PREGNANT IN HEELS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE IDEAL, MATERNAL BODY IN CELEBRITY MAGAZINES

by

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Abstract

Over the past several years, the physical appearance of pregnant and new mothers has been evolving within Western society. In particular, celebrity mothers who are templates for contemporary ideals within society (Tyler 2011) experience heightened levels of surveillance and normalizing practices. The shifting ideal, maternal form illustrates how the bodies of women continue to be subjected to discipline and control within society. Furthermore, the flourishing of consumer culture within some neoliberal societies pressures women to consume in order to fully realize their maternal identity. Increased articulation of individual identity through consumption, coupled with increasingly specific appearance standards, narrow the scope of what idealized motherhood embodies. In order to best investigate the issue of the shifting, ideal maternal form, various issues of tabloid magazines will be analyzed. Relying on social constructionism in conjunction with Foucault’s theories of the disciplining of docile bodies and biopower, along with Lyotard’s desire-based, libidinal economy, the literature on the public presentation of maternal bodies will be analyzed with focus on newly developed, rigorous appearance and fitness standards for mothers. Additionally, how these disciplinary practices function within neoliberal climates that champion desire-based consumption, freedom, liberty, individualism and self-subjectification will also be investigated. A cultural analysis of thirty-seven tabloid publications from 2012 to 2013 will be examined for both visual and written discourse pertaining to the cultural construction of ideal motherhood. Through this analysis the interplay between the two seemingly contradictory messages of excessive, desire-based consumption and restrictive,
corporeal discipline will be explored in order to gain a better understanding of how these incongruous scripts affect the lives of mothers today.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Traditionally, the maternal body was a hidden body; pregnant women were generally restricted to domestic and child centered spaces within the private sphere, and their bodies were draped in conservative clothing designed to hide their growing maternal forms (Tyler 2011: 21-24). The concealment of the maternal body remained consistent until the 1990s when a significant change in the visibility of the gravid woman took place (Tyler 2011: 21). Suddenly, there was a fascination with pregnancy and motherhood within the public sphere which resulted in the depiction of these fertile bodies in “popular culture, arts, literature, politics, consumer culture and ‘everyday life’” (ibid). This newfound public preoccupation with pregnancy has only intensified over time, with the media representing one of the primary sources in which images of partum and post-partum bodies are depicted and subsequently distributed. Evidence of this growing need to surveil the maternal body can be found in various magazine publications that relentlessly document celebrity pregnancies, and have come to include permanent ‘bump watch’ columns in standard issues. Maternal femininity is learned through bodily discourse where images function to communicate how the ‘perfect’ mother should look and act. Correspondingly, the pregnant celebrities that grace the covers of tabloid publications have come to act as templates for what the ideal mother ‘should’ embody. Tyler and Bennett note that: “How women relate to celebrity pregnancies, exemplifies the ways in which the celebrity body has become the central means through which contemporary social values are distributed and through consumption, identification and
mimicry become hardwired into everyday practices of subjectivity” (Tyler and Bennett as cited in Tyler 2011: 24).

The evolving body norms for mothers as communicated through tabloid magazines such as *In Touch, Life and Style, Star, US Weekly and People* appear to indicate a shift in new requirements for maternal bodies. Maternal celebrity bodies now appear to now adhere to strict weight and appearance standards as celebrity mothers who are overweight during pregnancy, are the opposite or “pregorexic,” unstylish during pregnancy or unfit post-pregnancy appear to be highly criticized in these publications. Michel Foucault’s theory of bio-power and panoptical surveillance can be applied to this example of evolving motherhood in order to inform our understanding of the underlying power dynamics and the techniques utilized to regulate the bodies of pregnant and post-partum celebrities. Additionally, Lytoard’s theory of libidinal economy can provide insight into forces that motivate gravid women to illustrate their maternal identity through participation in consumerism.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Overview

2.1 Bio-Power: Using Medical Discourse and Biological Responsibility to Control Reproducing Women

A key element in the investigation of the shifting, ideal maternal image viewed though a Foucaudian lens, is the critical assessment of the formation of knowledge and systems of power that function to control populations. Foucault suggests understanding power as an effect of discourse which is omnipresent in nature; power is everywhere and possessed by everyone and has evolved beyond the more traditional contextualization of control in which a small group of governing subjects retain all ruling authority (Foucault 1977:93). These discourses permeate every aspect of life for citizens from personal interactions to complex relations with social institutions (Jette 2011:333). As such, an understanding of who develops knowledge and how truth comes to be defined and accepted is intrinsically linked to the production of power (ibid). In this way, we come to understand the body or the maternal body in this case, as a product of discourse resulting in the exercise of power dynamics at the corporeal level. The shift in governing techniques and practices to ones predicated on the use of bio-power a combination of corporeal subjugation and population control - provides context for understanding the importance of maintenance of control over the female body. The regulation of the feminine form functions to sustain existing social segregations and gender norms as well as support the economic system through increased demands of consumerism.
Foucault (1978) provides an extensive discussion of how marginalized individuals or groups experience stigmatization at various points in history. In his work he highlights several populations including prisoners, the insane, homosexuals, and hysterical women, all of which exemplify the ostracization and domination experienced by those rendered discursively non-normative. Management and regulation of these deviant bodies, as well as the bodies of all citizens, become of central importance in the governing of populations starting in the seventeenth century (Foucault 1978:138). Control of these populations was achieved in part through a control of the sexuality of individuals. Specifically, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a new technology of sexuality was developed which was largely divorced from its traditional bond with religious institutions and become a concern of both state and secular society; “the flesh was brought down to the level of the organism” (Foucault 1978:117). The dispersal of this new sexual control was diffused through three main channels: (1) pedagogy, which was mainly aimed at controlling the sexuality of children; (2) medicine, which largely centered on the control of the female sexual body; and (3) demography, which was largely concentrated on the regulation of birth rates or populations.

The medical field also began to distinguish between medicine of the body and medicine of sex at the turn of the nineteenth century. Heredity was examined by health practitioners who promoted an understanding of sex as a “biological responsibility” (ibid: 118). Sex was no longer just a physical act but a rapidly expanding concept which included marriage arrangements, sexually transmitted diseases, and procreation. State control and monitoring was prescribed in order to prevent the spread of disease and ensure the reproduction of a healthy population. It was the ‘idle’ woman, born of
privilege and position within society who Foucault highlights as the first to suffer the socially mandated control of her sexualized physiology. “She inhabited the outer edge of the ‘world,’ in which she always had to appear as a value, and of the family, where she was assigned a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligation” (Foucault 1978:121). It is here that Foucault traces the origins of the “idle” women and how her body and her sex were subjected to medical scrutiny in the name of reproductive responsibility, the maintenance of family relations, and the continuation of future generations (ibid:147).

Drawing on Foucault’s theory of sexuality, Julia Emberley (2005) examines the politics of desire in the formation of the ‘idle’ woman. The goal of Emberley’s work is to examine the “symbolic production and commodity consumption” of the “idle” woman as this figure came to represent ideal, white femininity (2005:55). Additionally, Emberley outlines how this figure functions to conceal laboring female bodies in a global context (ibid.). The body of the “idle” woman, in this case, has come to represent an abstract libidinal power that “renders invisible the global divisions of female labor” (ibid:68). Emberley positions the eighteenth century “idle” woman in opposition to the female laboring body that she contends is mediated not only by class but also by “nationalist and imperial commodity discourse that capitalize on de/generative libidinal power and its symbolic investment in the sexed/reproductive indigenous female body” (ibid:66).

However, for the purposes of this analysis, Emberley’s figure of the “idle” woman will be used to highlight similar ways in which the “idle” woman of the 18th century and contemporary celebrity mothers act as indicators of specific factors of social life and are subject to surveillance and corporeal discipline. Emberley describes how the “bourgeois”
or “idle” woman is highly critiqued by members of society, is often in the public eye, and comes from economic privilege (Emberley 2005: 56-57). The development of a specific sexuality in this bourgeois society indicates a “classed” body with high standards of hygiene, health and heredity (ibid.). Sexuality is cultivated in order to articulate bourgeois hegemony with political, economic and historical implications. The bourgeois body and sexuality, “provided strength, endurance, and secular proliferation of that body through the organization and deployment of sexuality” (Foucault 1978:125-126).

Although Foucault’s description of the idle woman is product of a specific era and cultural context, there are parallels that can be drawn between idle woman of the 18th century and celebrities of today. Within neoliberal society, the maternal celebrity body can be seen as an indicator of class and a specific set of social values. The bodies of ‘star-moms’ tell the tale of a society that places high premiums on beauty, aesthetics, fitness, and consumption practices; this is signified by their firm, pregnant figures clothed in designer labels with flawless hair and make-up. Mothers experience social differentiation, in this case, the ability to adhere to norms of maternal aesthetics.

During the beginning of the Eighteenth century, a hysterization of women’s bodies began to take place as a means to control sex, knowledge, and power within populations (Foucault 1978). This mechanism of control has continued to gain strength today as the hysterical woman is still alive and well in the depiction of the “stressed out” celebrity mother. The traditional procedure whereby the female body was subjected to hysterization was a threefold process: first, her body was subjected to medical investigation where it was deemed to be inherently burdened with an excess of sexuality (Foucault 1978:104). Due to the pathology that was thought to be rooted within it, the
female body was then incorporated into the domain of medical practice (*ibid*). Lastly, her body was situated in “organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element), and the life of children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of a biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children’s education). Notably the Mother, with her negative image as the “nervous woman”, constituted the most visible form of this hysterization” (*ibid.*).

The hysterization of female bodies is especially salient in both “pregorexic” and overweight mothers. Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa have reached epidemic proportions in the late twentieth century and is now what “hysteria was to women of an earlier day: the crystallization in a pathological mode of a widespread cultural obsession” (Bartky 1988:65). Where once the purging and starvation practices of anorexia and bulimia were generally restricted to non-maternal bodies, now pregnant and new mothers are feeling the strain to conform to the Western ideals of the slender “yummy mummy”. The term “pregorexia” is a pop-culture reference used primarily by the media to describe pregnant and post-partum mothers who display eating disorders or disordered eating during and after their gestation periods (Sullivan 2010). These medical conditions can present in two ways, with the first being a pregnant woman who develops an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia (Eating Disorder Association of Ireland as cited in Sullivan 2010:6). Secondly, the term is used to describe women who severely limit the amount of weight they gain during pregnancy, or new mothers who take extreme measures to lose the weight they gain during their pregnancies after giving birth (*ibid.*). These dieting practices can be particularly unhealthy especially during pregnancy, putting
both mother and child at risk for various health related complications (Riley 2011:212). Pregorexic-looking celebrity mothers are shown as struggling to manage their pregnancy or child-rearing responsibilities along with other facets of their lives and thus, are in need of medical intervention and social control to normalize their weight. Similar discourse is used by media publications to depict overweight celebrity mothers. Stars that are deemed to have gained excessive amounts of weight are reported as being “out of control” with their food cravings and hormones, again being analyzed and qualified as a pathological body in need of medical correction.

2.2 Disciplining Maternal Bodies: Training, Surveillance, and Normalizing Judgment

Foucault historically traces the shift in power dynamics and tactics used in the governing of individuals within a society; where once monarchs and rulers governed with the authority to impose death on their subjects, now societies were ruled with a power that seeks to foster life (health, medicine, sanity and so on) (ibid.). The series of interventions and regulatory controls used in these life-promoting governing practices etched onto individual bodies are described by Foucault as “bio-politics of the population” (1978:139). The power over life was organized around two poles: one end focuses on the regulations of the population while the other pole centers on disciplines of the body (ibid.). Control of the population is dedicated to the “species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (Foucault 1978:139). The disciplines of
the body or “anatomo-politics” are centered on the premise of the body as a machine. The corporeal actions of individuals were regulated and refined in order to maximize efficiency and productivity with the supplementary intent of integrating these human machines into “systems of economic controls” (ibid.).

