

**Yummy Mummy? : (Re) Appearance of the
maternal body in popular women's magazines in
New Zealand**

By

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ABSTRACT

Images and detailed descriptions of the postnatal maternal body have become more common in popular women's magazines than they have in the past. Although researchers generally accept that popular media's representations of the female body contribute to body image concerns among some women, there has been little research that has focused on the recent media constructions of the maternal body or the effects of this increased visibility. This is an important area of research as there are indications that media representations of the postnatal body, in particular body size, are beginning to have negative affects on women's wellbeing in pregnancy and after childbirth. This thesis examines how women's bodies are being represented in popular culture when they become mothers, and what discourses these representations make available to new mothers. The research involved analysing references to the maternal body found in a convenience sample of popular NZ women's magazines. The research, framed within feminist post-structuralist theories, used thematic analysis and discursive analytic tools to explore textual and visual representations of the maternal body found in the magazines. Three major constructions of mothers emerged from the analysis; these were 'sexy', 'healthy' and 'labouring' mothers. Women who, through 'body work' such as diet and exercise, had lost weight and dressed glamorously were depicted as sexy, healthy and praised for their efforts. Mothers who regained a slender, glamorous appearance were often referred to as 'yummy mummies'. Women who lost 'too much weight' were considered to be ill and were individually pathologised as having psychological problems. Mothers were encouraged to diet and exercise as soon as possible after childbirth, with scant reference to possible health concerns for mother or baby, and were targeted by the diet industry. Postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of empowerment, choice and self-care were used to promote and justify these images of mothers. Findings suggest appearance of new mothers was emphasised wherein the 'undisciplined' normal maternal body was denigrated as dull, unattractive and unworthy. Analysis indicated that a new cultural imperative for women to return to slenderness as soon as possible is being evoked. Given the new media pressures being imposed there is a clear need for research with new mothers themselves. Such research will illuminate a period in women's lives that had previously slipped below the radar of culturally prescribed strict beauty standards, but is now under the glare of the media spotlight.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This may be news to the gossip mags, but there is such a thing as too many baby stories. One of this week's mags is so full it should probably come with a free nappy

(Shultz, 2007, July 12. What the Kiwi Goss Mags Say. The Dominion Post, D1)

Hardly a week goes by when a celebrity mother is not featured on the cover of a woman's magazine available in any New Zealand supermarket, dairy, petrol station or bookstore. While celebrity babies have become de rigueur, so too have images of the maternal body, particularly the celebrity mother's body. The cover of a recent Who magazine, for example, is headed "10 most talked-about new bodies. Who looks great, who's gone too far" and features photographs of Eva Longoria who is labelled "is she pregnant", Ashlee Simpson labelled "hot baby body" and Catherine Zeta-Jones (post babies) labelled as "slimmer than ever" (Who, 23 June, 2008). Such heightened interest in and visibility of the postnatal body mark a distinct cultural shift in the representation of mothers in the media. What meanings does this new visibility of the pregnant and postnatal body in women's magazines make available and what are its implications for the subjectivities of new mothers and mother-to-be? These are the broad research questions that underpin the thesis. By way of context, this chapter traces the cultural shift in the representations of mothers and identifies the associated phenomenon of the "yummy mummy" in women's magazines. It also considers the small literature that points to ways in which the idealised "hot" post baby body may map onto embodied subjectivities of women themselves.

Making the maternal body visible: Celebrity mothers

The visibility of the maternal body in the media has changed considerably over the last 60 years. Until comedian Lucille Ball in the 1950's, celebrities who became pregnant were routinely removed from the public screen and public view (Von Schilling, 2003). Lucille Ball starred with her husband in a top rated television show, however when she became pregnant she was told she would no longer be able to appear in the show. Lucille

and her husband fought and won a hard battle with the producers to be allowed to continue to act in the show throughout her pregnancy which was eventually written into the script. As a concession to public morals the word 'pregnancy' was never used as it was considered more polite to use the word 'expecting' and the script was vetted by religious clerics to insure it did not create offence (Von Schilling).

Hollywood stars have continued to break the mould in relation to the public visibility of motherhood (Stacey, 2007). For example Demi Moore is credited with extending the public visibility and redefining public perceptions of the pregnant maternal body in a more explicit manner. In 1991 she appeared nude on the cover of the *Vanity Fair* magazine while seven months pregnant. It has been argued that this single magazine cover publicly challenged the notion of what are appropriate images of pregnant women in the media (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Tyler, 2007). Her appearance on the cover is purported to have prompted a change from seeing the pregnant body as 'frumpy' and asexual to representing it as glamorous and 'sexy'. Although the cover caused controversy at the time, since this 1991 photograph a number of other pregnant celebrities e.g. Eva Herzigova, Britney Spears and Heidi Klum have posed in glamorous nude or nearly nude photographs for magazine covers (see Appendix 1).

Douglas and Michaels (2004) and Coward (1997) have also noted a slightly earlier shift beginning in the late 1980's and 1990's towards celebrity mothers being portrayed as 'sexy' both in American magazines and in British pop culture. Coward (1997) refers to this as being "Hello!ed" (in reference to Hello magazine), and suggests that in the popular media motherhood was reduced to "photo opportunities of glamorous and successful mothers" who spoke of the joys of motherhood and their perfect children (p. 117). She likens "this version" of motherhood as "having small human accessories while staying unchanged" (p. 117). Coward (1997) also refers to celebrity mothers such as Demi Moore and Paula Yates as demonstrating their "active sexuality" in the public eye while often at the same time referring to their children and their roles as mothers (p.117).

Douglas and Michaels (2004) have written further about the connection between the increasing visibility of glamorous celebrity mothers and the 'mommy myth', i.e. an idealization of motherhood which includes the notion that motherhood is natural and therefore an effortless and rewarding role for women to perform – a standard that most mothers fail to achieve. They argued the increased visibility of the celebrity mother in the media and particular magazines, a phenomenon they have called the "attack of the celebrity moms", gave rise in the 1990s to the appearance of the "celebrity supermom" in

American magazines (p. 115) . The “supermoms” are portrayed as “serene, supremely contented woman who found motherhood the most ecstatic experience of her entire life” (p. 115). Douglas and Michaels (2004) state that all negativity was banished in the profile of this new breed of “celebrity mom” (p.116) which they contend effectively disguised the challenging reality of motherhood and perpetuated the “mommy myth”. Douglas and Michaels (2004), report that the “supermom” phenomenon has continued to be a dominant fixture in American women’s magazines.

However with the rise in tabloid style journalism seen in women’s magazine in more recent years (Kirkman, 2004) and the growth in the ‘paparazzi’ and celebrity gossip magazines, such as ‘New Weekly NW’ or ‘Who’, in New Zealand, there is a shift away from portraying celebrities as perfect. Candid representations of stars which reveal flaws such as clothing malfunctions, spots, cellulite and bad plastic surgery have become top sellers alongside traditional glamour in magazines (Holmes, 2005). Gill (2007) notes there is

“an increasing focus upon celebrity – seen in both the launch of new magazines and the transformation of existing magazines to reflect/contribute to a culture ever more fascinated and preoccupied with the lifestyles, diets, body care regimes, marriages and sex lives of Hollywood stars” (p.184).

There are indications that the ‘celebrity’ maternal body is becoming a lucrative target for the gossip magazines as well. For example a recent cover from New Weekly NW (14 June 2008) , features candid pictures of celebrities Melissa Joan Hart, Tori Spelling and Jennifer Lopez – pregnant and four weeks to four months after having their babies. This fascination and expose style journalism around women’s bodies before and after childbirth, may indicate a newer perhaps more realistic or perhaps more sensationalised construction of the maternal body than has been seen in the media before.

Celebrity culture not just sells magazines but it has also become a lucrative marketing tool for many products (Pringle & Binet, 2005; Thomson, 2006; Till, Stanley, & Priluck, 2008). In this way the power of celebrities is transferred from the media into commodities. O’Donohoe (2006), writing about the growth in the use of the ‘yummy mummy’ in advertising to mothers, points out that as celebrity mother’s “trade on their dramatic displays of postnatal weight loss, role models for stylish motherhood abound”(p. 2). In turn she argues this message is picked up by the “young mother steeped in visual culture and seeking to escape the old ‘frump’ stereotype of motherhood” which is achieved by “literally buying into the mode of motherhood depicted and embodied by celebrities (p.

2). O'Donohoe (2006), describes these images as part of the modern 'yummy mummy' culture, a phenomenon which is explored in the following section.

Sexualising the postnatal body: Yummy Mummy

The phrase 'yummy mummy' has become a popular way of describing how motherhood is to be performed in the 21st century. Although the origins of the term are not known, it is reminiscent of what Lupton (1996) describes as "infantile food endearments" used in both maternal discourses, where a mother addresses her child, and also masculine discourses where it is used to show "sexual familiarity" e.g. "sweetheart", "honey bunch" or "sugar" (p. 46). The phrase is memorable because of its playful use of assonance and rhyme and without a clear origin its meaning is open to interpretation. For example the word "yummy" connotes 'tasty' a widely used descriptor for a sexually attractive person, usually a woman. 'Mummy' suggests an English origin to the phrase, with perhaps the Americanised equivalent being the popular 'hot mama' or 'hot momma' used to describe attractive women, and increasingly used to refer to mothers.

Despite its unknown origins the term 'yummy mummy' is used regularly in both the media and the general community where it appears to have similar but slightly differing meanings. The shorter Oxford English dictionary has included the term in its 6th edition published in 2007 where it is defined as "a young, stylish, and attractive mother" (Christie, n.d.). The populist online "Urban Dictionary" contains the following definition:

A young, sexually attractive mother. There is an important age distinction between a yummy mummy and a MILF. Yummy mummys are younger than 30, while MILFs are older than 30. (skidmarkymark, n.d.)

This was rated as the most well-liked definition by online voters and shows a sexualisation of the term within contemporary use. This definition also brings in the concept of age, MILF, meaning "mother I'd like to f**k", a phrase which more overtly emphasises a sexualised interpretation.

O'Donohoe (2006) defines 'yummy mummies' as "attractive, well groomed, and well-dressed mothers". She also cites Liz Fraser's (2006) definition of yummy mummy from her book "The Yummy Mummy's Survival Guide", a book on how to obtain and maintain this image of motherhood. Fraser describes the 'yummy mummy' as "a mother of any age, who does not identify with the traditional dowdy image of motherhood" (2006, as cited in O'Donohoe, 2006. p.1). All these definitions are appearance based suggesting

this is a defining feature and therefore a vital component of this new construction of motherhood. Fraser's (2006) description also refers to the modernity of the construction and her description of a traditional mother as 'dowdy' or dull and drab, perhaps reinforces this newer image as a more glamorous portrayal of mothers where we are more in awe of appearance than nurturing ability (as cited in O'Donohoe, 2006. p.1).

British Television Channel 4 under the banner of "10 Years Younger", provides an online "Yummy Mummy handbook" which presents some general tips on how to achieve the 'look' (Brown, n.d.). The tone seems somewhat tongue in cheek but does refer to a general understanding that appearance is important i.e. "how you look is what it's all about", and that the aim of the 'yummy mummy' is to make "pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood look like a breeze" (p. 2). Interestingly it also echoes the commonly held rhetoric that "there are no excuses for letting yourself go", a mantra that has been noted to underpin a more general construction of femininity (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003; Chapkis, 1986) and is now readily applied to motherhood.

