)

## **Thoughts on Pregnancy**

A soon-to-be working mother

I am pregnant.

As soon as I announced my pregnancy, I became the property of the public: people telling me that I should be happy, that I should prepare a room, go baby shopping, and have a list of names ready. They also tell me about how beautiful and romantic pregnancy is. But everything feels lightyears away from the truth. I have been vomiting so frequently that I now vomit blood. I am nauseated all day. I was even hospitalized for a couple of days. I feel heavy, tired, and the round ligaments' pains are excruciating. Before I sleep, I have to make a dozen trips to the bathroom. When I get to bed, I hardly sleep because every time I need to turn left or right, it's painful. I wake up in the middle of the night sweating to vivid dreams. My diet and exercise have been restricted. It is like my life has simply been put on hold until delivery.

No, I am not enjoying the pregnancy, and this does not mean I do not want the baby. It is just that I had no idea what to expect since everyone made it sound like the next best thing that could ever happen to you after marriage. People have weird expectations: get married young for fertility reasons, and become a perfect housewife who knows her way around the daily household chores, perfectly juggling between her job, her husband, and the house. Then a few months later, parents start to wonder if everything's OK and why you're not pregnant yet. Then when you're pregnant, they ask you when you are planning for the second one. The expectations are surreal.

All I want is to be left alone. I don't want to be touched. Sometimes, I even hear voices in my head. I get depressed, cry for no reason, and become angry at everything. I feel like I have no control, and nine months seem like an eternity.

A decision to have a family, one night. That is all the effort it took from my husband and it translated into a one-year dive into hell for me. Nothing in his life changed except for the fact that he can now brag about the joy of being a future father; oh, and complain that the sex life is dead. Well, if I were to endure all the misery, I don't see why he can't share it. Together for better or worse, right? See, everything is taking place inside my body alone, and I got acquainted with different types and intensities of pain I never knew existed before. And then following birth, everyone expects that it would be natural for the baby to take the father's family name. But isn't the baby also mine?

And all of this has an effect on work, of course. I can only be thankful to work with a manager who understands my difficulties and who gave me the option to work from home instead of discriminating against me. I work for an international company, but for most of my friends who had children and who work for local companies, the story is different. Their managers refused to understand the physical undertaking of pregnancy and made them work until the day of delivery without covering the hospitalization expenses. In some cases, they were even asked not to return to work and were forced to resign. Others saw their salaries shrink, which is something I cannot afford. For me to be productive in the public sphere plays an essential role in my life and in that of my couple. It is the only way to make ends meet at the end of the month. No one ever told me what to expect on the financial front either. I am literally stunned at how expensive baby products, monthly medical visits for vaccination, medication, and school tuitions can be. Can someone explain to me how on earth do parents manage multiple children?

Please don't preach. I know that a lot of couples are getting treated for infertility issues and some will never succeed in having babies of their own, but this doesn't make my pregnancy any less painful. I am grateful, but it is still painful.

I am almost eight months pregnant and I look like I have swallowed a balloon. I can't wear socks and shoes on my own, I have to be inventive when it gets to wearing panties and pants. Picking something off the ground seems impossible, the strain on my back is incredible. Long trips are a nightmare. Standing too long to do anything like the dishes or ironing is painful. My spine looks deformed and I walk like a penguin. Ten steps and I'm out of breath. But I will soon get promoted to the status of a mother. Then I get to start thinking about the after pregnancy: when will I have time to shower and make something to eat? How will I survive the guilt of leaving my baby after the 70-days maternity leave and getting back to work? How will I be able to manage everything without failing?

Clearly, whenever I voice out my opinion, my community is appalled. How dare I speak of pregnancy like that? My own mother believes that if I continue voicing them out, I will give birth to an angry, stressed baby. Never mind that the baby would get by and get all the nutrition needed from my bodily reserves.

Reproductive labor doesn't seem to be fair on both parties involved. Women have to do most of the work while men get equal parental rights, if not more, thanks to the religious institutions that also decide what happens to the child should the parents want a divorce. And I know that it is not the end: at the hospital, after birth, I will have to deal with a body that went through delivery and that is working its way to get back to its initial state, and that is painful. I will have to deal with the mysteries of breastfeeding every two to three hours, to wake up in the middle of the night to feed the baby while not recovered yet, and that is painful. Does anyone realize how much pain the female body has to go through to bring new little humans into the world? What about the psychological and emotional turmoil? What about the baby blues? It is a lot to handle. And yet, instead of acknowledging that pain, societal pressure finds a way to make moms feel guilty about their choices whenever they fall short of these unrealistic expectations: "don't forget your husband," they tell you, "or he might leave you and look for someone to cater for his needs." It is as if they question why he would want to be close to someone who hasn't simply delivered a baby, but has also grown a whole new organ, the placenta, in nine months, while going through the worst levels of pains during contractions. Gross much? Not romantic enough?

Although it takes two to tango, why can't people recognize that mothers do and endure more than their husbands? The least you can do is be supportive. Thank you.