The effectiveness of governing by exercising control over the life of citizens facilitated a rise of parliamentary institutions and conceptions of political liberties. The disciplinary institutions and techniques described by Foucault (1977) in Discipline and Punish include examples such as the military, the school, the hospital, the prison, and the factory. The development of these regulatory structures marks the genesis of bio-power, which functions to subjugate bodies and control populations (Foucault 1977:140). The use of bio-power was instrumental during the development of capitalism. Bio-power served to produce docile bodies for insertion into the “machinery of production” and fostered the shift of the “phenomena of population to economic processes” (Foucault 1977:141). Beyond the use of bio-power as a means to further production and economic progress, anatomo- and bio-politics were used as a means to segregate and order populations in order to secure political compliance and social domination (ibid).

Foucault describes anatomo-political forms of discipline as going beyond the traditional political fidelity and the acquiring of products of corporal labor – now this discipline seeks to conquer the body and take control of how the body moves and behaves in everyday existence (Bartky 1988:61).

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that acts upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the
efficiency that one determines. This discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (Foucault 1977: 138).

The management of these docile bodies is achieved through constant coercion directed not just at the intended outcome for the human subject, but at the very processes of corporeal action; the body is broken down and fragmented in time, space and movement through a “micro physics” of power (Bartky 1988: 62). The soldier is not simply told to raise his rifle, but raise his weapon following a series of carefully articulated steps; steps developed to optimize efficiency and utility of military personnel (Foucault 1977:153). Likewise the student is not simply expected to attend class, they must sit erect in their seats, raise their hand to speak, align their movements to the sound of a bell or direction of a teacher (Foucault 147:147). The “body-object articulations” of the soldier with his or her rifle and the student with his or her desk illuminates a “coercive link with the apparatus of production” (Foucault 1977: 153).

What is the object linked to the maternal subject if not her reproductive body? Her growing form not simply mandated to produce healthy children; now, her everyday actions and behaviours are scrutinized and controlled by a system of power relations which operate beyond the confines of social institutions that traditionally functioned to discipline bodies. The power that constricts and controls the docile bodies of reproducing women permeates every aspect of her life. Media publications, the field of medicine, pregnancy and parental literature, as well as other social institutions contribute to the formation of a maternal discourse- the development of a ‘truth’ of motherhood complete with appearance norms and standardized behaviours. In addition to systems of power
that subjugate partum and post-partum women, other mothers, family, friends and fellow citizens also perpetrate the discourse of what ‘normal’ or ‘good’ mother should embody.

The complete control of corporeal existence cannot be achieved without the use of constant and rigorous surveillance. Foucault saw Jeremy Bentham’s (1843) ideal prison model, the panopticon, as an archetype for modern disciplinary society. The panoptical structure itself takes a ring-like shape with cells occupying the periphery of the structure. In the centre of the ring of cells is a central tower where guards are able to monitor inmate actions. The holding chambers have two windows; one at the front of the cell facing the guard tower and one at the back which functions to illuminate the room so the movements of the prisoner are made visible to the guard. The gaze, in this case, operates in one direction, from the guards to the prisoners; inmates are not able to see into the windows of the central tower. In this way, the threat of surveillance is ever present, as the tower symbolizes the potential of disciplinary action taken against non-normative behaviour at any time.

The result of this state of permanent visibility evokes a heightened state of self-consciousness, illustrating not only a control of the body, but control of the mind; prisoners learn to self-monitor their own behaviours every minute of the day under this unyielding observation (Foucault 1977:201). It is within this state of continuous self-surveillance that the praised “individualism” and increased self-awareness, both hallmarks of modern, neo-liberal society, find their origins (Bartky 1988:63). The panopticon, although designed to manipulate power to suit capitalist ends, “does not do so for power itself …its aim is to strengthen the social forces – to increase production, to develop economy, to spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and
multiply” (Foucault 1977:208). In this way, new and expectant mothers can be interpreted as confined in a panopticon of gender norms or more specifically, ideal maternal femininity. The archetypal structure of the panopticon, in this case, extends to the limits of a woman’s social reality and infiltrates all aspects of her being. Celebrity magazines are one of the more pervasive disciplinary tactics used within this penitentiary of pregnant beauty. Pregnant celebrities act as mediums of popular culture and figurative types for the ideal motherhood to be embodied by all western women (Tyler 2011). Consequently, women are constantly under the supervision with regards to their compliance with these ever evolving feminine standards. Although celebrity mothers act as an archetype of maternal perfection, they are still confined to the same restrictions as all other mothers. The average woman is able to view her fellow Hollywood inmate at all times with the abundance of celebrity images in various media outlets (such as magazines). Women can bear witness to both the praising of star moms who conform to appearance norms and the stigmatization of those who fail to comply. This serves to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the surveillance and the swift disciplinary action taken against those who do not to conform. In this way, norms become internalized as bodies come to be ranked and compared according to a successful engagement with maternal body work.

Limitations of Foucault’s theory on the management and discipline of docile bodies can be found in his ungendered understanding of the experience of this control for both men and women. He does not highlight any difference in the manner and extent to which these bodies are controlled and is, “blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine” (Bartky 1988:64). The lived
experience of femininity is not inherent within women; we are not born feminine as we are born female. The gendered experience of femininity is a role which women play, a way of enacting and perpetuating learned gender norms, norms which shift and change over time and space (Butler as cited in Bartky 1988: 64; Bordo 1993:166). The failure to highlight the difference in the treatment of the gendered docile body serves to further mask the modes of control with which the corporeal existence of women are coerced into submission and function to support existing patriarchal supremacy. It is important to note an understanding of these power relations not as mechanisms of repression, but as constitutive forces that focus on nurturing productive elements and the ordering of subjects (Bordo 1993:167). This is especially relevant when examining notions of embodied femininity which is predicated on superficial compliance to beauty standards and practices (ibid.). In this way, both Bordo (1993) and Foucault (1980:136) advocate for an analysis of power from below to gain a better understanding of “mechanisms which shape – rather than repress – desire, generate and focus our energies, construct our conceptions of normalcy and deviance”.

The 1990’s marked a re-opening of the public sphere to women while concurrently demanding that they invest more time managing and disciplining their bodies (Bordo 1993:166). The intensification of self-subjectifying practices dictating the relentless pursuit of the feminine ideal lead women to understand their bodies as lacking and in need of improvement. “Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress – central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women – we are rendered less socially orientated and more centripetally focused on self-

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modification” (Bordo 1993: 166). Although pregnancy was once seen as a time of reprieve from such bodily practices, new standards for pregnant and post-partum beauty have emerged with increasing prevalence in the last two decades (Tyler 2011:21-22). The template of the ‘yummy mummy’ is linked to neo-liberal values of freedom, liberty, individualism and choice (Tyler 2011:22), all of which are exercised through participation in the work force and consumer culture (Hartmann 1993:109; Tyler 2011:22). Neo-liberal citizens are seduced by advertisers and products which claim to aid in the self-subjectification process, helping citizens - or in this case mothers - get one step closer to their desired manifestations of ‘self’. New mothers are now a specific target market for an array of fitness and beauty products including but not limited to clothing, makeup, exercise classes, magazines and television programming. All of these mediums and merchandise promote and reinforce norms for the new maternal body – what she looks like, what she wears, how she acts, where she is seen – norms which require specific levels of consumerism in order to attain.

2.3 Libidinal Economy

Western markets push citizens to participate in continuous desire based consumption. As previously noted, Susan Bordo (1993) highlights how the bodies of women are presented as inadequate by marketers in order to promote spending driven by a yearning to achieve aesthetic perfection. “Desire desires what is lacked because only what is lacking can be wanted” (Crome and Williams 2006: 28). Desire as motivation to consume or alter behaviour is an important factor to examine when analyzing the bodies of new mothers, as desires and wants of maternal women are preyed upon by exploitive
structures such as advertising agencies and media publications. Jean Francis Lyotard’s (1974) work, *Libidinal Economy*, presents a theory of society driven by desire or what he terms “libidinal energies” or “affects”. These “libidinal energies” are predicated on theory developed by Freud and his psychoanalytic account of desire. In the terms of Freudian psychoanalysis, “libidinal energies” are the “primary processes” of the libido, the forces that exist in the body on a more basic level than the “secondary processes” of the conscious mind (Crome and Williams 2006: 24). Lyotard however focuses primarily on sexual desire, as he uses these terms metaphorically to describe workings of reality and society as a whole, divorcing them from their usual attachment to human beings. The introductory chapters of *Libidimal Economy* describe the opening up of the body to the “polymorphous diversity of the multiple intensities that pass across and constitute it” (Crome and Williams 2006:27). These chapters serve to illustrate a move from phenomenology of perception that informed his earlier work, as well as to highlight the prominence of desire in his libidinal philosophy (ibid.). The body described in his work is not well situated or formed; the dismembered figure is more accurately described as a pastiche of organs charged with desires (Sullivan 2002:51). Lyotard sees desire as dislocated from the corporeal figure and points toward a libidinal energy that refuses to see materiality as property of bodies but rather as sharing the “radical singularity of the event” (Readings 1991:93). Events or happenings transpire when “libidinal intensities” or “affects” become concentrated in one area. Reality is understood in terms of unpredictable happenings (events), rather than structured regularities (Woodward 2002).
Lyotard also discusses personal and impersonal desires and illustrates how society shapes and is shaped by the feelings people have. “Libidinal intensities” or “affects” describe the process in which libidinal energy becomes concentrated in one area, catalyzing the emergence of unpredictable events. Lyotard sees affects as material entities that have the ability to move and produce feelings and desires. These affects can include such things as “a sound, a color, a smile or a caress” (Woodward 2002). “Dispositifs” or ‘set-ups’ are systems of affects that essentially create sets of dispositions that lend themselves to the interpretation or exploitation of libidinal energies in specific ways. When excesses of libidinal energy meet dispositifs, the energy is channeled in a precise manner, investing largely in selected areas and not in others.

The role of desire (libidinal energy) and the reciprocally transformative effect it shares with society is illustrated in the shifting ideal maternal form. Expectations of maternal existence have evolved from the concealing expectant figures within domestic spaces, to displaying glamorous to a fit motherhood within the public realm (Tyler 2011). How women ‘want’ to look and are depicted is largely influenced by “set-ups” or dispositifs. These structuring forces aid in articulating libidinal energies. Advertisers and media outlets (dispositifs) channel libidinal energy which results in the conceptualization of bodies of women as sites of control and objects of desire, traditionally for male audiences. Desire functions and is manipulated here in several ways. In a heteronormative context, men desire the bodies of women; desire for the feminine body increases if the figure conforms to high standards of conventional beauty. The desire of women to be found attractive is presupposed in this example. The constant yearning to be beautiful impacts how women relate to their bodies as well as their consumer practices
– women want make aesthetic improvements to conform to the mainstream standards of beauty, and advertisers prey on these longings in order to make economic gains. The libidinal economy of the twentieth century has been progressively transformed by marketing by increasingly provoking investment of desire in the objects of consumption (Steigler 2011:150). This is reflected in how marketers have begun to target maternal women, offering new products and services with the new mother in mind (Tyler 2011; Gentile 2010). Often businesses will not only seek to sell products to women, but will use the bodies of women to increase consumption by target audiences. “…The interest which this economic power shows in this body and this face appears to be in dissociable from a consideration of their libidinal force” (Lyotard 1974: 87). Advertisers rely on the use of the desirable bodies of women to sell images as they are able to evoke consumerism by enticing the target audience to spend their libidinal energy and not just their money in exchange for any given product (Lyotard 1974: 88). Within a libidinal economy the bodies of women are the objects of, or that which promote exchange; so, it can be rationalized that reproducing women purchase beauty enhancing products and engage in body work in order to be regarded as desirable, and thus more valuable within a desire based system.