The term 'yummy mummy' has successfully been used, and perhaps most famously, to promote the British children's cancer charity, CLIC Sargent. The charity, with its sponsors Avent, hold an annual fundraiser named the "Yummy Mummy Campaign", which encourages mothers to get together and have some family fun while raising money for the charity. The fundraiser has also come to stand as a 'celebration of motherhood' and as part of this the charity holds a "Yummy Mummy Competition" where celebrity mothers are nominated and a nationwide poll is held to determine the number one 'yummy mummy' with its results reported across the world. It is interesting to note a shift in the definition of this term within reports of the competition. For example in 2005 Kate Winslett won the competition. An Avent spokesperson described her as being "Britain's top yummy mummy because, while she is beautiful, she has a down-to-earth attitude and isn't bothered about the usual trappings of celebrity" suggesting a more traditional, less overtly sexualised representation of motherhood; contradictorily Kate was hailed in newspaper reports as "Britain's sexiest mother" (e.g. see Yummy mummy, 2005). Victoria Beckham was voted the winner of the competition in 2006. Newspaper reports state that she "won praise for looking perfectly groomed at all times despite being mother to Brooklyn, seven, Romeo, four, and 18-month-old Cruz" (Victoria voted number one, 2006). The Avent spokesperson this time is quoted as stating:

When we asked people to define the term ‘yummy mummy’ they came up with someone nurturing, hands on, often seen out with the kids – and sexy. Victoria is all of these and the ultimate high maintenance mummy. (Victoria voted number one)

These definitions and constructions of the term imply a notion of modern feminine perfection, in that the woman is feted for being a nurturing mother, twinned with a “perfectly groomed appearance” as well as being ‘sexy’.

The term ‘yummy mummy’ and the newer construction of motherhood it implies, has attracted both criticism and praise. For example journalist and mother India Knight (2007) writes in the ‘Timesonline’ that there are few real ‘yummy mummies’ in the world and:

Everything else is aspiration, self delusion and pretence – the stuff women use to make themselves feel better, not realising that it’s making them feel worse because it adds another strand of unnecessary competitiveness to the boringly complicated business of being female. (p. 1).

While this argument is not uncommon, mothers also express other views. Many express approval of and defend the notion of the sexy mother, for example Kristen Maschka of the American non-profit organisation ‘Mothers & More’ argues: “we have created this world where if you pay attention to yourself and you’re sexy, you can’t be a good mom” (as cited in O’Donohoe, 2006, p. 6). Lisa Ebbing, designer for the lingerie company “Hot Milk”, which manufactures and sells lingerie to pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, responded in a similar manner to negative comments about the marketing images used in their catalogue in a newspaper article billed as “Yummy Mummies or Soft Porn?” (MacIntyre, 2007). Ebbing, described in the article as a “staunch breastfeeding mother”, stated:

Our designs say to women ‘You can still be beautiful and sexy’. They can still be fun and cheeky and our product empowers them to feel better when there is a lot of change in their lives (p. A5).

The Yummy Mummy Industry

The feminist scholar Angela McRobbie (2006) has suggested that celebrity motherhood and the concept of the ‘yummy mummy’ have contributed to an extension of consumer culture into the realm of maternity. She proposes that “successful maternity now requires that mother and baby afford high maintenance pampering techniques as well as a designer wardrobe” (p.1). Recent reports within marketing culture also suggest pregnant women and new mothers have become a profitable target for business. ‘Marketing to Women’, an American based marketing newsletter, claims that the “marketers sights are set on moms... the buzz in marketing circles is reaching fever pitch”, (Trends to Watch, 2006, p.1). They further

suggest that ‘self care’, for example diet and exercise, is an important growth area with respect to women, especially mothers, as “women continue to seek ways to de-stress and maintain their youthful vitality” (p. 6).

One indicator of the rise of marketing to mothers is the growing trend for mainstream diet companies and exercise companies to target both pregnant women and mothers. For example, the worldwide company ‘SureSlim’ offers both a Pregnancy Eating Plan “designed to control abnormal weight gain during pregnancy” and a Breastfeeding Eating Plan. While the international organisation ‘Weight Watchers’ does not provide an ‘eating plan’ for pregnant women, it does advocate weight loss for some women prior to pregnancy in order to avoid unhealthy weight gains and possible negative outcomes for mother and baby. Weight Watchers also promotes a ‘Breastfeeding’ diet. Both companies advertise regularly in New Zealand popular women’s magazines.

Exercise for the maternal body has also been targeted as a lucrative market, trading perhaps on the ‘celebrity mother’ frenzy in the media. For example ‘Leisure Report’ a monthly newsletter providing news and analysis for the UK and Europe’s leisure industry, has recommended targeting pregnant women and new mothers with regard to membership in health and fitness clubs (Nicci, 2006). The opening paragraph refers to the current media focus on celebrity motherhood:

“In our celebrity-obsessed culture there is not a day that goes by without some skinny ingénue claiming that three weeks after giving birth she is back on the red carpet, in her skinny jeans and looking as glamorous as ever. This kind of media attention makes other women feel inferior....It has become cool to be a yummy mummy! It is not only desirable, but actually important that new mothers look good and get their bodies back after childbirth.” (p. 16)

While this is ‘marketing hype’ in one sense, written to encourage health and fitness club operators to target this group of women, it also reflects the pressure on new mothers to get back into shape in order to ‘look good’ and “glamorous” and “cool” and “yummy” as soon as possible. The report later provides a clear health rationale for promoting exercise to these women, particularly pregnant women, but the main emphasis in the article remains on the strong business case for pursuing this group.

In New Zealand there are one or two exercise companies exclusively concentrating on the ‘yummy mummy’ target market. For example ‘Preggi Bellies’, as the name suggests, is specifically for pregnant women but they also suggest it is a useful exercise routine to help tone up postpartum bodies. Another based in Auckland’s North Shore area is called “Yummy Mummies” and involves group lessons with a personal trainer. Les

Mills, a large New Zealand wide exercise company, does not hold specific classes for pregnant and postnatal women but on its web site it advises pregnant women that “Being fit will also help you lose your pregnancy weight post birth”, and promotes some personal trainers as specializing in pre and post natal exercise e.g. “I also provide pre & post-natal care & also c-section rehabilitation” and “Sarah is a health and fitness coach whose main focus is on weight loss, and ante- and post-natal exercise” (Les Mills, n.d.). There are also numerous yoga classes run specifically for pregnant women and new mothers, as well as pilates classes for pregnancy. ‘Buggy walks’ have also been regularly held around New Zealand and are organised by the government sport and recreation agency and local government. While these are billed as family events the emphasis is on mothers with ‘under fives’. Weight Watchers has been a sponsor of these events providing magazines, flyers, as well as nutritional products.

In this era of new technologies, there are also many items available through the internet. A ‘google’ search on losing ‘baby weight’ or ‘baby fat’, for example, reveals a long list of self help books, DVDs and websites on the topic of losing weight and firming up after childbirth. Additionally, numerous online chat rooms can be accessed in which mothers discuss the imperatives of losing weight, compare weight loss and offer advice and support to each other on how to ‘shape up’ after childbirth.

The more extreme method of reshaping the maternal body, plastic surgery, has also been increasingly seen to target the ‘mother market’ with, for example, postnatal ‘tummy tucks’, breast augmentation and liposuction. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons reports that in 2006, 365,000 women aged from 20-39 underwent what has been called the ‘mommy makeover’ (Shipman & Donnelly, 2007). So common is the procedure becoming in the USA that one plastic surgeon has written a book called “My Beautiful Mommy” to help prepare children for their mother undergoing this surgical makeover (Serjeant, 2008). Within New Zealand the ‘tummy tuck’ has also been marketed by a plastic surgeon in a Wellington newspaper as “love being a mummy but hate the tummy” (Love Being a Mummy, 2007); their information brochure includes a personal testimony (including before and after photographs) from a mother of four who writes “I feel complete again, like I’ve been given back something I reluctantly gave away having my 4 kids” (Plastic Surgical Masters, 2007).

The list of products aimed at the mother market is expanding. Apart from an increasing array of ‘how to’/self help books on how to stay glamorous and attractive throughout motherhood, O’Donohoe (2006) notes that car manufacturers have also

targeted the 'yummy mummy'. Fiat Auto UK in 2006 specifically launched the Sedici 4x4 at 'yummy mummies'. Fiat's UK marketing director states: "This marks the first time that Fiat has targeted this relatively new consumer segment." (Fiat in 'yummy mummy' mail push, 2006). UK pharmaceutical retailer Superdrug in the same year ran a campaign targeting "yummy mummies and young professional women as part of the new offensive against supermarkets and arch-rival Boots" (Superdrug fights back, 2006).

Perhaps the most notable change is in the clothing market. In 2002 the US journal 'Marketing to Women' (2002) observed that "celebrity moms have made pregnancy stylish" and the "loose silhouette" that was designed to "drape" the "belly to 'minimize' it" has been replaced by "one that hugs the contours" of the woman's body (Celebrity moms, 2002, p. 1). They report that fashion designers who specialise in maternity are quickly "becoming sought after" (p. 1). There are also reports of stars such as Elle McPherson and Gwyneth Paltrow using "a binding girdle...to help flatten (the) post-baby tummy" (Sheen, 2008), in order to look as slim as possible soon after childbirth.

The growing trend in maternity wear is also evident in New Zealand where there are a number of companies, such as the previously referenced "Hot Milk", or for example Mama2b and Mobeas, which design, manufacture and sell clothing that is 'transitional', meaning that it can be worn during pregnancy and after. The Dominion Post recently included a fashion feature to help pregnant and breast feeding women achieve "the celebrity look" cheaply (Enting, 2008, p. D2). They noted that current fashions for "voluminous maxis" etc allowed pregnant women more scope to dress well and like the celebrities without great expense but the article also included more casual maternity clothing such as EGG's new " 'miracle' jeans" which not only have a stretch waistband, but have been designed to "make your bottom look smaller"(p. D2). And in what they suggest may be a "world first" a "black organic cotton wrap to labour and give birth in" which suggests that now the woman can purchase clothing in order to look their best even when giving birth (p. D2).

Embodiment of yummy mummy: pregnancy

As the marketing of a yummy mummy escalates, the women who are deemed potential consumers must negotiate the ideal that is produced. Despite pregnancy being a time of considerable bodily change, representing the biggest change from the ideal slim feminine body shape that a woman will experience (Johnson, Burrows & Williamson,

2004), it is being produced in the media as requiring containment and control. Ussher (1989) contends that as women are continuously defined by their bodies and “their bodies are expected to buy them happiness” (p. 98), the changes which occur in a woman’s body during pregnancy can have a big effect on her personal identity and self image.

Traditionally, pregnancy has been described as a phase when women change from being ‘seducers’ to ‘producers’ or from ‘ornamental’ to ‘functional’ (Earle, 2003; Wiles, 1994). However recent qualitative research suggests this construction of pregnancy is changing, perhaps as a response to media representations of the pregnant body.

Researchers such as Longhurst (2000 & 2005), Johnson et al. (2004) and Earle (2003), have cited celebrity culture as having a strong influence on this. They, and the women interviewed in their studies refer to media images of pregnant celebrities women such as Demi Moore and Victoria Beckham as having brought pregnancy into public visibility and made it fashionable. Longhurst (2000) proposes that while in the past pregnant women were expected to be “demure and modest” now pregnant women are expected to be “confident, forward, sexy and public” (p. 467). But while this allows modern women to be ‘pregnant and fashionable’ and ‘pregnant and sexy’ (Longhurst, 2000) it also adds pressure on pregnant women to conform particularly to appearance norms. Earle (2003) comments that while this shift “asserts both the aesthetic beauty and sexuality of pregnant women, it also establishes a standard to which all women aspire” (p. 251).