The bodies of new and expectant mothers are sites of surveillance and control within society. The use of life-promoting, bio-power tactics are used to regulate maternal figures and this is manifested in the depiction of celebrity mother in tabloids. Furthermore, this can be seen in the use of scripts frequently used within these publications that rely on medical discourse in order to promote ‘healthy’ practices for moms related to diet, exercise, and fitness. Additionally, celebrity magazines will rank
and order the bodies of pregnant and postpartum women in order to illustrate the desired
and undesirable maternal body. The use of the “before and after picture” is another
common tactic used to depict what the optimal corporal figures looks like for mothers.
The comparison and ranking of bodies in this manner serves to stigmatize those figures
that are perceived to be ‘disordered’. These tactics promote the standardization of
appearance norms for new mothers, as well as instill surveillance practices (both internal
and external). Women who do not embody the normative or ideal maternal state seek out
corrective measures to normalize their appearance. Mothers view their current physical
state as lacking a desire to emulate ideal templates set forth by magazines and the media
more generally. The libidinal energy (desire) of women is channeled towards products
and services that claim to enhance their corporeal inadequacies. The cultivation and
channeling of libidinal energy flourishes within neoliberal societies that promote
individualization, self-subjectification, and liberation practices. In turn, mothers are
constantly bombarded with products offering to optimize their physical being, with
consumption often acting as the paramount way individuals choose to distinguish
themselves. Celebrity moms are ideal models of how consumer practices are used to
enhance the maternal body, as high-end maternity fashion, weight loss programs and
beauty products are all examples of typical consumption by stars mothers. It is the way
in which celebrity moms experience disciplinary practices, as well as how their desires
are manipulated, that is of particular interest to this research.
Chapter 3

Methods

To undertake an examination of the shifting ideal, maternal form, I conducted a cultural analysis of images and articles in a selection of magazines. Within these publications, I focused on materials that relate to managing maternal bodies using medical discourse, surveillance, training, and discipline. Additionally, I examined how desire is used to urge mothers to consume products and engage in practices and behaviours in order to embody the model, motherly template. The decision to examine magazine publications was prompted on a personal level by the increase in pregnancy related material I found in tabloid magazines. I found that the fitness and beauty expectations for new mothers have seemingly accelerated within the past few years, creating a new series of largely unattainable beauty standards for women to desire and conform to. From an academic standpoint, vast amounts of research and literature indicate that women are strongly impacted by the celebrity culture and advertisements found in various media outlets (Bartky 1998; Bordo 1993; Jette 2006; Riley 2011; Sullivan 2010; Tyler 2011). The depiction of celebrity pregnancies and new celebrity mothers present as an ideal outlet to study the evolving maternal body. Star-moms, often regarded as the template for ideal beauty, are monitored by the public (and themselves) to ensure their adherence to feminine body norms including body weight, fitness regimes, and fashion and beauty expectations. This template is put forth for all ‘normal' women to aspire to.

Due to the vast array of magazine publications available, I narrowed the scope of materials analyzed to major star culture publications: *In Touch, Life and Style, US*
Weekly, Star, and People Magazine. According to each of the aforementioned magazine online homepages, each publication boasts having the latest celebrity news and star style which facilities my examination of famous, maternal bodies. I chose to limit my examination to print publications of these magazines, as these resources were a readily available and a cost effective way of gathering research materials. More importantly however, these magazines impact large numbers of women as they can be viewed at almost any retail checkout and are widely distributed across North America. According to Alliance for Audited Media, the publications included in this study have high circulation rates, indicating that they reach a large percentage of the female population. Specifically, the number if magazines sold are as follows: In Touch (569,074); Life and Style (316,615); US Weekly (1,964,446); Star (801,735); and People (3,637,633)\(^1\). People Magazine alone has a self-reported estimated audience of 42,470,000 of which 29,972,000 are women\(^2\). High circulation rates of the magazines I reviewed are of particular importance as I am interested in how the shift in body expectations effects the larger population of reproducing women.

In order to ensure the relevance and currency of my analysis, I chose to review only magazines published during January 2012 thorough to May 2013. Random selections of 37 magazines were included in the study, and notably, all 37 publications contained some discussion or depiction of celebrity pregnancy, new mothers, maternity fashion, or “shape-up tips” for moms. Previous research by Shannon Jette (2006), Katie Gentile (2010), Imogen Tyler (2011), and Linda Wachs and Shari Dworkin (2004)

\(^1\) These statistics are current as of December 2012 and is based on data collected in the United States. The information regarding circulation rates includes only total paid and verified circulation.

\(^2\) This information is up to date as of January 2013 as is based on sales in the U.S. and Canada.
indicates that print media is a valuable resource when analyzing maternal bodies. As I am examining 5 different titles, I chose to increase my sample size to 37 magazines instead of the average size of 20 sources reported in the aforementioned studies.

On average within each magazine, celebrity pregnancy or motherhood was mentioned 7 times (including headlines mentioned on the cover). All articles featuring celebrity mothers included at least one photograph of a star mom, often comparing the natal and postnatal body of the celebrity in question. The ranking and ordering of different celebrity bodies was another common feature within the publications. Articles detailing dramatic post-baby weight loss were often coupled with meal plans and fitness suggestions for ‘normal’ women to follow. Both In Touch and US Weekly have regular columns dedicated to following star mothers. These feature articles can include reporting on diet from celebrity parents to snapshots of celebrity mothers with their stylish offspring.

Each magazine was carefully dissected and categorized according to the major theoretical components of bio-power, disciplining bodies, and libidinal economy. Based on these theoretical contributions and the content of the publications, I have determined there to be four major areas of focus for the purposes of this study: maternal weight gain represented as excessive, the pregorexic mother, increasing fitness demands, and evolving maternity fashion. These themes will be explained at length in the findings component of this thesis.
Chapter 4

Literature Review

4.1 Historical Depictions of Maternity: Pathologizing Pregnancy

The social construction of gender roles has traditionally been based on nature/culture and public/private duality and function to describe embodied gender essentialisms (King 1989:116; Nash 2005:3). The male body is understood as rational, stable and active in the “public sphere” while the female subject is dichotomously viewed as “irrational, leaky, emotional” and confined to the domestic realm (Nash 2005:3). Regard for female corporality as embodying chaos and a lack of control dates back to the beginning of the 19th century (Bordo 1989:16) with an idealized maternal state that intensified the perceived instability of essentialized femininity. Susan Bordo (1989) discusses how during this time period, the boundaries between female disorder and the practice of ‘normal’ women can be analyzed through the disorders that women found themselves susceptible to, namely hysteria and neurasthenia. Symptoms of the two disorders included “loss of mobility, loss of voice, inability to leave home, feeding others while starving self, taking up space while whittling down the space one’s body takes up” (ibid: 16). All symptomologies carry symbolic and political meaning in the cultural construction of gender roles; these gender roles function to normalize and homogenize
female subjects by relying on the dualistic system of diagnosis, including those who conformed to culturally ascribed depictions of femininity and the ‘abnormal’ woman who functioned beyond the borders of normative female behaviour (ibid). Symptoms of hysteria and neurasthenia eventually came to be seen as an exaggeration of normative feminine traits for the 19th century “lady” (ibid.) with the term “hysterical” and “feminine” becoming almost synonymous with one another (Showalter as cited in Bordo 1989:17).

Bordo sees disorders such as anorexia and bulimia as contemporary versions of hysteria and neurasthenia (1989:16). These “female disorders” all function to implement a standardized ideal to which women must aspire (ibid) that is manifested today in the bodies of models and celebrities in various media publications. One requirement of contemporary western femininity is a lean, slender body which functions as a symbolic indication of self-containment, control of impulse, and status for women (Bordo 1993:193; Bartky 1988; Nash 2005). Additionally, a thin figure places both a “moral and emotional coding on a woman’s internal state or (dis)order” (Nash 2005:3).

The pregnant body can be understood as a site of contention in comparison to the thin, aesthetic ideal; “at the exact moment when a woman’s body is accomplishing a highly valued route to femininity, she is least likely to be viewed as aesthetically ideal” (Wachs and Dworkin 2004:611). Considering the maternally successful yet aesthetically problematic state that pregnancy presents, it is understandable that many women express intensified body dissatisfactions during gestation (Earle 2003: 245; Riley 2011; Nash 2012; Wachs and Dworkin 2004: 612) and there is a growing media preoccupation with
the bodies of pregnant women including emphasis on weight to gain, diet, fitness, and clothing (Gentile 2011). The media fixation on celebrity mothers signifies a social desire for increased control over maternal bodies, using surveillance measures to ensure women are behaving as “good mothers” should (Nash 2004). Medical discourse is often used to exercise this type of corporeal control (Gentile 2011; Nash 2005; Jette 2006; Wachs and Dworkin 2004); one example of this is how the type and amount of physical activity acceptable for expectant mothers has shifted over time (Jette 2006:332-333). Though pregnancy was once seen as a time in a woman’s life where she could escape from demanding beauty and fitness regimes (Baily 2001; Wachs and Dworkin 2004), the increasing pervasiveness in contemporary maternal imagery focusing on pregnant beauty and maternal fitness practices in the media seems to indicate that the nine month reprieve from body work no longer applies for many.

According to Shannon Jette (2006) the 1990’s saw an increase in medical research dedicated to pregnancy and exercise that revised the medical understanding of the physical abilities of the expectant woman (332). Health guidelines mandated by medical experts evolved from viewing the reproducing body as weak and fragile to highlighting the health risks to women who do not engage in adequate levels of physical activity (ibid). Research by Jette (2006) and Wachs and Dworkin (2004) emphasize the role of commercial fitness industries in capitalizing on this shift in medical discourse and preying on the corporeal insecurities of pregnant women who are now pressured to engage in adequate levels of exercise for both health and aesthetic reasons.
4.2 Surveilling the Body

The use of the panoptic model, as outlined in Foucaudian texts, is utilized by many scholars to provide an understanding of the ways in which the bodies of women are surveilled and self-monitored (Bordo 1993; Duncan 1994; Jette 2006; King 2002). In Margret Duncan’s (1994) analysis of various women’s magazines, she describes two media-based devices or mechanisms within the Panoptic model that invite continuous corporeal monitoring for women: “the efficacy of initiative” and “feeling good means looking good” (50-51). The former pressures all women to strive to reshape their bodies to more closely emulate those of models and celebrities found in magazine publications (ibid:51). The second device describes how health issues take a subordinate position to achieving beauty ideals. Contemporary women’s magazines push the idea that feeling good has more to do with achieving optimal beauty standards and is less related to the physical health of the individual (ibid:51). The link between beauty and health/fitness is also mirrored in the work of Wachs and Dworkin (2004) and Shannon Jette (2006) who emphasize how the two themes mutually reinforce each other within the media.

Underlying these panoptic mechanisms that promote self-regulation in accordance with cultural norms is a growing conflation between the public and private spheres (Duncan 1994:49; Jette 2006:336). Analysis of devices that prompt women to engage in continuous self-surveillance offers an understanding of how the seemingly private disciplinary behaviours and practices women engage in, are actually governed and dictated by cultural regulations within the social sphere (ibid.). Duncan specifies that the use of the term ‘private’ in this context emphasizes the assumed individuation that individuals experience; more specifically, qualities that we believe separate us from one
another making us unique (49). ‘Private’ in this sense creates a boundary between the personal and culturally shaped public sphere and facilitates an understanding of “one’s own embodied experience” (ibid). Emphasis on self-regulation and increased individualization is symptomatic of neoliberal society (Evans, Riley and Shankar 2010:115; Jette 2006:336) and can be understood as facilitating the self-monitoring that women engage in by perpetuating discourse which places maintenance of optimal health and appearance as a personal responsibility. Duncan (1994) cites the “gaze” as one of the paramount ways in which the lines between public and private become blurred (49). She uses the term “gaze” in a metaphorical sense to describe how the monitoring is both a visual act and “an economy of surveillance that operates on many levels and via many forms of media” (ibid). Western women within neoliberal societies are trained to self-evaluate and scrutinize themselves via the use of the (masculine) gaze of others and in this way, they become both spectator and spectacle (Bordo 1989,1993; Duncan 1994; Spitzack 1990). From a spectator stance, women turn the gaze upon themselves by engaging in physical comparison with ideal bodies found everywhere in the media (Bordo 1993; Duncan 1994:50; Markula 2001:159). The internalization of the male gaze presents as a personal manifestation for the pursuit of physical perfection and in this way women come to understand their bodies as lacking and in need of correction (Bordo 1993; Duncan 1994:50; Gentile 2011:4; Spitzack 1990; Wachs and Dworkin 2004).
4.3 The Cult of Domesticity

Some theorists link increased control over female bodies to climates of cultural instability and social change (Gentile 2011; Narayan 1997; Mohanty 2004). One example of a cultural shake up that implemented revised gender roles for women took place during the industrial revolution in the 19th century (Gentile 2011:40). At this time, “economic based systems of family-based farming and home-based production were replaced by urban factory work” (Amott and Matthieu 1996 as cited in Gentile 2011:40). This cultural shift required a revision in how and where gendered bodies were allowed to occupy and behave. Wage labour and the public sphere became exclusively masculine, leaving women to occupy domestic spaces and perform unpaid labour (Gentile 2011:40).

Increased regulation of women’s corporeal existence during the industrial revolution was fostered through the use of media which used images and articles to promote a homogenous, feminine ideal (Gentile 2011:40). Barbara Welter (1966) examined advice books and women’s magazines from 1820 to 1860 and delineated how these publications were instrumental in communicating upper class values to the emerging middle class women. Within the examined literature, four major themes emerged which function as the foundation for the ultimate feminine existence: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (163). In light of the economic uncertainty brought about by rising industrialization, women were charged with creating a home environment that was safe from the evils of public life. Working for “pure affection without thought of money or ambition” was believed to be the ‘natural’ role women should take on, a role which primarily confined them to the home (Welter 1966:160). In addition to keeping women in the private sector, the “cult of domesticity” also
“created/identified and elevated their previously negative ‘natural’ talents to being godly” while simultaneously reducing competition for wage labour with the male population (Gentile 2011:45). The assumed irrationally, thought to be innate for women, was suddenly valuable in terms of “emotional nurturing” and mothering came to be regarded as a very important role (ibid.). Religion was used as a “tranquilizer” to dull the physical and psychological desires of women as “it was better to pray than to think” (Welter 1966:153). The upstanding 19th century woman was void of sexual longing with maternal instinct being the singular way she experienced love (Gentile 2011:45).

Working class and immigrant women who were forced to take jobs in factories were not able to gain the same power and stature from embodying this domestic, nurturing image (ibid:40). The “cult of domesticity codified an ideal of femininity that emerged in the United States beginning around 1820, and despite the ethnic, race, and class divides supported by this ideal, it functioned to create within most women a desire for home-based existence revolving around a family” (ibid.).

The works of Katie Gentile (2011) explore a neo cult of domesticity focused on procreation that emerged within the media after the events of 9/11. The once religious based ideals of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity proposed by Welter (1966) have taken a new form in our current cultural climate, according to Gentile:

Piety and Purity are still relevant, but they are wielded from different alters. Dieting; exercising; living cleanly with no fat, or no carbs, or no sugar, depending on the accepted “religion,” that is, diet, is the new purity. Piety is being “good” and staying on a
diet. Women can have sex and advertise it. Pregnant bodies, once hidden underneath tentlike asexual smocks, can now burst out in Lycra formfitting clothes and walk proudly down award show carpets. However, both states of women’s bodies need to be pure and pious according to the new definition: they must be thin. Even pregnant, the only parts of the body that can swell and be displayed are the belly (the pregnancy bump) and the breasts. Dieting is the tranquilizer (2011:46).

Media depictions of the ideal, maternal figure within the cult of domesticity do not reflect current circumstances of many women today. Unprecedented numbers of women are engaging in paid labour while raising a family with only the top 5% of the income spectrum and women with high school degrees likely to decline to work outside the home (ibid:46). In the case of women with a high school degree, “opting out” is more of a side effect of nonflexible labour conditions common with lower income jobs (ibid.). So, although statistics indicate that more women are working outside the home, the media continues to promote an ideal where women alone are emotionally invested in maintenance of home and family life (ibid). Gentile sees the regulation of pregnancy and a rising pronatalist discourse in the media over the past decade as a defense against the threat to existence that has been heightened due to recent military, political, and environmental threats in the United States (ibid:40-43). By encouraging women to bear children, the continuation of the human species can be assured and cultural anxiety can be placated (ibid.). “We are in a future-orientated culture with a tenuous future and pregnancy can be seen as the embodied manufacturing of the future…” (Gentile 2011:43).
4.4 Celebrity Culture and the Media

Although many media messages targeted towards women continue to be pronatalist, the mother figure has been taken out of the domestic confines of the home and placed into the public realm (Jette 2006:331; Nash 2005:3; Tyler 2011:21). Scholars describe a cultural shift in the representation of pregnancy and motherhood during the 1990’s, citing the famous 1991 depiction of Demi Moore on the cover of *Vanity Fair* as the turning point for treatment of pregnancy in the media (Cunningham 2002; Longhurst 2001; Nash 2005; Tyler 2001 and 2011). The cover photo shot by Annie Lebowitz displayed a heavily pregnant Moore dressed in nothing more than diamond jewelry. Prior to this image, depictions of pregnancy were highly regulated within the media, guided by strong cultural taboos which kept the expectant figure out of the public eye (Longhurst 2005:483; Nash 2005:2). Meredith Nash suggests that Moore’s depiction signals more than just a public eroticization of the pregnant body, but also places her as the ideal white woman embodying cultural wealth and power (2005:2). Since the 1991 cover, the nude, pregnant cover shot has become a mandatory photo for celebrities (Nash 2005:2) and more recently, many non-celebrity women have begun to follow suit (Tyler 2011:23). The growing prevalence of the pregnancy photo shoot for the ‘ordinary’ woman can be seen as reconfiguring pregnancy into a “sexy bodily performance: a body project to be coveted and enjoyed” (ibid: 24). Tyler (2011) discusses how the depiction of celebrity “pregnant beauty” has facilitated a shift in thinking for some women, enabling them to see their expectant bodies as sensual and attractive rather than a site of corporeal abjection and excess (24).
Depictions of stylish, pregnant starlets may enable some women to view their bodies as a site of eroticism and beauty; however, coverage of maternal celebrities can also provide women with an unrealistic aesthetic template that they feel pressured to emulate. Even though women may be aware that these images are unrealistic, these ideals are still internalized by female viewers, causing them to view their bodies as lacking in comparison to the famous figures they view in the media (Bordo 1993). Examination of maternity-related media is imperative when investigating the shifting, ideal maternal image because individuals are altered when they consume various forms of media, even when the proposed message or idea is rejected by the viewer (Gentile 2011:41). Furthermore, analysis of celebrities in these publications provides further insight into the evolving, maternal body as celebrities continue to be a significant means through which cultural values and judgements are communicated (Tyler and Bennett 2010:376; Tyler 2011:24). Imogen Tyler (2011) also notes that the figure of the “pregnant beauty” has “emerged out of and is still driven by celebrity culture” (23).

What is a celebrity? Modern celebrity is described as a product of media representation and understanding this cultural phenomenon demands that close attention be paid to the “representational repertoires and patterns employed in this discursive regime” (Turner 2004:8). Jessica Evans (2005) mirrors Turner’s sentiments regarding celebrity and media as being mutually constitutive forces and outlines three major themes discussed by academics when examining issues related to the origins and persistence of celebrity in western culture today. The first is that celebrity culture represents a worrying cultural shift towards a society that privileges “the momentary, the visual and the sensational over the enduring, the written and the rational” (4). The second issue is that
celebrity is seen as a ‘natural’ or innate star-quality which a small handful of gifted individuals possess and industry talent scouts must discover (ibid.). Lastly, Evans presents the argument that celebrity is the product of a number of economic and cultural processes. These processes include the “commodification of the individual celebrity through promotion, publicity and advertising; the implication of celebrities in the processes through which cultural identity is negotiation and formed; and most importantly, the representational processes employed by the media in their treatments of prominent individuals” (ibid: 4-5). Further highlighting the importance of the media in the creation of celebrity, Turner states that the shift from public figure to celebrity occurs when media reporting on the public figure ceases to focus on accounts of achievements and public roles, and shifts to an investigation of personal life (2004:8). The depiction of celebrity mothers in magazines can be interpreted as an example of Turner’s description of the origins of celebrity; pregnancy and motherhood are both private events in the lives of women and media publications, and consumers of these publications have become increasingly fixated on following the maternal journeys of famous mothers, bringing these private events into the public realm (Tyler 2011; Gentile 2011).

An alternative definition of celebrity noted by many scholars (Evans 2005:3; Gameson 1994; Tyler and Bennett 2010:378; Turner 2004:5) is offered by Daniel Boorstin (1962) who describes celebrity as “fabricated on purpose to satisfy our exaggerated expectations of human greatness,” (58). According to Boorstin, many celebrities become famous for being famous, and claims to public attention can often come to outstrip the public awareness of the original achievements of the celebrity in question. Reflecting back on the example of pregnant celebrities, in some cases,
notoriety regarding pregnancy and the maternal role can become the main source of a star’s fame. Tyler (2011) notes stars such as Nicole Richie who reached a peak in notoriety while pregnant, with little mention or care in the media for the original source of her celebrity status; she became a maternity style icon for no other reason than the media coverage during her pregnancy.

Recent analyses of celebrity status has focused on the role that celebrityhood plays within the mass media and how these two elements function as a set of rules and guidelines for conduct in public life (Evans 2004:6). Celebrities have come to represent more than just themselves; individuals who have risen to stardom are one of the key sites where cultural meanings are negotiated and organized, indicating an “ontological shift in popular culture” (Turner 2005:6). Tyler and Bennett (2010) describe how increasing accounts of celebrity culture that embody the self-absorption and shallowness of market driven society also marks the decline of traditional values and institutions, including the decline of the nuclear family unit (378). This interpretation of celebrity coverage in the media contrasts with ideas presented in the work of both Gentile (2011) and Wachs and Dworkin (2004) who contend that coverage of pregnancy in women’s magazines has served to reinforce traditional gender roles for women (as mothers) as well as to reinstate their proper place in the domestic sphere.

Many scholars indicate that the rise of celebrity culture can be interpreted as a democratization of social life and is indicative of a more general process of social levelling (Evans 2004; Tyler and Bennett 2010:378; Turner 2005). Evidence that celebrity culture is democratic is predicated on two assumptions: the first is that increased
exposure of members of marginalized groups demonstrates that celebrity culture creates employment opportunities for groups that were formerly socially and culturally subjugated (Tyler and Bennett 2010:378). This position is supported by reports of increased visibility of working class and members of minority ethnic groups on television (ibid.). While this understanding can be applied to some individuals in society, research completed by feminist scholars indicates that depictions of celebrity pregnancies tend to be homogenous in nature, usually depicting white, wealthy, slim bodies as the epitome of maternal beauty (Gentile 2010; Tyler 2011:27; Nash 2005, 2012). Graeme Turner (2006) discerns that initially it may appear that celebrity culture has opened up media access to marginalized groups in society, but warns that these effects are inadvertent and “celebrity still remains a systematically hierarchical and exclusive category, no matter how much it proliferates” (157).

The second founding premise of the democratizing effects of celebrity culture is that there has been an increase in opportunities for audience participation for media viewers (Tyler and Bennett 2010:379). Tyler and Bennett report that John Hartley’s (1999) research findings indicate that when audiences are given the chance to publicly express an opinion, the expressed views are unlikely to be “oppositional or critically reflective interpretations of celebrity media”(2010:379). Hartley’s finding suggests that participants’ views often reflect mainstream social values and meanings already inscribed within celebrity culture (ibid.). “In other words, the democratizing claim risks becoming indistinct from neoliberal ideologies of market meritocracy, which use the rhetoric of equality of opportunity to disguise and sustain massive inequality” (ibid.). These sentiments are reflected in the pages of tabloid magazines under review for this analysis.
in sections where readers can comment on celebrity photos via the use of email and various forms of social media. The audience commentary, in this case, functions in a disciplinary capacity and reinforces notions of “pregnant beauty” that mask social inequalities experienced by women (Tyler 2011:29). These inequalities include issues such as discrimination in the workforce, as Tyler notes that approximately 10 percent of women lose their jobs or are discriminated against as a result of motherhood (ibid.). The ability to emulate the homogenous depictions of maternal beauty is another avenue where women are disadvantaged. New maternal beauty displayed by celebrities involves the ability of a woman to purchase beauty products, clothing, accessories and services - an ability that assumes certain levels of affluence that are available to few women (Gentile 2011; Tyler 2011). This inequality is masked with the use of neoliberal discourse that relies on tenants of freedom, liberty and choice to encourage individuals to participate in consumer culture as a means to individuate themselves from others (Tyler 2011; Lazar 2011).