All pregnancy researchers note that this is a time when there is heightened attention to the body from multiple sources. Research has found that many women experience their body as becoming public property and under increasing scrutiny by others such as partners, family, friends, medical professionals and complete strangers, due to their increase in size and their position as pregnant women, particularly in regard to foetal health (Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997; Ussher, 2006; Warren & Brewis 2004). Women’s reactions to this attention to their bodies have been found to vary. For example, researchers have found that public scrutiny or attention to their changing body was welcomed by some women as they view their pregnant bodies as purposeful and this view provided them with a stronger sense of being womanly (Bailey, 2001; Bondas & Erickson, 2001; Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997; Johnson et al. 2004; Young 1990). However other women were found to resent this intrusive gaze not wanting to be essentialised and viewed as a vessel or incubator and felt it rendered them asexual (Johnson et al. 2004; Ussher, 2006). Some specifically reported ‘others’ comments about their body shape which they interpreted as having negative

connotations. For example Johnson et al (2004) who conducted an interview based study of pregnant women write that some women spoke of disliking other people positioning them as 'fat' as it invited negative interpretations. In their discussion the authors reflect on the power of the discourse of feminine beauty even during pregnancy. They write "even though women inevitably become larger as pregnancy progresses, they can be positioned as being less attractive" (p. 368), and they note this reading of the maternal body can be a cause of distress.

In a number of studies researchers found that some women viewed their pregnant body as unpleasant and distasteful (Warren & Brewis, 2004; Longhurst 2005). For example, Bondas and Erickson (2001), in their study which involved interviewing 40 Finnish women about their experiences of pregnancy, reported that many women thought their "big belly made them look fat and ugly"; they quote a 22 year old participant who stated "I hated to be pregnant, ugh. I thought it was disgusting, and I still think so. I was so mad when someone told me I was big..." (p. 829). But in contrast, other women in this study and in others (e.g. Bailey, 2001; Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997; Johnson et al, 2004) saw pregnancy as a time to relax or 'time out' from the social pressures to be slim. However researchers have noted women were also frequently cautious about how far they let down their guard in relation to weight gain. For example some women referred to enjoying their larger belly or 'bump' but at the same time described themselves as lucky not to be big all over (Bailey, 2001; Earle, 2003).

Some studies have reported that women were pleased to be "showing" as then they would be seen as pregnant not fat (e.g. Earle, 2003; Johnson et al. 2004), a notion which absolved them of moralistic connotations of greed or lack of control. The size of women's breasts in pregnancy also provoked differing responses in studies, with many women feeling more womanly due to their breasts being larger and fuller while others expressed disgust seeing them as too big (Earle, 2003; Fairburn & Welch, 1990; Johnson et al. 2004). Earle (2003), in her qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with 19 pregnant women, noted that in both these constructions the women appeared less concerned with the functional nature of their breasts for breast feeding than for their appearance.

While weight increase and changes to body shape were found to be problematic for many pregnant women in the studies, many saw this as just a temporary phase and looked forward to 'returning to normal' after childbirth (e.g. Bondas & Erickson, 2001; Earle, 2003; Fairburn & Welch, 1990). Some women were reported to have formed plans about how they would achieve this, whilst others were reported as content to let 'nature' take its

course (Earle, 2003, Fairburn & Welch, 1990). Fairburn and Welch (1990), for example, found in their study of 50 first time mothers that in an interview taken three days after giving birth 68% of the sample spoke of future diet and exercise plans to help them return to their pre-pregnant shape. Earle (2003) suggests that this construction of the pregnant body as a temporary phase helps many women cope with the bodily changes which pregnancy brings.

One of the most notable features of interview based studies of pregnancy was the frequent mention of clothing. For example, Earle (2003) reported that all the women in her study talked about clothing, mainly in relation to wanting to look fashionable and attractive while pregnant and how they saw big clothing as unattractive. Earle contends that this stance reflects the continued commodification of women throughout pregnancy and the continued importance of physical appearance during this time. She argues that the growth in consumerism around pregnancy and motherhood in recent years as well as “a possible shift in public expectations of pregnant bodies” may in part account for this (p. 248). Both Bailey (2001) and Johnson et al. (2004) reported that some of the women in their studies complained that the pregnancy clothing available to them did not reflect their preferred style of dressing, describing it as ‘frumpy’ and they resented being forced to change their style of dress.

The number of references to clothing by women in these varied studies suggests that clothing is still very important to women during pregnancy and carries meaning beyond its obvious purpose. Longhurst (2005) addresses this topic specifically in an interview based study of 19 first-time pregnant women in New Zealand. She based her research on the notion that “fashion and clothing are cultural constructions of embodied subjectivities” (p. 434). Her findings suggest four different subjectivities that the women “tried on”, these were: “the thrifty, self sacrificing mother to be; the sexy, proud pregnant woman; the growing woman who fears her body will be read as fat; and the pregnant professional.” (p. 433). Longhurst found that while some women were too shy to wear tight clothing or were more comfortable in loose clothing; other’s were pleased to be able to wear something sexy and attractive. She suggests that the media, in particular magazines have contributed to this shift. For example she quotes one participant who stated “you are influenced by people in the media, like, I mean all those pop stars...wearing tight things when they’re pregnant, and its like, fashion basically” (p. 440).

Embodiment of yummy mummy: post birth

Attaining a yummy mummy identity post birth is at odds with the experiences many women report regarding how they feel about themselves and their bodies during this period. In a number of studies involving first time mothers, it has been found that many women are shocked by the reality of motherhood in stark contrast to serene, attractive and perfectly dressed portrayals in the media (e.g. Ex & Jansenns, 2000; Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997; Upton & Han, 2003; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Similarly, a recent 'popular' survey of 2000 mothers commissioned by the British 'Mother & Baby' magazine in 2007, indicated that many mothers have concerns about their bodies after childbirth and the report highlights the sociocultural influences involved (The Body after Birth Survey, 2005). Over three quarters of the mothers in this survey were "shocked" by the changes to their bodies and no more than 3% of the mothers were "happy with their body after birth". Around two thirds felt "less body confident" after giving birth with 62% describing themselves as feeling "inhibited about their body during sex". Two thirds of the mothers also reported they thought about their body shape every day, and most were not back to their pre-pregnancy size or shape 22 months after giving birth. The majority of mothers in the survey also cited celebrities who quickly regained their figures after childbirth as 'an impossible act to follow and it leaves them feeling depressed.'.

Research also highlights women's dissatisfaction with their post-birth bodies and the impact of such feelings on their self-esteem. For example, in Jenkin and Tiggemann's (1997) prospective Australian study with 92 women, using self report questionnaires about the women's weight and height and results, the answers the women gave to the open ended questions commonly alluded to bodily problems (other than weight), precipitated by motherhood. For example several women reported being distressed by physical changes such as loose and wrinkly skin and stretch marks. The authors noted that 15 women in this study had dieted since the birth (four weeks prior) and 17 were currently dieting. In their conclusion to the study Jenkin and Tiggemann (1997) argue "It seems unlikely that our current societal standards will allow women to feel proud of their pregnant and childbearing bodies".

Sociocultural influences were at the heart of Upton and Han's (2003) interview and observational study involving 60 employed women in urban Michigan who were pregnant or had recently given birth. The researchers were particularly interested in "the importance of control of the female body" in modern society (p. 671) and their study is rich in quotations around the postnatal body. The notion of 'body work' as the new labour of

mothers to achieve the right, “socially sanctioned body type” emerged strongly; this work was referred to by women as a “whole other job” or an “entirely new job” on top of childcare and work outside the home (pp. 678 & 683). The importance of body work was a pervasive theme in the research, particularly amongst those women who were returning to the workforce. Women identified social pressures to reinstate the slim beauty norms after childbirth such as celebrities who lost weight quickly after childbirth, and also magazines and diet companies which targeted mothers; women frequently referred to “Slim-fast” in particular. The authors note the company had recently launched an advertising campaign aimed directly at mothers “who can’t wait to get back into their pre-pregnancy clothes” and used the discourse that ‘self care’ enables you to take better care of your baby (p. 684). Indeed women in the study frequently referenced clothing; a mode of concealing post-birth bodies rather than displaying bodies as in pregnancy. Moreover, clothing signalled contrasting pre and post pregnancy embodied identities wherein pre-pregnant clothing signified the ‘old me’, (e.g., ‘Carolyn’: “you want to be able to say heck, I got down to that size, no problem, there’s something of the old me there!” (p. 686)).

Upton and Han (2003) suggest that ‘getting the body back’ after childbirth may have “more to do with becoming visible in a way that many postpartum women feel they are not” (p. 688). This suggests a reassertion of feminine beauty norms in order to become visible and therefore to be valued. The authors argue that the results from their study indicate that the “impetus to get the body back was a social one. The message that getting the body back was important is one that can be seen in popular culture, magazines advertising diet products for women, and even in medical literature.” (p. 687) Upton and Han conclude that the women’s strong desire for slender bodies and the social pressures on them to shape up again indicate that now there is no ‘let up’ in the demands to attain the perfect body.

The Current Study

Women’s magazines in modern society, as noted earlier in this chapter, give considerable press to celebrity mothers’ endeavours (or not) toward ‘getting the body back’ after birth. This thesis argues that women’s magazines provide a widely read resource for women about ways of being new mothers and may potentially be a source of pressure to achieve the slim beauty norm as soon as possible after birth. The research

described in the thesis aimed to investigate the ways in which women's magazines portrayed mother's appearance in pregnancy and post-birth and to explore the meanings such representations may make available to readers.

The thesis is underpinned and motivated by a number of health concerns for women that relate to feminist and academic reports of the increasing demands being placed on mothers to achieve a slender body shape; a standard of feminine beauty which is currently highly valued in our society. Of particular concern to feminist scholars is that the socially constructed "gendered aesthetic of slimness" (Burns & Gavey, 2004, p. 551) is being applied to women at a time of immense natural bodily change that positions them outside the culturally prescribed norms of femininity. While research suggests some women enjoy taking 'time out' from body discipline during pregnancy, other women report being uneasy or distressed about bodily changes of motherhood. The possibility of triggering eating disorders has also been raised for some new mothers (Baker, Carter, Cohen & Brownwell, 1999; Crow, Agras, Crosby, Halmi & Mitchell, 2008; Patel, Lee, Wheatcroft, Barnes & Stein, 2005; Stein & Fairburn, 1996) and links to Post Natal Depression (Beck, 2002; Crow et al., 2008; Stein & Fairburn, 1996; Walker, Timmerman, Kim & Sterling, 2002) for others. If, as research suggests, pregnancy and motherhood represent a vulnerable time for many women concerning their bodies, then research investigating media representations of the pregnant and postnatal body is particularly salient and important.

However, there is a scarcity of research about the emergent focus on postnatal bodies in the media. A recent large popular survey held in the UK suggests that women feel depressed by media images of celebrity mothers who are slim again soon after childbirth (The Body after Birth Survey, 2005). More recently, reports of a new phenomenon dubbed 'pregorexia' were made in the British press. 'Pregorexia' refers to women dieting and becoming over-thin in pregnancy in an effort to become slim quickly after childbirth. This phenomenon has also reported to be a small but growing issue in maternal mental health in New Zealand (The Press, 2008). The report claims that the images of the slim celebrity mothers seen in the media is distorting the women's perceptions of the maternal body and has led to a "real sense of competition to get back into pre-baby shape as soon as possible" (The Press, 2008). These suggestions of media as influencing the drive to slim down quickly after childbirth, with potentially negative health consequences, point to the pressing need for a critical examination of media representations. Popular women's magazines are known to contain many references and

features on celebrity mothers and provide a rich source of data. As well they are inexpensive, widely read, easily accessible for purchase and regularly available to non purchasers in waiting rooms and libraries. Accordingly the study in this thesis investigated a sample of women's magazines widely available in New Zealand.

The current study is based on a social constructionist view point which is premised on the understanding that our experience of the world is formed by the social, historical, cultural and linguistic milieu in which we live (Willig, 2001). This thesis builds on and extends feminist literature on media and women's bodies (Blood, 2005; Gill, 2007). It investigates and comments on how the fundamental feminine role of motherhood is being represented through the portrayal of women's bodies in the themes, discourses, meanings and images used in the media. It is hoped that this thesis offers valuable insights into how the popular media are portraying modern motherhood and contributes to the investigation of this as yet under-researched but important and challenging area of women's lives.

Organisation of this Thesis

The next chapter (Chapter Two) in this thesis introduces the methodological framework that underpinned this study and includes discussion of the analytical methodology used to explore the data set. The analytical findings from the data set form the basis of the next three chapters. These chapters are organised around the constructions that emerged from the data analyses, and comprise: Chapter Three 'sexy' mothers; Chapter Four 'healthy' mothers; and Chapter Five 'labouring' mothers. Each chapter will begin with reference to literature relevant to the constructions of the maternal body and motherhood, emphasising their social and historical contexts. The final chapter, Chapter Six, of this thesis draws together the various threads discussed in each analytical chapter. Chapter Six summarises and discusses the implications and limitations of the findings. The chapter also offers suggestions for future studies that can extend the current investigation into popular women's magazines representations of the maternal body.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Methodological Framework

This study addresses representations of the maternal body within popular magazine culture. The research is situated within a social constructionist/post structural framework which holds that knowledge is not independent and universal but is constituted through discourses and social practices. The choice of a discursive form of analysis allows exploration of the data set using both feminist and Foucauldian precepts which are well suited to an examination of both the textual and visual constructions of the maternal body found in the magazines. While this analytical approach was chosen for its emphasis on broader sociocultural contexts, some finer grained analyses included where they contribute to elaborating meanings.

This chapter presents the methodologies used, the rationale of selection and a description of the data collection and analytical processes. The first section backgrounds the central arguments of both post-structuralism and the discursive research methodology. This section also outlines the Foucauldian and feminist approach to analysis before then discussing in more detail the specific choice of analytical methodology for this project. The second section presents the methods used for data collection and describes the analytical process.

Post-structuralism & Social Constructionism

The post-structuralist paradigm grew out of a rejection of structuralism's essentialist approach which held that there was a universal truth underlying any object or way of being in the world, a truth that could be uncovered by rigorous application of scientific, positivist methods (Burman & Parker, 1993; Burr, 1995). It is strongly aligned with the social constructionist position which purports that the world and our experience of it is "mediated historically, culturally and linguistically" and that this experience "must be understood as a specific reading of these conditions" (Willig, 2001). Social constructionist theorists suggest that we "actively and purposefully construct and interpret our own realities from the meanings that are available to us" (Taylor & Ussher, 2001, p. 295). From this perspective the media, the subject of this research, are credited with being major

“contributors to the social construction of ideas about appearance, health, illness and sexuality” (Braun, 2005, p. 409), all topics found relevant to this study.

Both post-structuralism and social constructionism reject the positivist notion that there is a straightforward connection between the world and our understanding of it which can be discovered through quantitative research, and as such have favoured qualitative research methods. The post-structural position further holds that *all* understanding, knowledge, or reality is based on language rather than ‘fact’, a notion which argues against scientific claims to objectivity (Malson, 1998). Burman and Parker (1993) propose that it is in the linguistic interactions between individuals that such knowledge is created. Language, particularly language in action, is therefore central to post-structural theory.

Moreover post-structuralism argues that the meanings of language are never fixed, they are temporary and are therefore contestable and open to different interpretations (Braun, 2005; Burman & Parker, 1993). This stance allows for what has been described as “a plurality of ‘truths’” (Malson, 1998, p. 39). Post-structural media theorists contend that texts, as written language, also carry multiple meanings and while there can be ‘preferred’ meanings “invited by the text”, all can be challenged (Duncan, 1994, p. 52). Post-structuralism is then a useful framework for the current study as it permits texts to be analysed in close detail for both patterns of language use, known as discourses, and examination of the current construction/s of the maternal body. At the same time, this paradigm allows for multiple and alternative readings of these texts.

Discursive Approaches

The ‘turn to language’ and the criticism and distrust of the hegemonic nature of positivism advanced by the social constructionist and post-structuralist theorists, has been labelled as the ‘discursive approach’ (Malson, 1998). In line with post-structuralist theorizing, discourses are held to be social practices or inter-actional sites where social and internal constructions of reality and our experiences are both constructed and expressed (Davies & Harré, 1990; Malson, 1998). Burr (1998) provides a definition of discourse as: “a systematic, coherent set of images, metaphors and ways of talking that constructs or represents an object in particular way” (p. 145). She also points out that discourses accumulate around cultural issues such as gender and health. A ‘discursive approach’ to analysis was therefore chosen as suitable for this study with its central interests in

magazine texts and the cultural functions they may have for example in relation to motherhood, bodies, gender, femininities and power (Ussher, 1997).

All forms of discursive ‘analyses’ reflect the post-structural notion that language is not a fixed reflection of reality but is dynamic and has multiple and sometimes fragmented meanings (Burman & Parker, 1993; Davies & Harré, 1990). As discursive analysis is also founded on arguments against universal truths, this notion, along with the concept of multiple meanings, allows for the contradictory and inconsistent nature within an individual’s talk. Such contradictions are frequently found in research, and they are harder to explain from a positivist, essentialist standpoint (Gill, 1993; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). Post-structuralist theorising around discursive practices also includes the concept of positioning and subjectivity, which represents a substantial move away from positivist notions of fixed identities (Burr, 1998). Subjectivity is conceptualised as fluid, flexible and constituted in discourse not essentialised and inherent. Davies & Harré (1990) elucidate these concepts as taking up a position in discourse. Burr (1995) also describes them as the linguistic or visual expression of a variety of possible ‘selves’ that are taken up, put down or rejected in relation to different others or different social situations. Davies & Harré (1990) further explain these concepts; they describe discursive practices as a “force” in which people are positioned, either by themselves or by others, within discourses, and that an individual’s “subjectivity” or self “is generated through the learning and use of certain discursive practices” (p. 43).

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

The French philosopher Michael Foucault’s work has also informed and influenced the post-structuralist discourse analytic tradition. Writing in the 1970’s and 1980’s, Foucault espoused that, along with all objects, ‘knowledge’ was socially constructed and therefore also subject to shifts and changes in meaning throughout history. More importantly Foucault proposed a theory that ‘knowledge’ is constituted in discourse and tied closely to power (Burr, 1995). Tracing the origins and sites of power through an historical lens Foucault described a radical shift in the power base in society from the sovereign leader to an omnipresent disciplinary ‘power’ that currently pervades all levels of society at a micro level. Most interestingly, Foucault proposes that disciplinary power has been internalised by the individual (Bartky, 1990; Burr, 1995; Gill 2007). This modern focus on the individual rather than the social led Foucault to postulate that the

'body' has therefore become a major site of power relations where the unstated aim is to produce a disciplined body that is at the same time both docile and productive (Burr, 1995; Gill 2007). He also proposed that power maintained its hold on the individual not through self discipline alone but also through, for example, the experience of mastery as it "induces pleasure, it informs knowledge, it produces discourse" (Foucault, 1980 p.119, as cited in Gill 2007).

Foucault's concept of how power becomes internalised is central to my analysis of discourses and constructions of the body found in popular women's magazines. In his book "Discipline & Punish: the Birth of the Prison (1995), Foucault introduces the metaphor of the Panopticon, a theorised prison system which consists of a round guard tower surrounded by a circle of individual cells. He suggested that continual surveillance by an 'other' (the guard) afforded by the Panopticon design works to maintain conformity amongst the observed (inmates) as they seek to avoid punishment. Foucault postulates that this constant, inescapable monitoring by a more powerful 'other' eventually breaches an individual's psyche and is internalised, leading to self monitoring and self discipline. Self discipline in this way becomes both an effective and efficient mechanism of power i.e. "Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1995, p. 201). His concepts of self monitoring and self discipline and the production of the 'docile' body can also account for what appears in current society to be 'freedom of choice' discourses which surround the 'self discipline' or effort that is required to conform to social norms (Burr, 1995). Foucault's metaphor of the Panopticon therefore is held to offer a potent agenda for any research involving the body (Blood, 2005).

Foucault also promotes a number of other disciplines as being useful in enforcing power at a microlevel. In particular he refers to the concept of normalization as being a useful means of "corrective training" referring to it as "the power of the Norm" and questioning whether this has become "the new law of modern society" (Foucault, 1995, p.184). He notes that not only does measurement against the norm promote homogeneity but it allows all individuals to be graded against it, suggesting that "Like surveillance and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age" (p.184). Gill (2007), in her book on gender and media, also refers to Foucault's concept of normalisation and the "power to regulate" through a process of description and measurement against norms. She describes these as 'discourses' which have become common, and at times a focus, in a variety of media where we, as the

audience, are invited to measure ourselves and our conduct against socially or 'scientifically' prescribed norms (p. 64).

Foucault's theories around discourse and power provide an eminently useful framework under the post-structuralist umbrella from which to analyse the workings of discourses in magazine culture. His approach has been utilised within discourse analysis where power is held to be exercised through discourses around expert knowledge. Foucault was interested in the 'truth effects' of power', i.e. where and when knowledge is applied and its effects, arguing that "certain types of discourse in each society are accepted and allowed to function as the 'truth'" (Blood, 2005, p. 51). Gill (2007), notes that Foucault considered power in modern society to be closely connected with the "production of new knowledges" and this has a "regulatory function" through for example "categorisation and measurement of more and more areas of human life and experience, rendering them knowable and manipulable" (p. 61). Burman and Parker (1993) also acknowledge the important contribution Foucault's work has made to discourse analytic research around subjectivity. They write that Foucault's analysis adds to the knowledge about "how subjects are constructed (how we experience ourselves when we speak, when we hear others speak about us, and how we still have to use that talk when we think without speech)" (p. 7).

Foucault and Feminist Analysis

Although Foucault's post-structuralist, anti essentialist stance was not welcomed by all branches of feminism, his work has been influential and is said to offer feminists "a contextualisation of experience and an analysis of its constitution and ideological power" (Weedon, 1997, p. 121). While Foucault did not focus on gender in his writings about the disciplinary power of the 'all seeing' Panopticon and the production of docile bodies, his theorizing and analysis did strike a chord with many feminist theorists, perhaps, it has been suggested, more than any other post-structuralist thinker (McNay 1992). Bordo (2003), for example, also states that Foucault has been influential adding to the new feminist "scholarship" around the body (p. 17). In particular she views his notions of, for example, docile bodies and micropractices as useful concepts to aid analysis.

Foucault's conceptualisation of how power is able to discipline the body with little or no resistance has been fruitfully applied by feminist writers to unpack the disciplining (or oppression) of the female body, a practise which Bartky (1990) describes as the

“tyranny of slenderness” (p. 66). She uses Foucauldian analysis to eloquently expand this notion:

“In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other” (p. 72).