Research by Tyler and Bennett (2010) indicate that “celebrity culture is not only thoroughly embedded in everyday social practices, but is more constitutive of contemporary social life” (376). Although the primary focus of research by Tyler and Bennett is aimed at establishing a link between the new working-class, celebrity female and the constitution of class relations in social life, their understanding of celebrity as being a uniquely disciplinary sphere of social life is useful when examining celebrity mothers. Many researchers including Bordo (1993), Tyler (2011), Nash (2005), Wachs and Dworkin (2004), Tyler and Bennett (2010), Jette (2006), Synnott (1990), and Joy, Sherry, Troilo and Deschenes (2010) cite a correlation between a woman’s (or mother’s)
ability to closely emulate beauty and fitness standards and their socially ascribed moral value—“good mothers” look good. The work of Anthony Synott (1990) evaluates the origins of beautiful/ugly dichotomy linguistically, providing evidence that beauty and ugliness are not only “physical opposites but moral opposites” as well (55). The profound impact of either pejorative or praising text used to describe images of star moms is reported in Meredith Nash’s (2005) analysis of the media coverage of Britney Spears throughout her pregnancies. Spears was depicted as embodying a “good mother” when she was able to emulate both purity and sexuality in her photos. The subtle nuances involved in achieving the “good mother” image included a careful selection of clothing (white mini-dress to signify innocence and purity) as well as the full display of her expectant belly (maternal state sexes her body) (Nash 2005:6).

Beyond the application of the “gaze” as a disciplinary surveillance tactic as noted previously, Nash draws on the work of feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (1989) and her ideas regarding the male ‘gaze’ in cinema to provide context to the interplay between the reader and expectant mothers captured in print media (2005:6). The term male ‘gaze’ developed by Mulvey (1989) contrasts select structuralist and psychoanalytic theories with visual imagery and ‘looking’, arguing that traditional depictions of women in cinema present them as passive subjects of the active gaze of their male counterparts. More contemporary research conducted by Angela McRobbie (2009) delineates how the increasing amount of sexualization found in western societies complicates traditional dynamics of the male gaze. McRobbie (2009) argues that notions of the male gaze can be removed from media images, as women increasingly engage in the monitoring of other female bodies as well as their own. The traditional understanding of women as the
passive bearer of the male gaze as outlined by Mulvey is complicated by Nash’s analysis of various magazine images of a pregnant Britney Spears. Nash’s findings indicate that in select images, Spears takes the role of an active participant in the visual exchange with her stare directed at the camera and body language indicating that she enjoys being the subject in the photograph (2005:6). Spears does, however, still embody a glamorous image which may signal the internalization of both the male gaze which dictates desired expressions of ideal femininity for women, as well as the female gaze which is associated with inflating amounts of self-monitoring completed by women (ibid.). This shift in gaze captured in the photos of Britney Spears is notable because it signifies a change in culture around how expectant women view themselves as proud and sensual beings.

The depiction of Britney Spears in this particular image noted by Nash indicates a re-coding of the ideal maternal template to include strong elements of sexuality (2005:6). The image of sexy mother is an ideal archetype that is discussed by many scholars investigating the relationship between pregnancy and the media (Longhurst 2005; Tyler 2011; Nash 2005; Huntley 2000). In addition to the increase in fashionable maternity clothing and products available to women, research indicates that an increased amount of celebrity exposure in the media is one of the main catalysts for the formation of the sexy mother archetype (Longhurst 2005; Tyler 2011; Nash 2005). Concern for women’s participation in sexualized culture is indicated in the work of Gill (2007), McRobbie (2009) and Storr (2003) who report that reinstating women as the objects of sex has the potential to reproduce the male gaze while concurrently producing a “narcissistic, neoliberal, self-policing gaze, in which the contemporary woman does not seek male
approval for her apparently ‘freely chosen look’ (as cited in Evan, Riley and Shankar 2010:116). Coverage of pregnant celebrities is also charged with creating a romanticized view of motherhood for women (Nash 2004:5) by depicting star-moms who ‘have it all’, juggling a career, family, domestic life, and body work (Tyler 2011:29; Gentile 2011:51). Again, the depiction of celebrities masks inequalities as magazines photos fail to show the nannies, chefs, personal trainers or other services staff which offer support to many celebrities in order perpetuate the cultural narrative of the supermom, which includes a high level of body maintenance. Celebrities who are interpreted as performing successful motherhood are also often impeccably styled, which indicates how clothing and grooming habits can impact public perception of a woman’s ability to cope with her new parental role.

Robyn Longhurst (2005) highlights the significant role that the depiction of celebrities in women’s magazines has played in transforming “maternity wear into maternity fashion” (438). Longhurst chronicles the evolution of popular maternity wear in western culture from the smock tops popular in the 1950s and 1960s through to the ‘tent dresses’ popular from the 1970s through to the early 1990s (ibid). Pregnancy was traditionally seen as private time for women, when energy and money should be focused on purchasing and preparing for the arrival of their infant - not spending money on clothing for personal wear (ibid). The mid 1990s marked the beginning of a shift toward proud pregnancy fashions promoting apparel that emphasized the full, expectant bellies of mothers and expanded the fashion market (Tyler 2011:24-25; Gentile 2011:50; Longhurst 2005:438). With the help of celebrity moms, ‘ordinary’ mothers were able to envision pregnancy as a time when they could continue to be sexy and stylish.
Advertisers and corporations in the 1990s, taking their lead from the shift in maternal image displayed in the media, began to capitalize on the commercial possibilities that pregnant women offered. A wide array of clothing and beauty products specially aimed at maternal bodies erupted onto the market so all women were better able to emulate sexy, maternity fashions adorned by their favourite celebrities (Longhurst 2005:438).

4.5 Neoliberal Society and the Right to be Beautiful

Contemporary neo-liberal societies are described by McCromack (1999:162) as inhabiting citizens who are actively responsible for their own physical fitness: “Such individuals are to become ‘experts of themselves’, adopting an educated and knowledgeable relation of self-care in respect of their bodies…..and that of their families” (Rose 1996:59 as quoted in McCormack 1999:162). Rose (2001) suggests that there was a conflation of the political desire for a healthy population and the personal health purists of individual citizens, as a result of the democratization of biopolitics that took place throughout the 19th and into the 20th century (17). During this time, conceptions of health evolved to include preventative practices in order to avoid illness and premature death, and to enhance one’s physical being to include such elements as “beauty, success, happiness, sexuality”(Rose 2011:17).

The ability of mothers to achieve adequate levels of physical fitness is not only a way to fulfill their civic responsibility as neoliberal citizens, but also suggests that women are responsible for the future health and well-being of their expected children. Celebrity mothers are presented as ‘experts’ of their bodies - individuals who take the
necessary steps to maintain optimal health and in turn, reduce possible dependence on institutions and economic support provided by the state (Jette 2006). There have been many health risks associated with being overweight or obese, and these negative health consequences translate into economic drains for governments in the form of health care costs, absenteeism from work due to illness and lost tax revenue (Bereska 2008:197). Although, initially it seems like the pressure that women are under to replicate the fit celebrity body is for purely aesthetic reasons, the direct benefits to the government and economic system are also evident. Preventative practices such as monitoring weight gain during pregnancy and encouraging diet and fitness practices for mothers has been linked to decreased obesity in toddlers and has the potential to reduce the number of children with lifelong weight struggles (Gentile 2011:52). A reduction in obesity could prospectively reduce medical treatment for individuals, which would contribute to a thriving economy via the aforementioned reduction in stress to the healthcare system and use of support programs for non-working citizens. In this way, we can understand how images of star mothers, which act as models for all other women to emulate (Gentile 2011:51), are a form of biopolitical control.

Contemporary understandings of neoliberalism delineate how it is presented as a system “concerned with individual freedom, choice, democracy, and personal responsibility” (Tyler 2011:22). Although neoliberalism appears to be predicated upon foundations of liberation, it can also be understood as a class-based financial plan where wealth is concentrated into the hands of a small populations of elite (including corporations and individuals) while appropriating assets (including welfare provisions) from less-privileged members of society (Harvey 2006). Ideal subjects of neoliberal
societies have the desire and ability to work and participate in consumer culture (Tyler 2011:22). In this way, neoliberal governance has produced bodies which are able to ‘bear the burdens of liberty’ (Rose 1999:viii) and comply with their subsequent subjectification within society (Tyler 2011:22). Maternity can be understood as a failed consumerism within this neoliberal context as the maternal state signifies an inability or unwillingness to work or engage in consumer practices (ibid.). With this in mind, it becomes apparent why advertisers and media outlets have begun to bombard women with images of maternal beauty products and practices; with an array of products and services as their disposal, even reproducing women- once considered lacking in neoliberal consumerism - are given the freedom to fully engage in capitalist consumption. Increasing amounts of maternal publicity found in neoliberal states indicate the birth of a new range of maternal identities and practices (ibid.). These feminine identities often revolve around emancipation through engagement in beauty practices and notions of women’s empowerment, both by-products of post-feminist discourse found within neoliberal societies (Lazar 2011:38). Advertisers are able to respond to the social climate and adjust promotion of beauty products and practices to align with post-feminist discourse, making the link between “normative practices of beautification and emancipated identity” (ibid: 37). In this way, advertisers cater to individual desires (ibid) shaped by neoliberal societies, aiming to produce subjects that are inclined to comply with consumer practices that perpetuate the economic status quo (Tyler 2011). Standardized beauty practices and ideals are presented in the media as an extension of female liberation and choice and are constructed as a “woman’s right to be beautiful” (Lazar 2011:38). However, it is argued that the ideal, feminine image that women have the ‘freedom’ to embody is becoming
increasingly homogenized and exclusionary (Bordo 2009; Evens, Riley and Shankar 2010:115; Lazar 2011:37; Tyler 2011) leaving women with a limited range of pre-packaged maternal identities to strive to emulate.

4.6 Maternal Mass

Dworkin and Wachs (2004) and Jette (2011) discuss how the partum and post-partum figure is viewed as out of control and highlight how women are now encouraged to engage in fitness regimes and body work in order to re-discipline their bodies – rescuing themselves from the chaos of the maternal state. An investigation into a selection of celebrity magazines conducted by Gentile (2011) indicates that in addition to speculation about which celebrities may be expecting, the most prevalent type of article featured in publications relates to postpartum weight control (39). Similar research regarding increased fitness demands for postpartum women indicates that the push to ‘get your body back’ is mirrored in other publications such as health and fitness magazines (Jette 2011; Wachs and Dworkin 2004). Hillary Cunningham (2002) also reports how the postnatal body, in particular, is presented as problematic for new mothers. To illustrate her point, Cunningham (2002) draws parallels between the postpartum body and the biblical story of the prodigal son. She delineates how the pre-pregnancy body departs while the reproducing body is left to contend with the laborious task of gestation, birth and nourishing a newborn (ibid: 4). Despite this biological triumph, the post-partum body is regarded with disgust, hidden under loose garments, and is a source of embarrassment for new mothers (ibid: 4). It is the pre-pregnancy body or prodigal body which is desired and whose return is highly celebrated by mothers and in the media (ibid:5; Gentile 2011:39). The slim, taught post-partum body is one commonality that all
depictions of successful mothers in popular culture share (Cunningham 2002:5). Wachs and Dworkin (2004) argue that in addition to the first shift of paid labour, and the second shift of domestic and familial responsibility, that contemporary mothers must now take on a third shift of “bodily labour and fitness practices”. The required third shift of physical activity is reflected in celebrity magazines with stars like Gwyneth Paltrow outlining her three hour a day workout in efforts to regain her former body (Gentile 2011:39). The time allotted for women to regain their pre-pregnancy bodies is growing increasingly short with media publications reporting stigmatization of celebrities who have not achieved their pre-baby figure in 2-3 months (Gentile 2011:39; Cunningham 2002:3; Tyler 2011). Famous mothers depicted in celebrity magazines act as a template for all mothers (Gentile 2011:51) and drastic post-baby weight loss is unattainable for most women who have no personal trainers nor the free time for long daily workouts. Therefore, the excess of articles celebrating the quick return of celebrity’s pre-partum body has the potential to negatively impact the way new mothers experience their bodies.