Bartky (1990) also reveals the explanatory depth of this metaphor or device by using it to explain the contradictions between the notion that social beauty norms are repressive and the idea that “production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural” (p. 75). She suggests that the “anonymity of disciplinary power and its wide spread dispersion have consequences which are crucial to a proper understanding of the subordination of women” (p. 75). She illustrates this view by tracing its subtle almost unnoticeable effects through issues such as achieving the right shape, right gestures and right ornaments in the creation of ‘femininity’.

Gill (2007) acknowledges Foucault’s contribution to feminist media studies as particularly important. She also highlights his concepts around “disciplinary power – in which power is conceptualised as circulating through ever finer channels, invading the body and seeking to regulate every aspect of its functioning” (p. 62). Using Foucault’s analogies Gill (2007) extends his concepts to visual images found in advertisements and women’s magazines. She writes that both these genre:

“have been identified as key sites of this form of power in a society increasingly orientated towards the visual media. Their representations of normative femininity form part of the ‘public habitat of images’ that works to discipline and regulate women’s relationship to their own bodies” (p. 63).

Many feminist writers such as Bordo (2003) have also argued that femininity has come to be increasingly constructed in visual terms with an increasing emphasis on the body. Bordo (2003) describes current society as the “empire of images”(preface), and contends in her book *Twilight Zones* (1997) that the images of slender women in magazines are “never “just” pictures” but they provide influential lessons on how to attain the current socially prescribed ‘look’ and way of being (p. 114). As a result, Bordo (2003) argues, images in the media function as a normalising power. Bartky (1990) also suggests that the repeated presentation of images of ‘perfect woman’ works to “deprecate women’s body ... and reminds us that we fail to measure up” (pp. 39-40). Currently in magazines there is also a growing trend to show candid and unflattering images of celebrities, which media analyst Su Holmes (2000) suggests may be interpreted as representing the “higher

truth” or “more of the inner being” of the celebrity when compared to posed, contrived images (p. 26). She contends these images provide readers with a greater sense of access and intimacy with the reader, but also the exposure of the ‘ordinary’ behind the celebrity façade provides pleasure for many readers as it closes the gap between “them and us” (p. 30).

As evident in both Ros Gill’s and Sylvia Blood’s (2005) work, the study of ways the body is constructed in popular media representations is well suited to analysis based in both Foucauldian and feminist epistemologies. Accordingly, this study uses a discursive analysis of the texts and images, based on Foucauldian and feminist paradigms, to recognise and explore the discourses gathering around a body that is becoming increasing fetishized both textually and visually in the mass media.

Analytic methodology

Taylor and Ussher (2001) describe the main aim of discursive analysis as being to “unravel the processes through which ... discourse ...is constructed” (p. 296). There are a number of approaches available to researchers working within a discursive framework, some focusing entirely on discourses, positioning and the creation of subjectivities while others such as conversational analysts focus on the intricate analysis of naturally occurring conversations. However, as this study relies solely on written and visual texts rather than verbal texts, some approaches, such as conversational analysis, were ruled out.

The second consideration in choosing the analytic method was recognition that the texts were drawn from popular magazines. The nature of magazine discourse has much to do with the commercial aspects of the product and the editorial presence endorsing this (Gill, 2007). It is likely that both these factors will have an effect on the construction of, and choice of, discourses about the maternal body presented. For example, the discourses attributed to the mothers interviewed for popular magazines will have been heavily edited and as such are not representative of a natural conversation or an interview other than in the broadest sense. These considerations meant that, again, some approaches such as discourse analysis (DA) (e.g. Potter & Wetherall, 1995) were considered less suitable than others.

Acknowledgment of the limitations of magazine discourses led to the decision to use thematic analysis (TA) as the main methodical technique for this exploration of popular women’s magazines and the maternal body. Gill (2007), notes that analysis of

media texts is often “theoretically pluralist” drawing on “more than one approach” (p. 72). Taking up this point, it has been recognised that exclusive use of TA can restrict analysis to mere description (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In response to these notions it was decided that the current study would benefit from the use of relevant analytical tools used in discursive analyses. Accordingly, discourse analysis around rhetorical devices, such as metaphors and stock phrases or expressions, was also used to enable a more fine grained analysis of extracts and to provide a richer deeper exploration of the texts (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). The Post-structuralist Discourse Analytic (PDA) tools of positioning and subjectivity were considered useful to the analysis given magazines may function as a discursive resource that can be used by readers for identity work (Jackson, 2005).

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a common, widely used research technique in social sciences (Roulson, 2001). It is employed across a large range of qualitative research as it has the ability to fit within many theoretical frameworks. However, while frequently used it has not been adequately described or explained, consequently my discussion of this particular analytic process is confined to the one report by Braun and Clarke (2006) who have attempted to fill this gap. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that while there is no clearly defined and agreed guideline around how to go about TA, it provides researchers with “a flexible and useful research tool which can potentially provide a rich and detailed yet complex account of data” (p. 78).

Conducting TA involves searching across the whole of the data set for repeated patterns of meaning or themes which “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). As a consequence, in this study, it will provide a stronger account of the sociocultural context in the construction of the maternal body than an individualised account would allow (p. 86). At the same time, drawing on the previously mentioned discourse analytical tools to look more closely at the texts, allowed a more complex picture to be developed and a more detailed analysis permitted contradictions and uncertainties to be explored.

This TA based study was ‘data driven’ in that I did not take pre-existing themes and search for references or expressions of these in the data set, rather the themes were allowed to emerge through repeated examination of the texts. These emergent themes were analysed further to produce a more nuanced account, particularly in relation to

previous literature and both the Foucauldian and feminist perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). The flexibility inherent in the TA technique allows it to be used as a constructionist method which “examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating in society.” (p. 81)

Photographs

Gillian Rose (2001) provides the basis for the discursive analysis of the visual representations used in this research. Rose (2001) highlights the complexity of visual images and that, like discursive analysis of verbal/written text, there are numerous readings or interpretations of visual images available, although the majority have a preferred reading. In her discussions of semiology or the study of signs she provides a useful list of questions and suggestions of meanings around individual aspects of the body, such as hair, body size, expression, eye contact, pose as well as props and settings, all of which can be used to prompt or guide interpretations of visual images. Rose (2001) also emphasises the importance of contrasting images as this allows for comment on connections and contradictions between the representations; and she discusses the importance of noting what may be excluded from the photographs as this may hold significance. These prompts and recommendations were used to aid analysis of the photographs included with the texts.

Susan Bordo’s (1997 & 2003) and Ros Gill’s (2007 & 2008) feminist analyses of magazine advertisements were also resources drawn on to help interpret the visual images included in this research. And finally Marianne Wex’s (1979) seminal feminist study of female and male body language, and in particular meanings around space and pose as it relates to notions of power, was usefully applied to assist with analysis of the magazine images.

Method

Ethics

Ethical approval for the two part study was sought and gained from the Victoria University of Wellington School of Psychology Human Ethics Committee (SOPHEC) prior to the start of the data collection.

Research Process

The data gathered for this study was drawn in the main from the most widely read 'popular women's magazines' available in New Zealand. Three of the titles, the New Zealand Woman's Weekly (NZWW), Woman's Day (WD) and New Idea (NI) were rated in the Top 10 magazines from January – December 2006 in a Neilson Media National Readership Survey (Top Magazines, n.d.). They were rated second, fourth and ninth respectively. The only other 'popular women's magazine' listed in the readership survey was the Australian Women's Weekly (AWW) which was ranked eighth.

The magazines targeted are readily available and prominently displayed for sale in supermarkets, dairies and petrol stations as well as magazine and stationery shops. They are often positioned near the checkouts to catch the attention of shoppers as they queue and as a consequence, if not bought, are available for browsing. In addition popular women's magazines are usually found in doctors and dentists waiting rooms, hairdressers and other situations which allow for brief perusal (Hermes, 1995). It has also been noted that popular magazines are often passed on by the purchaser to family members or friends (McLoughlin, 2000). As a result the circulation of these magazines is high and accounts for the widespread dissemination of the content even amongst non purchasers.

Choosing to sample readily available and widely read 'popular' women's magazines was crucial to the study as they are considered "a significant site of production of women's bodies/subjectivities" and also "represent the dominant meanings available in the current socio-historical moment" (Blood, 2005, p. 66). The central focus of this study, i.e. the construction of the maternal body, determined the selection of *individual* magazines within this grouping. As such the content of numerous magazines was examined in relation to discourses focusing on the maternal body. Only magazines which were found to contain references to the maternal body were included in the sample.

The sample covered the period 21 March 2005 - 21 August 2006. During this time period I selected both magazines available at the supermarket, and those available at the public library (although this was restricted to their collection of NZWW and AWW). This resulted in a random sampling of magazines which were then further scrutinised in order to locate examples of the targeted subject. Consequently the magazines selected do not represent either a scientifically selected sample or analysis of all magazines available during this period. There were two reasons to sample in this way. The first related to the necessity to manage the cost and sample size for the project as there are a vast number of weekly magazines available for purchase. The second is related to the understanding that

it is unlikely that many women buy every copy of the four magazines represented in the sample. As such this method was believed to be more representative of the purchasing or browsing habits of women in respect of this magazine genre, and captures a more naturalistic sample of the material available to readers.

The sampling and initial analysis resulted in the inclusion of 29 magazines in the data set (for list of magazines see Appendix 2). The number of magazines included for each title and the number of references to the maternal body found in these magazines is shown in Table 1. below:

Table 1. Number and title of magazines in sample & number of articles or advertisements containing reference to the maternal body

Magazine	Number of magazines	No. of articles/adverts ref. the maternal body
NZWW	15	37
WD	8	35
NI	5	20
OK	1	7
TOTAL	29	99

The heavier proportion of NZWWs in the data set is more accounted for by the use of the public libraries collection of this magazine, rather than its proclivity to reference the maternal body. It is notable that although I also randomly sampled the Australian Woman's Weekly through the library, this did not result in any references to the maternal body. This may have been due to the sampling method but may also suggest that the magazine held, at least during this time frame, a different focus on women's maternal bodies in comparison to the others included.

It is also noteworthy that the individual issues of the magazines included in the data set usually contained more than one article or advertisement which referenced the maternal body. Only two of the issues included in the final sample contained one reference, 24 contained between two and five references, and three magazines had seven articles or advertisements containing references to the maternal body. These references took various forms. These included entire articles focusing on body issues relating to the maternal body, at times including dieting tips; others were a brief one or two sentence long

reference to the mother's physical appearance positioned within a longer article. References were also found in cover titles, contents pages and photographic captions and advertisements.

In order to facilitate the analysis of the magazine texts the relevant content of the magazines was scanned using an Epson 3170 and reformatted into word documents. This method necessitates reading through the data once more to check for OCR errors and correction of misreads and elisions. This process although lengthy allowed ease of analysis and construction of data files.

Analytical Process

Once the texts had been scanned into word format the process of the thematic analysis began following the method described in Braun and Clarke (2006). Firstly the texts were read several times to gain a familiarity and understanding of them, both individually and as a whole. This procedure also allowed for the final selection of references to the maternal body for inclusion in the data set as these were at times buried within longer articles.

The texts selected were grouped into a word data file and then printed. The hard copy was re read once more to reinforce my knowledge of and familiarity with them. At the same time I began to make notes in the margins in order to begin the process of sorting the data set into thematic groupings. Having a more in-depth knowledge of the texts, and with reference to my notes, a basic coding process was begun in order to, as Potter and Wetherall (1987) state, "squeeze an unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks" (p. 167). This involved a gradual refining process where texts were coded under a number of emerging themes such as 'self surveillance', 'body as a machine', 'body as natural', and 'clothing'. It was noted that during this process many texts were allocated into a number of codes as the texts frequently contained more than one theme. This multiple coding is not unusual in TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and in this study reflects the complex and often contradictory nature of the texts which at times included reports/comments on and by celebrities the magazine/ 'friends'/ 'spokespersons' comments. It should be noted that photographs at this stage were not included in the coding as they were seen at this point as more illustrative of the text rather than stand alone. Later in the analysis it was decided to include photographs as they either illustrated and enhanced the textual analysis or provided a contrasting meaning to the texts being analysed.