The maternal experience has been shaped by the social circumstances that surround it. From early depictions of the hysterical woman to the new cult of domesticity, the spaces women were allowed to occupy and the roles they were expected to fulfill impact the embodied experience for maternal women. The disciplinary and self-monitoring practices women must engage in to align their bodies to the aesthetic archetype of the time, illustrates the pervasiveness of norms for new and expectant mothers. Celebrities in conjunction with media publications play a large role in communicating these values and ideals to the public, with newly emerging maternal ideals often originating from the pages of celebrity magazines. Advertisers and media
officials rely on the influence of star-moms to promote new maternity related products to an expanding motherhood market. Within neoliberal societies identity and consumer practice are closely intertwined and the bodies of women are sculpted not only by disciplinary and surveillance tactics, but also by commercial markets that endorse the purchase of beauty and fitness products to articulate the prefect maternal identity. Currently there is existing literature that chronicles specific celebrity mothers or details the prevalence of maternity in recent media publications. However, there is a lack of research which examines how the ideal, maternal form has changed and the role celebrities play in communicating the new ‘yummy mummy’ template to ‘normal’ women in Western society. This research will contribute to the current body of literature by delineating specifics of the maternal ideal and the discourse, which is used in tabloid publications to achieve this shift in how contemporary mothers look and behave.
Chapter 5

Findings

My interest in investigating tabloid depictions of celebrity ‘yummy mummies’ and the subsequent shift in body expectations for ‘normal’ mothers developed from a personal interest (and perhaps an anxiety) about what contemporary motherhood looks like. For myself and the other young women in my life who may one day consider starting a family, I was deeply concerned by the ‘get your body back’ and ‘pretty and pregnant’ hype that seemed to be conjured up in celebrity magazines across Western society. At a time when the female body is pulling double duty, supporting the fetus and the mother, why should women have this intense pressure to discipline their bodies to mirror celebrity standards of aesthetic appeal? I witnessed how stars that were not able to shape up in a timely manner (2-3 months) were ridiculed in the media, creating the façade that they were somehow less capable as new mothers.

The purpose of my research is to investigate this revision in the ideal, maternal body and uncover other elements that may be supporting increased demands for corporeal discipline. I wanted to know not just how the bodies of mothers, star moms in particular, were expected to re-sculpt their figures, but how and why neoliberal society seemed to be facilitating this process. I began to notice an increasing array of pregnancy fashion and beauty products taking a prominent role in advertisements and stores. Likewise, fitness centres in my area began to offer ‘mommy and me’ fitness classes and post-baby boot camps to aid mothers in their pre-baby body reclamation efforts. Through a sociological understanding of the shifting, ideal maternal form, contemporary Western society can
better reflect on how media depictions of motherhood are impacting the way women experience pregnancy and parenthood.

Media depictions of ever increasing fitness and beauty demands hit a climax recently after the duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton, gave birth to her son. The same day that Middleton brought her baby into the world, the UK tabloid OK! magazine released a special edition featuring a six page spread on the “duchess diet” (Figure 1). Public outcry by British women reached unprecedented levels as mothers across the country expressed their anger via social media outlets such as Twitter. Outrage over coverage of Middleton’s “post-baby weight loss regime” resulted in moms calling for a boycott of the celebrity magazine in order to take a stand against the intense pressure this type of journalism places on ‘normal’ women to lose weight right after pregnancy. Although OK! is not one of the magazine titles selected to include in this study, the public backlash against coverage of Middleton’s post-baby weight loss illustrates the impact that these type of celebrity stories have on mothers. Furthermore, this example illustrates the need for analysis of the shifting, ideal maternal form and the potential negative ramifications of how motherhood is socially constructed in the Western world.

After conducting my analysis, four main themes emerged from the visual discourse within the celebrity magazines under review. By discourse, I refer to photographs and articles that reference famous, maternal bodies and their subjection to disciplining and normalization practices within a neoliberal society. Based on tabloid publications, there appears to be an increasingly specific template of what a maternal body is allowed to look like. (1) Bodies that are deemed to be too large or have experienced rapid and excessive weight gains are the target of ridicule by these
publications. (2) Similar to the way overweight bodies are problematized, so too are excessively thin or pregorexic bodies. Mothers who appear to be underweight, especially post-pregnancy are pin-pointed as be unable to cope with their new busy schedules that tend to include parenting, career, family and friends. (3) The push to reclaim the pre-baby body is another major theme highlighted on the covers of these magazines. New mothers are expected to lose pregnancy pounds as fast as possible, erasing any traces of the post-natal body. (4) Finally, maintaining beauty and style regimes throughout pregnancy is another newly implemented requirement for new and expectant mothers. Maternity fashion, in particular, has become of increasing importance for celebrities, as even pregnancy no longer offers a time of reprieve from these strict beauty norms. Homogenizing practices in these cases appear to be reinforced through surveillance – readers tweeting, celebrities tweeting about themselves, paparazzi photographs and tabloid articles. Although there is some push back against these maternal body standards, especially with regard to reclaiming the pre-baby body, these feeble attempts to reaffirm the pregnant/post-pregnant form send contradictory messages to readers. Ultimately, depictions of the fit and beautiful, gravid body is constructed as the apex of maternal embodiment.

5.1 Excessive Weight Gain: Pregnant Bodies Out of Bounds

Weight gain during pregnancy is a natural bodily function with Canadian obstetricians and gynaecologists reporting that the average woman should gain between 25-35 pounds (The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada). Interestingly, this recommendation is often countered by midwives who suggest that 40-50 pounds is a
more realistic and representative weight influx during female gestation (Cunningham 2002:4). Regardless of the current weight gain prescription for Western women, gravid celebrities face excessive scrutiny if they appear to have over indulged and ‘packed on the pounds’ during their pregnancy. In the course of my analysis, two notable examples of ‘excessive’ weight gain were featured in each of the different tabloid publications under review. Jessica Simpson and Kim Kardashian faced relentless surveillance and critique throughout their pregnancies, with monitoring practices increasing as their due dates approached. Of the thirty-seven magazines included in this study, thirty of them featured weight related articles pertaining to one of the two women. Headlines such as “Kim’s 200-lb Nightmare: I Can’t Stop Eating!” (Campbell 2013) and “Jessica’s desperate weight struggle” (Life & Style 2012: 24-25) serve to further problematize the increasing mass of these women by painting it as a critical symptom of their ‘out of control’ pregnancies. Within the aforementioned articles and others like it, Kardashian and Simpson are depicted as being at the mercy of their intense food cravings, reaffirming the maternal body as lacking discipline and control.

In several issues featuring Simpson and Kardashian, articles speculate about how much weight was gained and potential negative consequences for star moms-to-be. Corporeal depictions of these women align with Foucault’s (1978) ideas regarding the hysterization of the female body. As mentioned in previous chapters, the body of the hysterical woman was thought to be inherently pathological and in need of rational, medical intervention in order to supress emotional and corporeal excessiveness (ibid.). Both Simpson and Kardashian are pathologized in the media with discussions of their supposed out of control “binge eating” and rapid weight gain. The opinion of quasi-
healthcare professionals is enlisted in order to further depict the diet and exercise routines of the two women as disordered. An issue of *In Touch* reports that “multiple sources” have seen Kardashian “binging on high-calorie food to the point that she’s literally bursting out of her clothes. She is eating whatever she wants – ice cream, fries, cereal loaded with sugar” (Campbell 2013: 26). Another article in *Star* magazine describes how Jessica Simpson looked “much larger than she should” just weeks into her second pregnancy (Cordes 2013: 1). The story continues with “insider” information detailing Simpson’s attempts to watch her diet much closer than she did during her first pregnancy but how her lack of control results in frequent overeating (ibid.).

In his discussion of the hysterization of women, Foucault (1978) outlines how medical experts were used to manage female bodies. Similarly, tabloids draw ‘expert’ opinion to regulate and reinforce norms for the behaviour and appearance of celebrity mothers. In the case of celebrity magazines, Foucault’s archetype of the healthcare authority has been diluted to such an extent that it now includes ‘experts’ such as nutritionists, fitness instructors, and weight-loss consultants. Although many of these ‘experts’ do not have any formal medical training or education that would enable them to be regarded as such, tabloids present them as authorities on the topic of maternal weight gain. For example, in a January issue of *Star*, weight-loss consultant, Alicia Hunter, commented on Jessica Simpson’s weight gain during her second pregnancy: “Jessica definitely looks too big. She appears to have put on about 35 pounds – and she is not even half way through her pregnancy” (Cordes 2013: 1). Hunter further comments that most pregnant women gain twenty-five to thirty-five pounds in total and that Simpson
needs to avoid “fried foods, pastries and Oreo sundaes, or she’ll find herself with even more weight issues after baby number two arrives” (ibid.). This article ignores that fact that postnatal bodies are designed to store fat in the advent of additional pregnancies (Cunningham 2002). Jessica Simpson’s body is behaving the way it is biologically designed to; her maternal body is storing fat to ensure the health of her fetus, yet she is endlessly scrutinized for her growing form (Figure 2). Kim Kardashian suffers similar scrutiny by various ‘experts’ in an issue of In Touch. The article includes testimony from “nutrition expert Dr. Fred Pescatore” (who interestingly does not treat Kim) and his speculation that Kardashian could tip the scales at more than two hundred pounds by the time she delivers her baby (Campbell 2013:26). Consequently, the title of the story was based on this unfounded speculation: “Kim’s Pregnancy Nightmare: Blowing Up to 200-lbs!” (ibid.).

Similar to findings reported by Katie Gentile (2011), health care information was used in tabloids to warn women about the evils of becoming over-weight during their pregnancies.

Medical discourse is used to problematize weight gain deemed as excessive, highlighting the possibility of gestational diabetes and other possible health risks for mother and baby. This contemporary form of bio-power continues to sanction women as biologically and morally responsible for the health of their children and themselves during pregnancy. Special attention is paid to the diet and exercise practices of gravid mothers as they are expected to take steps to ensure they are healthy enough to support their fetus. Any behaviour viewed as negative (such as weight gain deemed excessive in nature) constructs the mother as lacking in her social responsibility to raise a healthy child. Star
magazine reports how Kim Kardashian’s weight gain may prove dangerous to her health and delivery:

“In fact, Kim’s rapidly ballooning shape could have consequences beyond just her vanity. “Gaining too much weight during pregnancy puts the mother at risk for getting gestational diabetes,” says board-certified weight-loss physician Dr. John LaPuma, the author of ChefMD’s Big Book of Culinary Medicine. “If Kim has this, there is much greater risk for injury at childbirth – so it needs to be taken seriously.” And, he adds that women who suffer from gestational diabetes “often have a change in their metabolic function that remain even after childbirth. These women are also more likely to develop type 2 diabetes after giving birth”. (Plant et al. 2013:38)

The story further speculates that Kardashian may already have gestational diabetes due to reports that sugar was found in her urine during a routine doctor checkup. As a result, a “Kardashian insider” discloses that “Kim has been instructed to change her eating habits and completely avoid sweets for the safety of her baby” (Plant et al. 2013:39).

Much like the prisoners in panoptical prisons described by Foucault (1977) in Discipline and Punish, celebrity mothers find themselves in a permanent state of visibility that promotes a heightened state of self-consciousness. The minds and bodies of star moms have been trained to internalize social expectations of their gravid state. As norms regarding acceptable weight gain during gestation evolve, celebrity moms come to internalize these standards for appropriate pregnancy mass and begin to self-monitor and self-scrutinize their bodies and behaviours.

Jessica Simpson, now pregnant with her second child less than a year after giving birth to her daughter, is reportedly much more cautious about her weight gain and vows to be “healthier” according to an article in In Touch (2013:16). What can be inferred from Simpson’s statement is that by “healthier” what she is really talking about is limiting her weight gain. This illustrates the success in the internalization of these norms and
surveillance techniques forced upon famous mothers. Another example of this is the
disgust Kim Kardashian felt towards her body throughout her pregnancy. Kardashian
reportedly could not “cope with her dramatic weight gain” and felt that her “butt was
huge and that she looked gross” (Campbell 2013:26). Another article details how
Kardashian was crying to her sisters about how her “butt looks like a big hunk of cheese”
and how the stretch marks are ruining her money making body (Plant et al. 2013:38).
These examples illustrate the emotional distress these women experienced because their
bodies did not conform to the ideal, pregnant template. In attempts to discipline her
‘excessive’ body and avoid her worst fear of “turning out like Jessica Simpson”,
Kardashian enlisted the help of trainers and nutritionists (Campbell 2013:29). However,
efforts to realign her body with the maternal ideal were problematized in articles warning
that excessive exercise and dieting can endanger both mother and fetus (Campbell
2013:26; Plant et al. 2013:38). The bodies and behaviours of celebrity mothers are now
controlled to extreme measures – they are not allowed to gain too much weight, but if
they do, they can exercise but not too much. Likewise, dieting while pregnant is a bad
decision but eating whatever you want is forbidden as well. It would seem that whatever
pregnant celebrities do to impact their weight, they are open to public scrutiny.