The coding process was repeated until a more cohesive and more meaningful group of themes was established. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend writing early in the process as the development of themes is a recursive rather than linear practice and the themes and structure of the analysis take time to develop into a cohesive form or more meaningful groupings. With this in mind, it was decided at this point to begin writing both descriptive and more in-depth analysis using discourse analytic tools. This set in motion a lengthy process of writing and rewriting alongside reviewing themes and subsequently the formation of new larger thematic groupings where all data was reselected and located into larger data files.

Early writing of the analysis also allowed for rechecking of the context against the original articles (Weaver & Ussher, 1997). This rechecking against the original articles also allowed for the selection of the accompanying visual images and noting of the layouts as well as headings styles and colours as it became more obvious that these were at times integral to not just the representations but also the meanings constructed around mothers and the maternal body in the written texts. This realisation led to the inclusion of numerous photographs into the analysis as it was recognized that while some illustrated the text adding to the analysis others were seen as perhaps working against it and therefore worth exploring.

This exhaustive reflexive process subsequently resulted in the formation of three themes. Following the recommendations in Kitzinger and Wilmott (2002), I allowed “the data itself to name the themes” by taking direct quotes from the data set to “illustrate the kind of data classified by each theme as advocated by Breakwell (1995)”, (p. 351). The following constructions themes form the titles of each of the three analytical chapters:

- “Wow! Ange’s hot post baby body”
- “Trim, taut and terrific, and happy and healthy”
- “Getting back to normal”

With the final selection of themes completed, the final texts (visual and written) were selected to illustrate the themes. These texts were analysed afresh using discourse analytical tools, Foucauldian and feminist discursive framework and with reference to previous qualitative and quantitative research and discussion of the relevant contemporary cultural environment. By incorporating all these elements it was hoped to provide a strong social context in which to situate both the constructions of the maternal bodies and the

emerging discourses that are gathering around the growing media attention to motherhood in relation to women's appearance.

Reflexivity

As with all qualitative research it is important to acknowledge the researchers own contributions to the meanings drawn from the data (Willig, 2001) and to question their own position in relation to the study (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As the initiator of this study I acknowledge that the drive behind my interest and increasing focus on the construction of the maternal body in the media is a reflection of my own experiences as a pregnant woman and mother of three girls.

I well remember the period early in my pregnancies as my waist thickened when I wanted to wear a badge saying "I'm pregnant", not to illicit sympathy or special treatment but in order to convey a message that I wasn't fat! As the pregnancies continued I enjoyed the freedoms that being larger brought, but at the same time was pleased when complimented for being 'all baby'. This was in the 1990's and I recall the frustration of not being able to find maternity clothes that looked attractive or finding that the limited 'dressy' clothing made me look like a Christmas present or worse the Christmas pudding – most drawn in below the belly and adorned with bows. I envy the choices and comfort afforded now by the many new ranges of maternity wear, but also acknowledge the contradictory feelings of being relieved at having been out of the 'gaze' while pregnant although at the same time missing being part of it.

Immediately after childbirth I was also shocked at the state of my body despite having been warned to expect a 'marshmallow' stomach in Sheila Kitzinger's wonderful book, "The Complete Book of Pregnancy and Childbirth" (1989). At the same time, in contrast, I enjoyed feeling more womanly with larger breasts due to breastfeeding and acknowledge that I felt 'lucky' and 'proud' that my body did bounce back with little difficulty after each pregnancy as I lost weight relatively quickly and easily. However, I knew this was not the case for every woman and I vividly recall the tiredness of those confusing baby focused early months of motherhood where literally the last thing you thought of was how you looked.

But in the early 1990's when I had my children this way of being seemed to be more accepted as part of the 'deal', there seemed less pressure to regain your figure in comparison with current times. This is why I found myself becoming increasingly

disturbed at the growing emphasis in magazines, and more recently on television, on mothers' appearance. This includes the applause that accompanied a successful slim down, and worse, the derision when a woman showed apparent relaxation of the stringent beauty norms and dared to appear in the media's gaze after the baby was born heavier and not 'toned'.

While my own experiences have given me an insight into the issues involved and fuelled my energy in the data collection I am aware that this may have lead to a perceptual bias in my interpretations. For example, rather than holding onto the notion that you shouldn't let your appearance slip for any reason I remember the physical and mental pleasure at having time out from the rigours of bodily disciplines. But the analytical process and the background reading on femininity and discourse has proved a consciousness raising exercise for me. As a consequence, I have become more aware and more accepting that not all women think the same way as me, they may hold different values and beliefs which mean that appearance *is* very important to them. I have learnt that these deviations from my own way of thinking are largely explainable through analysis of the discourses available to us through the mass media and the socio-historical context in which we live.

CHAPTER THREE

“WOW! ANGE’S HOT POST BABY BODY”: SEXY MOTHERS

Introduction

Analysis of the data set revealed a significant number of references to the maternal body as ‘sexy’. This construction of motherhood and the maternal body, particularly the newly maternal body, is interesting on a number of levels. Firstly, anecdotal evidence, medical and psychological research suggest this positioning of women is at odds with how many new mothers feel about their bodies and their own levels of sexual desire. Secondly, traditional notions of motherhood, for example the good mother, have not included sexual desire. The final point of interest relates to what has been noted as the increasing visibility of the pregnant body and its glamorous portrayal by celebrities, which is argued to have started with the Demi Moore nude pregnancy cover shoot (see Chapter 1, p. 7) in the late 20th century (Coward, 1997; Douglas & Michaels 2004; McRobbie, 2006). Alongside this emerging trend are the ‘new femininities’ available to women which promote sexual confidence, empowerment and agency. I explore whether these shifts in representations of femininity are being mapped onto motherhood in the magazines, bringing about changes to its traditional construction.

This chapter firstly examines the literature related to the matter of motherhood and sexuality in the contexts of the shift noted above. It then presents the analysis of magazines texts addressing the representations of ‘sexy’ mothers. The analysis begins with an examination of texts which show tensions in the construction of the ‘new’ mother as sexy. It then moves on to examine more explicit sexual depictions of the maternal body and motherhood as represented by the trope ‘yummy mummy’ and by descriptions of clothing and behaviour. The analysis concludes by focusing on a contrasting article where the maternal body is depicted as abject rather than sexy due the revelation of the normal physical signs of maternity. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the findings.

Sexuality in motherhood: Sex and the six week check-up

“Intercourse alright?”

“Intercourse?” I gasped.

“There’s no reason why intercourse shouldn’t be satisfactorily established at six weeks,” he intoned, his eyes fluttering heavenwards.

The information sank in. Lord knows, it was hard enough sitting down, let alone having sex, but everybody, everybody – except me – “satisfactorily resumed” intercourse at six weeks! I was frigid!

I left, humiliated. My self esteem plummeted. When I got home I looked at my husband with new eyes. He was a deprived person. I began to develop an apologetic manner.

(Phillips, 1983, p. 109).

This extract is taken from a popular book about motherhood called “Mothers Matter Too” by New Zealand author Jenny Phillips. Her book is based on research and personal experience and written to express and add support for women who find the experience of motherhood far different from what was “expected – and assumed” (Phillips, back cover). The extract relates to Jenny’s personal experience of visiting her obstetrician for the standard six week postnatal check-up where the ‘question’ around sexual functioning was raised but dealt with briskly. While humorous in tone, the extract also accords with anecdotal evidence which suggests that for most women the first few weeks, if not months, after childbirth are not a time when they feel sexy, and is a time when their self esteem is especially vulnerable. Additionally, research suggests this is a period when many women are so overwhelmed with caring for their new child (and often their husbands’ feelings) that there is little time to spare for their own needs (Choi, Henshaw, Baker & Tree, 2005; Miller, 2005; Ussher, 1989).

Some researchers exploring wider themes around motherhood have made reference to the topic of sexuality and motherhood. Woollett and Parr (1997) in their study of the psychological tasks around transition to motherhood found that a number of women spoke of concerns around the physical changes to their bodies resulting from childbirth. The authors argued that these physical changes may have played a part in the downturn which many women experienced in their sex lives after childbirth. Lucy Bailey (2001), found that many women described their bodies in an essentialised way after child birth, which for some led to a lessening in their feelings of sexuality such that many found it hard to “describe themselves in sexual terms” (Bailey, p. 117). Some felt this as a loss, for example one woman reports that after childbirth she felt “frumpy” and stated “you feel like someone’s mum and not a woman” (Bailey, p. 118). At the same time it was noted that breastfeeding mothers despite employing essentialised talk, acknowledged that their larger breasts did conform to a body shape that is sexualized in Western society (Bailey). These discourses reflect the complexity of women’s negotiation of sexuality after childbirth in current society.

To date, there has been little research which has focused exclusively on the topic of sexuality and new mothers. Much of this research is medicalised, focusing more on the physical side of sexuality and new motherhood, and is based on empirical, largely quantitative research. Such research reports that: women's sexual desire and activity generally decreases during pregnancy; many women after childbirth continue "to report a decline in sexual interest, desire or libido" (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2002, p. 94); and sexual problems are common (von Sydow, 1999). Further, there is a strong focus in medicalised research on the resumption of heterosexual intercourse as a measure of women's sexuality. In general, this research suggests that most women resume sexual intercourse on average six to seven weeks after child birth, and then experience a gradual increase in desire and 'sexual functioning' over a period of usually 12 months when it may have reached pre-pregnancy levels (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2002; Fischman, Rankin, Soeken & Lenz, 1984; LaMarre, Paterson, Gorzalka, 2003).

Medical research has largely focused on the physical/mechanical rather than psychological/emotional reasons for the decline in sexual functioning after childbirth. The medical research suggests that physical discomfort such as dyspareunia, and fatigue are often associated with a decrease in frequency and desire, or ascribed to hormonal changes (Barrett, Pendry, Peacock, Victor, Thakar & Manyonda, 2000). Von Sydow (1999), in a meta analysis of the topic, states there is "scarce" research on "non coital activities or sexual feelings" (p. 27). However, the few researchers who have examined more psychological factors suggest that depression, relationship satisfaction, quality of the mother role and bodily appearance may also play a part (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2002; Fischman et al. 1984; Pastore, Owens & Raymond, 2007).

One recent Swedish study by Olsson, Lundqvist, Faxelid & Nissen (2005), used focus groups with mothers 3-24 months after childbirth, giving women the opportunity to express their views. This study found that most of the participants reported a loss of sexual desire. While the authors suggested that tiredness was the most common reason for loss of desire, body image after child birth emerged as one of the four main contributing factors. The authors report that many of the women found the bodily changes brought on by motherhood hard to accept and some felt less attractive (Olson et al.). The women were particularly concerned over changes in breast size and shape due to breast feeding, as well as vaginal changes that occurred as a result of childbirth. This may suggest acknowledgment of the notion of attractiveness for women as being largely built around the heterosexual gaze (McRobbie, 2004), as well as an understanding that "attractiveness is

sexually defined and women are positioned as objects of male sexual desire” (Jackson, 2006, p. 477). In contrast, a few women in the study felt more in tune with their bodies after the physical experience of childbirth which in turn enhanced their sexual satisfaction. It is noteworthy in the context of the current study that many of the participants referred to diet and exercise as well as plastic surgery as a “valid means of returning to the pre-pregnancy body” as they held that “childbirth and breast-feeding should not leave visible traces” on their bodies (Olsson et al., 2005, p. 385).