Beyond the self-monitoring that celebrities engage in, the external surveillance
that gravid stars experience also greatly constrains their behaviour and sets a precedent
for other women about aesthetic expectations during pregnancy. An article in Life &
Style details how The View star Joy Behar called a pregnant Jessica Simpson “fat”
(2013:29). According to the same article Dr. Tara Solomon deemed Simpson an
“absolute porker” and that “no one should ever look like Jessica” (ibid.). Around the
time the criticisms were released, Simpson had appeared pregnant and nude on the cover of *Elle* magazine. In retaliation to the disparaging remarks about her weight she stated that the *Elle* cover would be the last chance for people to see her ‘fat’ (*Life & Style* 2013:29). Simpson’s response is revealing about her recognition that her body is beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ pregnancy weight and that she must take steps to discipline her disordered figure as soon as possible. *US Weekly* chronicled attacks on Kim Kardashian’s weight from various sources including internet bloggers and members of the press (Frank and Grossbart 2013:54). “Getting picked apart is what to expect when you are expecting” according to the journalists who describe how Kardashian has attempted to look past the hurtful comments of her critics (ibid.). A story in *In Touch* (2012) features a series of celebrities who were surveilled and scrutinized for various reasons during their pregnancies. Stars like Jenifer Lopez, Kate Hudson and Alyson Hannigan all reported having been told from the press, family and strangers that they were ‘too big’ as expectant mothers (ibid:46-49). Similarly, many celebrities face stigmatization for not gaining enough weight while pregnant. The same *In Touch* article describes how Victoria Beckham, Rachel Zoe and Gisele Bündchen faced criticism for looking ‘too thin’ as expectant mothers, which illustrates how the bodies and behaviours of maternal celebrities are progressively constrained from both ends of the weight spectrum, making the template for an acceptable pregnant body increasingly specific and unattainable.

### 5.2 The Pregorexic Mother

Pregorexia is a new term that has gained popularity in the media over the past several years and as outlined in previous chapters, most commonly describes eating
disorders and disordered eating for new and expectant mothers (Sullivan 2010).

Although little evidence can be found to suggest that pregorexia is a growing concern for medical practitioners (Mathieu 2009:976), the development and appearance of this term in the media seems to indicate that mothers are becoming more concerned with their ability to achieve the ideal ‘pregnant beauty’ that does not allow for excessive weight gain. Celebrities who are deemed underweight while pregnant suffer stigmatization for their deviation from aesthetic standards as well as moral reprimands for potentially endangering the life of their fetus.

Many pregnant stars faced bullying from the media for being too thin during their gestation. In addition to the stars moms mentioned in the previous paragraph who were labelled ‘too thin’, Kate Middleton also found herself accused of being ‘pregorexic’. US Weekly detailed how Middleton was criticized on the internet by various experts, some making unfounded speculations that she was not pregnant at all (Frank and Grossbart 2013:57). Middleton’s slim, expectant body was sensationalized with headlines such as “New Fears for Kate: the world’s most famous mom-to-be has entered her second trimester dangerously underweight and coping with extreme stress. Could the royal baby be in danger?” (Burton and Faber 2013:34). This pregorexic propaganda was conjured in Star while the aforementioned US weekly article includes testimony from a “family insider” claiming that Kate is carrying exactly as her mother, Carole, did. “Carole didn’t show for a long time. She wore non-maternity clothes right up until the final weeks. So it was no surprise to the family when Kate stayed little” (Frank and Grossman 2013:57-58).
Kate Middleton’s alleged pregorexic form is an interesting example because on her body is indicative of the tension within society about the growing maternal form. The works of Susan Bordo (1993) have highlighted the use of the media to push feminine ideals of the thin aerobicized body to women. Kate Middleton’s pre-pregnancy body does adhere to these ideals yet her maternal state works in direct opposition to keeping with socially prescribed weight restrictions. The dilemma Kate Middleton finds herself in is a struggle many celebrity mothers face - she needs to gain weight to embody the healthy mother yet this weight gain serves to push her further away from the thin template of feminine beauty. Ironically, if media publications did not judge celebrities for their deviations form ideal weight prescriptions, perhaps expectant celebrities would not concern themselves with looking slim while pregnant and facilitate and happier and healthier maternal experience.

Pregorexic accusations do not limit themselves to pregnant celebrities as new star moms also face ridicule if they appear to have slimmed down too much after the birth of their child. The maternal body in this case is repeatedly associated with the idea of stress - more specifically, newly single mothers who seem to be struggling with the balancing of parenting, career and body work become targets of this type of speculation and critique. *In Touch* reports that marital stress is the cause of drastic weight loss for both Natalie Portman and Bethany Frankel (2012:43) (Figure 3). The women are portrayed as being unable to cope with their parental role by themselves and suffer from the emotional turmoil of their personal lives. The bodies of these women are illustrated as needing some sort of intervention (medical or otherwise) to regain control over their corporeal existence. Media persecution as exemplified in the Portman and Frankel article also
echoes the hysterization of women outlined by Foucault (1978). The female body is presented as disordered with feminine emotional instability the source of the corporeal disarray.

Similar scripts are used in the February issue of In Touch that detail how single moms, Selma Blair and Denise Richards have become “alarmingly skinny” while managing their careers and their children (2012:46-47). The same article targets Gwyneth Paltrow and January Jones insinuating that a lack of eating and excessive exercise are to blame for the mothers’ thin frames (ibid.). In Touch ran a similar article the following year that once again targeted Denise Richards as well as Heidi Klum, Kristin Cavallari, Angelina Jolie and Giuliana Rancic (2013:46-47). The story entitled, “Celeb Mom Body Shockers: Stressed and Scary Skinny” highlights Klum’s “bony” chest and Jolie’s “skeletal arms” as evidence of the alleged pregorexia (ibid.). Instead of emphasizing the stress of being a single mom as the source of women’s frail frames, this article cites the pressure of attempting to juggle work, family and personal life as the main weight loss catalyst. Although there may be some benefits to the fact that the very slender bodies of these women are no longer glorified in the media, the scrutiny these women face for their physique is unfair and counterproductive. Considering the article generally assumes that stress is the source of the women’s underweight bodies, this kind of negative press would understandably only add to the tension in the celebrity’s lives, potentially leading to further weight loss.
5.3 Maternity Fashion

The pressure that celebrities endure to look their best as mothers is not limited to how much they weigh. Contemporary maternity fashion has been taken to new extremes with once again, stars such as Jessica Simpson and Kim Kardashian setting new limits for just how stylish a woman can (and is now required) to be while expecting. Contemporary pregnancy clothing has evolved from the 1990s tight, belly embracing garments (Longhurst 2005) to designer label, couture clothing for moms-to-be. Maternity fashion is no longer designed to mask a baby bump or show off a belly in attempts to flaunt the gravid state – the aim of contemporary maternity wear is to flatter the mother and ensure she remains trendy and stylish throughout gestation. The emphasis appears to have shifted off the growing abdomen and the fetus and is now focused on crafting an identity for the new mother. New fashion lines for expectant mothers allow them to select clothing to make a statement about what kind of mother they want to be. This opportunity to consume a maternal identity is indicative of a libidinal economy at work within a neoliberal values that champion freedom, self-subjectification, individualization, and consumerism.

The stylish Jessica Simpson is one of many stars who spend large amounts of money on high-end pregnancy fashions. An article in In Touch details how the star “dropped $2,200 for her Roberto Cavalli dress” (2012: 26) (Figure 4). The story featured some of Simpson’s “crazy pregnancy fashion” with a subheading “Forget sneakers and sweatpants! The expectant Jess puts her best high-heeled foot forward all nine months” (ibid.). The story confirms that pregnancy no longer offers reprieve from beauty and style regimes. Gravid celebrities are now ‘free to’ don high-heels, wear designer
clothing and have full hair and make-up throughout their pregnancy. Advertisers and media outlets capitalize on the desire to be fashionable, channeling the libidinal energy of expectant stars towards a glamorous, pregnant ideal. Celebrities who purchase designer clothes and expensive beauty products within a libidinal economy do so because they desire to continue to embody culturally ascribed beauty standards that can only be achieved through participation in consumer culture.

Kim Kardashian, known for her glamorous and sexy style, is featured in several tabloids for her maternity fashion. Some articles report that she is finding it difficult to remain stylish within the confines of maternity fashion due to her growing form (Plant et al. 2013: 38) while others praise her “edgy pregnancy style” (Davis 2012: 25). Another story in *US Weekly* features a two-page spread on Kardashian’s pregnancy style (Anderson 2013: 40-41) (Figure 5). The magazine displays the star in eight different ensembles all with impeccable hair and make-up to articulate the ideal mom-to-be image. Sister Kourtney Kardashian is yet another example of a woman striving to remain stylish through her pregnancies. *Life & Style* feature the star almost taking a tumble at the expense of her “sky-high Christian Louboutins” (2012: 29). Although the idea of women sacrificing comfort for fashion is nothing new, celebrity mothers may be sacrificing their safety in order to satisfy a “desire” to be pregnant and beautiful. This supports the idea that contemporary maternity style is designed to enable the mother to express her ‘chosen’ maternal identity – or at least the maternal identity that is for sale at retail outlets.

Failure to conform to new standards of pregnant beauty results in critique from both media outlets and the public. Uma Thurmon was heavily criticized for her failure to
conform to the expectant mother ideal. An image of her in *In Touch* incited other mothers to comment on internet message boards (2012: 47) (Figure 6). The article detailed how one woman commented, “Do something with your hair, put a bit of makeup on and wear a bra!”(ibid.). Although Thurmon was not making a television appearance or attending a public function, the expectation was that she always appear perfectly groomed and styled. The criticism evoked by her ‘unfashionable’ image exemplifies how pregnant beauty norms are being internalized by the public and the key role surveillance plays in enforcing these aesthetic standards.

5.4 Getting Your Body Back

Congruent with the prodigal body described by Hilary Cunningham (2002), the celebrity depiction of the post-partum figure is presented as an object of disgust and abjection. Testimonials from several celebrities including Nicole ‘Snooki’ Polizzi, Jessica Simpson, Jennifer Garner, Molly Sims, and Kate Hudson contend that the women feel disconnected to the body that carried their baby for nine months. Jessica Simpson reports that she was so shocked by her post-pregnancy figure, she just looked in the mirror and thought, “Oh my God, what happened to my body? This is not me” (*In Touch* 2012:31). Kate Hudson and Molly Sims express similar discontent with their post-baby forms with Sims stating, “You have a body that looks nothing like your former self” (*In Touch* 2012: 27-29). The most disgust expressed about their postnatal body was reported by Jessica ‘Snooki’ Polizzi in an article entitled, “OMG My Post-Baby Body’s Gross!” (*In Touch* 2012:50-53) (Figure 7). When asked if she was being hard on herself as her son was only two months old, Snooki replied, “I really don’t like how I look. When you
have a baby you get stretch marks, and it’s all loose skin.” (ibid.). The Jersey shore star continued by adding, “My boobs are leaking! They look huge – I hate it!” (ibid.).

Pressure to lose the weight and regain their former bodies is heightened for celebrities who often rely on their money making figures to further their careers. Jessica Simpson, in particular, is depicted as being “stressed and overwhelmed” as the daunting deadline for her public body reveal grew closer (In Touch 2012:31). Simpson pre-planned her post-baby slim down as the star signed a 4 million dollar contract with Weight Watchers while still pregnant with her first child (ibid.). Kim Kardashian is also rumored to have shopped for a multi-million dollar deal with a weight loss mogul in attempts to rediscover her former figure after she gives birth (Plant et al. 2013:38). The trend toward gaining corporate sponsorship to slim down can be interpreted as stars making the most of the current demands of new motherhood. As is evident in the tabloids under review, new celebrity mothers will be surveilled and critiqued based on their ability to lose their baby weight and being paid to slim down allows women to capitalize on the situation their career and media visibility places them in. Weight loss moguls such as Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers use neo-liberal discourse to communicate to women that they have to power to liberate their bodies from unwanted fat and improve their lives. Although initially this may seem empowering for new mothers, by having stars like Simpson and Kardashian represent these diet empires it only further reinforce homogenous and unrealistic standards for the postpartum body. This is especially salient in the case of the aforementioned celebrities due to their public weight struggles throughout their pregnancies. Simpson and Kardashian, like many women, appear to have gained more than the recommended weight allotment for gravid women

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and if these new moms felt the need to employ diet regimes and programs to take off their weight as fast as possible instead of slowly shedding pounds by focusing on a healthy lifestyle for then it only further confirms that an overweight mother is a contentious figure within Western society.

Many stars also report during pregnancy that they have already planned to get plastic surgery in order get back the body they once had. Snooki is allegedly planning to get a boob job in her desperate attempts to regain her previous shape (In Touch 2012:47). She shared her body anxiety with In Touch stating, “Everything needs to go back to where it was” (ibid.).

Kim Kardashian is another star who is rumoured to go under the knife after she gives birth. According to an article in Star, she plans to “get everything lifted” in order to reclaim her money making body (Plant et al. 2013: 38). Other stars are mindful to continue to engage in regular exercise and not give in to too many of their cravings to limit weight gain and thus, the amount of work they will have to do to “re-claim” their bodies. Super model, Gisele Bündchen, was very careful with her diet throughout her pregnancy which facilitated her speedy body reclamation process according to an article in In Touch (2013: 46). “People get pregnant and turn into garbage disposals. I was mindful about what I ate” (ibid.). Jessica Simpson (In Touch 2013: 17) and Jennifer Garner (Life & Style 2012: 29) both made attempts to limit their weight gain during pregnancy so they could get back in shape faster. Garner disclosed, “It’s a bummer to gain that much weight and then have to lose it” (Life & Style 2012: 29).

The intense push for women to get back into shape as quickly as possible is becoming more and more apparent. An article in In Touch entitled, “Body After Baby:
Some Stars Rush it …and Some Relax!” ranked and ordered celebrities with regards to how fast there were able to get back into shape after giving birth (2013:46-47) (Figure 8). The reclaimed bodies are celebrated and those who are still struggling to achieve their pre-baby figures are presented in a much different way than those who have achieved their ultimate goal. Where once celebrities who were able to be runway ready in such a short time were seen as anomalies, shaping up in two to three months or less has become a new standard, with women competing to see who can shed the weight the fastest.

Reality television star, Rosie Pope, vowed to take her pregnancy weight off in twelve short weeks (Life & Style 2012: 28-29). Pope managed to shed her weight in just over half the time reporting a thirty pound weight loss in just seven weeks (ibid.). Claire Danes and Gisele Bündchen also both lost their pregnancy weight in two months or less (In Touch 2013:46).

Frequently included with articles featuring speedy post-baby weight loss are tips stars used to shed their weight. Weight loss guidelines are included in these articles so that ‘normal’ women can mirror celebrity results and shed their unwanted baby weight fast. Detailed meal plans and workout routines are presented as evidence of the disciplinary tactics that women are expected to engage in to reorder their non-conforming bodies. Several articles featuring Jessica Simpson also include her diet and exercise routines (Life & Style 2012: 24-25; Life & Style 2012: 30-31; In Touch 2012: 32-33) (Figure 9). Some stars take corporeal discipline to extreme lengths with celebrities like Snooki reporting a very restrictive low-carb diet and exercise program. Her rapid weight loss after the birth of her son has resulted in speculation about a potential eating disorder in light of her previous challenges with anorexia (Faber 2012:1). In an article discussing
her post-baby body, Snooki admitted, “All I eat is chicken and broccoli, spinach and salad. I haven’t eaten yet today [it’s 4 p.m.], I’m starving!” (In Touch 2012: 50). The trend to slim down as quickly as possible has many negative health consequences for women, especially mothers who are choosing to breastfeeding. Canadian health guidelines recommend taking in an extra five hundred calories for nursing mothers (HealthlinkBC 2013). Celebrities who resort to extreme reductions in their daily food intake can be detrimental as neither mother nor child can receive the nutrients they require.

Not all celebrities conform to the new time constraints on post-baby weight loss. Some starts including Drew Barrymore, Reese Witherspoon, Bryce Dallas Howard, Hilary Duff and Kourtney Kardashian opted to take off their baby weight at a more moderate pace. Extending the body reclamation journey appears to be accepted in tabloid publications as long as mothers display a desire to regain their former figures and that they do ultimately achieve this goal. Hilary Duff who championed slow postnatal weight loss in several magazines states that she is “obviously not where she wants to be” but that she is working hard (Life & Style 2012: 28). Barreymore, Witherspoon, and Kourtney Kardashian all claim to focus on leading healthy lifestyles and spending time with their children instead of subjecting themselves to grueling post-baby regimes (In Touch 2012: 48-49). The article entitled, “Losing the Baby Weight: We’re in No Rush!” includes picture of all three women while pregnant and a second photo of them after giving birth, tracing their steps toward reclaiming their former bodies.

There is a great amount of tension between a mother feeling responsible to care for her child and her duty to shape up. Drew Barrymore is almost villainized in an article
for choosing to spend time with her three month old baby instead of going to the gym.
“Not only has she not lost a pound, she’s gaining weight! She refuses to exercise, stating she would rather spend time with the baby. She lives on Mexican food, cheeseburgers, and pasta” (Star 2013: 26). Barrymore is initially depicted as resisting to conform to the demand to regain her former body, stating that she places a higher premium on spending time with her daughter than working out (ibid.; In Touch 2012:49). However, a subsequent story detailed how both she and Reese Witherspoon were “battling their baby weight together” by heading to a fitness weekend getaway (In Touch 2013:44-45).
Jessica Simpson also reports not wanting to leave her baby with reports of her being reduced to tears when she goes to the gym as part of her body reclamation efforts. The moral implications are evident in both of these examples – a good mother should care for her child, assuming the traditional role of primary caregiver. However, a mother’s failure to regain her pre-pregnancy form also results in negative moral repercussions. If a woman cannot even manage and discipline her own body then how can she be expected to raise responsible and healthy children? This sentiment is best reflected in a quote from reality television star Rosie Pope “Looking good makes me feel better and that makes me a better mom” (Life &Style 2012: 28-29).

Many stars also report the desiring to lose weight and work out in order to set good examples for their children. Jessica Simpson reportedly is attempting to eat better and workout to display healthy lifestyle habits to her daughter. Health conscious practices such as those displayed by Simpson are indicative of neoliberal biopolitics that foster increased personal responsibility for individual wellbeing as well as the conflation between health, beauty and happiness with general conceptions of ‘good’ health (Rose
Individual health maintenance is especially salient for mothers who are charged with ensuring their welfare as well as their offspring wellbeing (Foucault 1978: 121).

### 5.5 Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this analysis indicate that the ideal, maternal form is shifting and that the requirement for new and expectant celebrity mothers is indicative of other forces within Western societies. The way the body of the celebrity ‘yummy mummy’ is socially constructed aligns with neo-liberal values that promote freedom, liberation, and a personal responsibility for individual wellbeing. Consumption has become one of the main ways individuals articulate their identity and personal style within Western cultures (Tyler 2011) which is a by-product of Western societies that use a libidinal economy to promote a capitalist culture. The combination of the neo-liberal state and a libidinal economy results in market places where celebrity mothers are expected to consume in order to express that they are ideal, new parents. Advertisers and marketers prey on the desire and insecurities of women, often using celebrity mothers as model examples of the ‘benefits’ of desire based consumption. Congruent with this discourse, the new celebrity mother must remain beautiful throughout her pregnancy and regain her former body in order to express that she has achieved maternal success that she has been cultivated to desire. As previously noted in the works of Nicholas Rose (2011), beauty and sex have become conflated with idea of overall wellbeing within new-liberal societies, thus, a perfectly groomed mom-to-be is a model manifestation of these ideals. Gravid stars who adorn extravagant, pregnancy fashions and purchase beauty products communicate that they are maximizing their freedom to remain sexy and stylish as an expectant mother.
Celebrities who are able to maintain these high standards of aesthetic appearance throughout their pregnancy are depicted positively and this is especially apparent when the ‘success stories’ are present in contrast with mothers who do not appear to measure up.

The use of comparison between two stars or the before and after picture of a specific celebrity is a contemporary version of Foucault’s (1977) disciplinary tactics used to regulate docile bodies. The push to conform to new standards of maternal beauty is further reinforced through the surveillance and critique of celebrity mothers in magazines. Tabloids often reference additional surveillance tactics such as Internet blogs and social media sites that function to further regulate the non-conforming bodies of star mothers as well as praise those who achieve the desired norms. The permanent state of visibility experienced by celebrities results in the internalization of the physical appearance norms for famous moms. Star mothers self-monitor their bodies and behaviours throughout motherhood from concern over pregnancy weight gain (not too much or too little), the drive to remain a stylish mom-to-be, and the push to shape up after giving birth. When norms appear to have been violated, shame and discontent is expressed in the media by famous mothers until they are able to realign their bodies to social standards.

So what does this mean for the average woman? The abundance of slim, celebrity moms who are featured in the media create the illusion that all women should and are capable of re-sculpting their bodies to conform to acceptable aesthetic criteria. Though women may be cognisant of the fact that these celebrities have trainers, chefs, and supplementary caretakers for their children, a luxury afforded to few new mothers,
feminist researchers have highlighted how many women are highly critical of their physical bodies. These critiques often include self-blaming and internalizing perceived figure failures while failing to critique the social norms that prescribe such unrealistic stands of fitness and appearance (Bartky and Duncan as cited in Dworkin and Watch 2004: 612). Considering this, it is evident how discourse that mandates celebrity mothers to emulate an ideal, maternal image is extremely problematic for all women. Perhaps a critical examination of the new standards for the ideal, maternal body would enable mothers to question the new corporal standards that are trickling down from celebrity to the average woman. By acknowledging how unrealistic the ‘perfect’ maternal body is, perhaps a dialogue can be opened that helps foster a diversification of the ideal, maternal form beyond the celebrity ‘yummy mummy’ that appear in tabloid magazines.

This analysis combines theories of feminism, consumerism (libidinal economy), bio-power and surveillance. It was revealed how desire-based consumption practices work in conjunction with bio-power and bio-politics as gravid women are expected to participate in consumerism to benefit the capitalist economy in which they live. Likewise, governing bodies such as federal or state governments or medical boards, have an increased number of ways to distribute, communicate and enforce desired behaviours for new mothers. Beyond the print publications examined in this analysis, governing bodies have other forms of media such as television and the Internet as well as public policy and medical regulations as means to shape the maternal experience for women. The use of feminist literature fits into this analysis as the findings indicate that women are still expected to depict a specific kind of aesthetic ideal in order to be considered traditionally beautiful and appealing to a male audience. The sexualization of the
maternal state and the way mothers are now free to flaunt their bellies is viewed by some as a liberating experience in that women are able to take control of their bodies and their sexuality at any time in their lives. However, the increasingly specific and sexualized template that is used to depict ideal motherhood leaves many women to regard their bodies as unable to fulfill this ideal. Thus, women purchase products and services to fulfill the maternal ideal, the yummy mummy, and this furthers the neo-capitalist economy of maternity. Possible considerations for further research in this area may include examining the intersections of race, culture, age, income, occupation as well as education. A closer analysis of public policy and regulations relating to parenting including maternity leave and childcare may also offer new insight into how the maternal experience is shaped through various bio-political measures.
Figure 1 Kate’s Post-Baby Weight Loss Regime

Figure 3 Body Shockers

Figure 7 “OMG My Post-Baby Body’s Gross!”

References


“These Moms are Scary Skinny”. 2013. In Touch, February 25, pp46-47.