In common with the Swedish study above, both scientific and medical researchers in general (e.g. von Sydow, 1999) acknowledge that while the majority of the mothers show decreased levels of sexual functioning in the first year after childbirth, there is marked variability in the mothers’ sexuality. The fluctuating nature of issues around sexuality in pregnancy and childbirth is also noted by researchers. Such variability and fluidity is well illustrated in an example from a semi-qualitative longitudinal study conducted in Austria (Trutnovsky, Haas, Lang & Petru, 2006). In this study many women noted reduced sexual activity when pregnant while a few noted an increase in desire or arousal e.g. one woman stated that her “sexual needs have increased” (p. 284). After childbirth the results also varied; many women expressed a decrease in sexual desire e.g. one participant stated that she felt “like a mother cow, not like a desirable woman”. For the majority of women “interest in sexuality” was found to have increased at six months after childbirth, although not to pre-pregnancy levels (p. 285). In contrast 10 women (39%) considered that their sex life after childbirth was the same as it was before pregnancy.

Sexuality, motherhood and ‘new femininities’

Sexuality and motherhood have traditionally been constructed as incompatible in many societies and so deemed mutually exclusive (Friedman, Weinberg & Pines, 1998; Oberman & Josselson, 1996; Schmied & Lupton, 2001; Young, 1990). Jane Ussher (1989) has written extensively on the dualistic positioning of women, such as good/bad and Madonna/whore, and suggests that society often polarises women within these dichotomies. For example, she proposes that “the woman who is a mother cannot be a good mother and a sexual person at the same time, both Madonna and whore; women’s sexuality is dangerous and threatening and therefore at odds with the stereotype of the ‘good mother’ (Ussher, 1989). However as society has changed considerably in the last 20 to 30 years to the point where female sexuality is widely acknowledged, accepted and

promoted (Gill, 2008; McRobbie, 2004), it is possible that the construction of motherhood may also have altered.

‘New femininity’, a concept which emerged in postfeminist discourse in the 1990’s, was seen to combine both sexual and social confidence, along with ambition and independence, often referred to as ‘empowerment’ (Taft, 2004; Ticknell, Chambers, Van Loon & Hudson, 2003). Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006) take ‘new femininity’ a step further in their analysis of and discussions about the ‘chick lit’ genre. They suggest there has been a shift from the sexual ‘objectification’ to the sexual ‘subjectification’ of women, where femininity has become defined as “a bodily property” and the sexy body has perhaps become more central to femininity than the traditional notions of “caring or nurturing or motherhood”(p. 498). Here Gill and Herdieckerhoff (2006) propose that, “women are presented as active desiring sexual subjects” and the ‘sexy body’ is seen as a source of empowerment and is proffered “as women’s key (if not sole) source of identity.”(pp. 498-499). Gill and Arthurs (2006) propose that this ‘empowerment’ discourse is popularly offered to women through their expression of overt sexuality. The success of the ‘empowerment’ discourse appears to have resulted in a newer definition of the term ‘sexy’ in the 21st century. Results from a recent American MSN/Zogby online poll of more than 10,600 adults, showed that for over 75% of those polled the meaning of the term ‘sexy’ has been expanded beyond the idea of the perfect body to encompass attitude or “personal confidence” (Egner, n.d.). Not surprisingly this was true for more women than men (84% vs 63%) but may still represent a strong conceptual shift.

Feminist writers have suggested that this ‘new femininity’ has been advanced by the commodification of the ‘sexy’ woman, and is promoted through the neoliberal discourse of free choice or agency in that women have a choice whether to take on this subjectivity or not (Gill, 2003 & 2008; Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005). However despite this notional ideology of free choice to engage in new subjectivities both Bordo (1997) and Gill (2003) point out that what is sexy is proscribed by current culture, particularly through media representations and the commodification of sexuality. There is now an abundance of images and texts concerning women and sexual desire which frame the sexy woman as, in the main, “young, slim and beautiful”. Gill (2003) suggests this narrow definition also results in numerous “exclusions” from this “representational practice” and helps to maintain the hegemonic forces of cultural norms which alienate those who stand outside (p. 103).

Culture is never static and it has been noted that in more recent years television programmes such as “Sex in the City” and “Desperate Housewives” and movies such as “The Banger Sisters” and “Something’s Gotta Give” have further helped extend ‘new femininity’ beyond girlhood and the youth market by portraying older women and even mothers as having agency and sexual desire (Comella, 2003; Tally, 2006). At the same time the increasing visibility and acceptance of the pregnant body, perhaps pioneered by the Demi Moore photo shoot (see Introduction), and the production and promotion of figure hugging clothing, bare mid-riffed clothing and glamorous lingerie to pregnant women discussed previously, may have also blurred or merged the traditional boundaries between sexuality and motherhood. Despite this freeing up of women’s sexual desire, there is still evidence of social prohibitions or unease with the linking of sexuality and motherhood within the media. For example, the character “Vicki Pollard”, from the highly popular “Little Britain” television comedy series, represents a ‘promiscuous’ ‘young mother’ (Tyler, 2008). “Vicki” is satirised and vilified on a weekly basis, not only for her behaviour but also for her appearance and language (Tyler). The pop star Britney Spears, once feted as sexually confident and empowered (Aapola et al., 2005), is now hounded by the media and is the subject of gossip and derision largely because of her behaviour and appearance as a mother. Robyn Longhurst (2008) has written about the strongly moral, public outrage that occurred in New Zealand when a woman agreed to be filmed giving birth as part of a pornographic movie. Public comment focused on the welfare of the child but also expressed discomfort and disgust that motherhood was to be sexualised and therefore sullied. This explicit pairing of motherhood and sexuality was a step too far for even the more liberal members of New Zealand society.

In magazine popular culture sexualised representations of mothers have become more commonplace since the 1990s (Coward, 1997; Douglas & Michaels, 2004). An examination of the ‘sexy mother’ phenomenon in the magazine data set follows.

Analysis and discussion

The analysis of the ‘sexy mother’ is organised into five parts. The first explores the tensions found in sexualised representations of new mothers; the second looks at the yummy mummy construction with a focus on a celebrity mother but also ‘readers true stories’ where appearance is key; the third focuses on the more overt sexualisation of mothers centred on clothing and behaviour. The fourth focuses on the use of clothing to

sexualise the new mother and the final part looks at how exposure of the reality of the maternal body is treated.

Sexy new mothers

As sexuality and motherhood is still a contested site in society despite the emergence of ‘new femininities’ and the wide acceptance of women as sexual beings, it is useful to examine the data set against the background of ‘new femininities’. Putting this perspective together with the largely medical research showing a drop in sexual desire for the majority of women in early motherhood suggests that sexuality in new motherhood may be constructed within contradictory discourses across the data set.

Analysis of the magazine data highlighted a contradictory stance of magazines in relation to representations of the maternal body as sexy for new mothers. This tension between the good mother ‘asexual’ Madonna and the sexualised mother/whore was sometimes played out between text and images. For example there were occasions where photographic images conveyed a sexual representation of the mother’s body, and captions were used to highlight this depiction or further comment on ‘sexy’ behaviour, while the accompanying text framed motherhood using more traditional discourses.

Angelina Jolie: “Hot post baby body” vs the ‘good mother’

A magazine feature story about Angelina Jolie provides one example of the ways in which tensions played out in articles. The picture (shown below in Figure 1.) is taken from a Woman’s Day (WD) article about Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt’s relationship and provides an example of such a contradiction. The article reported that the photo was taken at a press conference “less than a fortnight” after the birth of their daughter (WD, 19 June, 2006, p. 8).

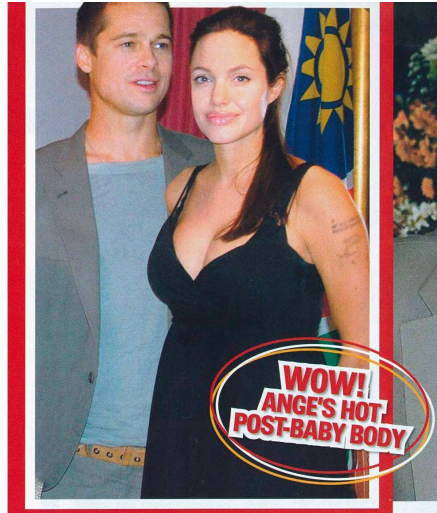


Figure 1. Angelina Jolie: Wow. WD, 19 June 2006, p. 8.

This representation of the maternal body through use of a photograph showing Angelina in a dress with a ‘plunging’ neckline, along with a tabloid style caption could be read as a form of magazine knowing self parody which helps deflect criticism of sexist discourses (McRobbie 1997 & 2004), and enacts postfeminist discourses of sexual empowerment. Alternatively it may be read as simply an emphatic comment about how Angelina’s body, which had been the subject of much media comment during Angelina’s pregnancy, and looks ‘amazing’ so soon after giving birth to her first child. But it is strongly illustrative of Mulvey’s theory of women as the object of the male gaze (McRobbie, 2004). Either reading still suggests a more sexualized construction of the maternal body, especially as the caption with its sexualized description of her body as “hot” is highlighted and placed on top of the photo. Angelina’s own strong gaze, stance, style of dress and lack of baby are features more reminiscent of the empowered sexual subject of postfeminist discourse rather than the ‘good mother’ conveyed in the accompanying article which is discussed below.

The article’s main text positions Angelina differently. For example, there were only two brief references to Angelina’s post baby appearance in the main text, but these used more modest and perhaps less sexualised adjectives, i.e. “glowing” and “looking great”, to describe how she looked (WD, 19 June 2006, p. 8). Further, Angelina is reported as stating “The focus is on the kids and we are obviously extremely committed to them and as parents together. So that kind of says it all for us.” (p. 9). Use of this statement by the magazine works to position Angelina within the text more as a traditional ‘good mother’ whose primary ‘focus’ is her children (Brown, Small & Lumley, 1997; Ex & Janssens, 2000) than

as a sexy celebrity. As such this construction positions Angelina within the more traditional discourses of motherhood as selfless, child centred, and perhaps non sexualized (Brown et al.1997; Ussher, 1989). But, the above photograph with its red, highlighted, emphatic, capitalized title tends to dominate the two page article. This dominance suggests a preferred reading that despite Angelina's statement in the main text the 'focus' for the magazine, and perhaps its selling point, is not exclusively about her relationship to her family but on her body and how she looks; viz, its "**HOT**".

The dominance of Angelina's image on the page provides an insight in to its possible reader impact, particularly as research suggests that magazine 'readers' may not in fact always 'read' the text. For example, Joke Hermes' (1995) in-depth research on 'readers' of popular magazines led her to assert that women do not always read magazines with total concentration but often skim read in between tasks. Accordingly images and highlighted features/texts may, in this context, have a greater impact on the meaning produced. In the example discussed here, Angelina's objectified, sexualized maternal body would thus take precedence over a textual reading of her romantic relationship with Brad and her more traditional maternal relationship with her children.

The tensions between text and image described above resonate with the Madonna/whore dualism (Ussher, 1989; Young, 1990), but may also be representative of a shift in the media's construction of motherhood and the maternal body. The magazine's framing of Angelina's body as a sexual object may, even if done playfully, be evidence of an emerging construction of 'new' mothers as sexual beings. Perhaps, however, this only applies if the mother is a celebrity who chooses to wear a low cut dress and looks "hot" and not motherly.

Geri Halliwell: All vanity has gone out of the window

The tension between sexuality and motherhood and its reflection in contradictions between image and text can also be seen in a more understated form in the WD coverage of Geri Halliwell after the birth of her daughter. Geri Halliwell has been the focus of a great deal of media attention both in her performing years with the girl band "The Spice Girls", where she was sometimes referred to as a "Sexy Spice", and subsequently in relation to both her solo music career and her public battles with weight and body image issues. The Geri Halliwell entry in Wikipedia describes her appearance when a Spice Girl as follows:

She wore sexy outfits and attracted much attention to herself and the group, and she became renowned for her independent and feminist attitude (Geri Halliwell, n.d.).

However the three page article in the WD magazine frames Geri as having undergone some form of epiphany since the birth of her daughter:

"Geri says motherhood has changed her life. Her battles with bulimia are no secret, but the star says she is in no hurry when it comes to shedding her baby weight.

"All vanity has gone out of the window. I haven't looked at myself because I'm looking at her all the time," she laughs. "My breasts are huge, but for a purpose. And apparently I'll have a tummy for a while, which is OK, too."

(WD, 26 June 2006, p. 22)

In this extract the magazine through reporting Geri's rejection of "all vanity" and her attestation that she can't take her eyes off her baby, positions Geri as a traditional, unselfish, baby focused mother. The notion of total focus on the baby, sometimes referred to as 'child centred' discourse, is a frequently found discourse in qualitative research on new mothers (e.g. Lupton, 2000, and Miller, 2005), and a concept held in society to be an important part of being a 'good mother' (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Miller, 2005). As such, this child centred discourse works to produce a shared understanding among readers, perhaps particularly women who may have experienced these feelings as new mothers.

The "shedding" of "baby weight" in the extract is framed as an unquestioned practice, and functions to normalize this behaviour in relation to mothers (WD, 26 June 2006, p. 22). Reporting Geri as stating she is in "no hurry" to lose this weight within the same sentence that refers to her past bulimia serves to frame Geri as having become more sensible and responsible now that she is a mother; of course she will lose the "baby weight" but not yet as she has to think of the baby. Describing her as laughing at her previous "vanity" may also suggest that vanity was part of a more frivolous persona and that perhaps becoming a mother has brought maturity and a letting go or relaxation of the 'sexy', glamorous image.

A reading of Geri as the 'good mother' is possibly further underlined by Geri's own baby focused and functional, essentialised discourse about her body, particularly her breasts. Bailey (2001) suggests this is a common discourse used by new mothers which she proposes may work to further distance a sexualised

construction of their bodies. An alternative reading of her laughter and talk of her breasts as “huge” may suggest a representation of Geri as still provocative, sexually confident and less serious. This reading together with her stated acceptance of a “tummy” as “OK” but just for “a while”, is perhaps reminiscent of the fun loving, sexy Geri of Spice Girls fame, whose appearance management was integral to her livelihood. Geri’s framing of her bodily changes as acceptable for “a while” also perhaps points to a certain transience in her embodied identity of the ‘good/child centred mother’ and suggests the possibility of reversal or renewal in the future.

The suggested framing of Geri in the text as the ‘good mother’ who has dismissed vanity, is complicated by a number of the photographs, shown below, that surround the text. The photographs provide another example of the tension occurring within the current magazine construction of motherhood which is played out between text and images. The first point of discussion focuses on the inherent glamour of the images which contrasts with Geri’s reported construction of herself further in the text as a mother and being “very unglamorous” (WD, 26 June 2006, p. 22). These photographs *are* arguably glamorous (see Figure 2. below). They are posed, and they are the work of a professional photographer with the help of a stylist, makeup artist and hair stylist. This seemingly contradictory framing of Geri through both text and photographs reflects a common image of celebrity mothers as ‘supermom’ noted by media commentators such as Douglas and Michaels (2004). That is, Geri has been constructed as a celebrity supermom who is a “serene, supremely contented woman who found motherhood the most ecstatic experience of her entire life” and is also glamorous and sexy (Douglas & Michaels, p. 115). This concept of the supermom/mum is reminiscent of the postfeminist notion of ‘having it all’. The concept of ‘having it all’ is seen as problematic in relation to demanding role of motherhood where it has been associated with Post Natal Depression (Choi et al. 2005; Ussher 2006). But as Geri is a celebrity it is no doubt important for her, and her agents, to maintain her attractive image as it is the basis of her livelihood, a point which many readers would recognize.



Figure 2. Geri Halliwell: Besotted. WD, 26 June 2006, pp. 21 & 22.

At the same time the photographs represent an idealistic standard by the portrayal of a glamorized image of new motherhood. It is suggested the images do not represent most women's experiences of the first weeks of motherhood as a physically draining and confusing experience (Choi et al., 2005; Lupton, 2000; Miller, 2005; Wolf, 2001). Weaver and Ussher (1997) noted that most women in their research experienced a large gap between the myth of motherhood depicted in the media of an "attractive, perfectly dressed and made-up mother" and the grinding reality of motherhood. They suggest that if this "ideal" is believed it "serves to make women feel inadequate" (p. 53).

As with the Angelina Jolie example, the power of the textual message of the 'good mother' is diluted by the composition of the images and their domination of the pages. The small amount of text in this article in comparison to the pictures also directs a reader's focus more towards the pictures. The series of photographs show both Geri and her baby either dressed in white or unclothed, against a backdrop of white bed linen. While the photographs in the main may be read as tender images of a new mother and her tiny infant, there is a sensual, arguably sexual, nature to some as the naked baby is positioned skin to skin on Geri's back, thighs and at her breast.

This set of photographs could be viewed as simply depicting Geri as a doting new mother and an example of idealized motherhood, but they also could

be seen as a framing new motherhood as glamorous, as well as a tentative framing of new motherhood as somewhat sexualised. Again, as with the Angelina Jolie example, this contrast between the pictures and the text may be representative of a cautious new positioning in New Zealand women's magazines of recent mothers as glamorous and sexy. This positioning may, in the postfeminist sense, be liberating but it also in turn constrains new mothers subjectively within the ideal beauty "norms" of femininity.

Yummy Mummies?

There were also examples in the data set where the maternal body was more explicitly paired with sexuality and ideal beauty norms than in the representations such as those of Angelina and Geri. These examples generally focused on the appearance of the woman when wearing glamorous, figure hugging or revealing, 'sexy' clothing, and substantially less on their role as mothers. An article about celebrity Kate Hudson and also a selection of non celebrity readers' 'true stories' provide typical examples discussed below.

Kate Hudson: Golden Goddess

Many glamorous or well dressed mothers featured in the data set were overtly positioned in the text as 'mothers'. Despite this in a number of instances their child/ren were not included in the images representing the 'sexy' mother. For example Kate Hudson is included in a "best dressed '05, dazzling divas" feature in one magazine (NI, January 2006, p. 88). She is photographed at an award ceremony (see Figure 3. below) and is described as follows:

"Golden goddess Kate reflects upon her status as Hollywood royalty, and shows what being a yummy mummy is all about"
(p. 88).



Figure 3. Kate Hudson: Dazzling Divas. NI, January 2006, p. 88.

This small caption in one sentence works to frame Kate, through careful choice of words, as both a mother (“mummy”), and as a glamorous (“golden goddess”), sexy (“yummy mummy”), movie star (“Hollywood royalty”). While she is textually positioned as being representative of a “yummy mummy”, the photograph, shown above, shows a slim, toned, well groomed and expensively dressed woman devoid of any signs of motherhood despite being described as such. This raises the question of why Kate is labeled by the magazine as a “yummy mummy”. The notion of her body as sexually appealing i.e. “yummy” is consistent with the image, but her identity on the night appeared to be more ‘movie star’ than ‘mother’. The term may have been used simply as a currently popular device to convey sexiness. Again some readers may applaud the new representation of the maternal body as attractive and sexy instead of drab, but at the same time this framing and focus on the appearance of the maternal body may also work to construct an idealized beauty norm for mothers to aspire to. This alternative reading is reinforced by the statement that the image of Kate “shows what being a yummy mummy is all about”. This example, unlike the Geri Halliwell example, positions the sexualized representation of motherhood as visually childless, a contradiction that was not uncommon in the data set when women were constructed as glamorous mothers.

Reader's Stories: Now she loves her size 10 figure

While it is recognized that celebrities have a financial as well as perhaps personal stake in being seen as slim, attractive and 'sexy', the desire among 'everyday' women to look slim and glamorous again after having children was also illustrated in a similar manner through photographic images in the three 'reader's stories' included in the data set. Kirkman (2001) has noted a growing use of first person accounts in magazines many of which are based on 'readers stories' i.e. narratives about/by non celebrities or "ordinary people" (p. 761). She suggests these narratives from 'ordinary people' are included with hope that the reader "will be able to identify with at least some of these experiences" (p. 761). The three readers stories found in the data set all linked the women's excessive weight gain to having children, and their 'weight loss' stories all featured photographs which tracked and illustrated their efforts to slim down.

The articles were similar in style to the 'big reveal' seen in the well known television 'makeover' programmes where before and after images are used, alongside personal testimonies, to illustrate not only how much women had changed in appearance but also how much their life had been changed by their enhanced appearance and increased femininity (Deery, 2004; Weber, 2006). In all three articles the largest photograph, running down the entire left hand side of the article, featured the 'mum' in a posed shot on her own, smiling, well groomed with professionally applied makeup, wearing fashionable clothes and standing in what could be described as the 'model pose' with one foot forward, and with one or both hands on their hips (e.g. see Figure 4. below). The photographs could be read as both representing pleasure and pride in their weight loss and/or as symbolic of empowerment through the body - now that the body is slimmer and dressed attractively (Bordo 2003). And as such, this reading may resonate with the dominance of sexualized images of women in popular culture (Gill, 2003). The example shown below illustrates this point particularly well; the candid 'before' photo presents the 'reader' as mother holding her baby and wearing baggy clothing, while in the 'now' photo she stands alone, appearing confident and wearing more revealing, figure hugging clothing and more glamorously styled.



Figure 4. Joanne Woodward: Reader's Story. NZWW, 10 October 2005, p. 42.

Gillian Rose (2001) in her book "Visual Methodologies" writes that what is left out of images can be as important to their meaning as that which is left in. If this premise is accepted then the exclusion of the baby in the main 'glamour' photo works to render motherhood invisible, and may give meaning to the distance between two constructions of motherhood, i.e. the traditional 'good mother' and the newer, empowered 'sexy mother'. Alternatively it could be read as representing to readers the possibility for 'ordinary' women to be both a mother and a proud, confident, desirable woman, although perhaps only once they have lost enough weight and started to dress attractively. It is interesting to compare this picture with the Geri Halliwell example (refer to Figure 2.) where the glamour and proposed sexualized images of the mother with her baby are merged. Perhaps the two contrasting images of mother and baby represent celebrity culture versus readers' 'reality', a gulf which is only bridged for 'ordinary' women after investment in months of hard work, i.e. diet and exercise.

Yummy Mummies: Bikini babes

References to the sexy mother/maternal body within magazine texts often made repeated use of the postfeminist discourses of self-pride, agency and empowerment (Bordo, 2003) to describe a celebrity mother's appearance when wearing 'skimpy'

clothing. In particular there were a number of references to mothers ‘proudly’ wearing bikinis. Feature articles about three celebrities – Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Hudson and Liz Hurley – illustrate magazine treatment of celebrity mother’s bikini-clad appearance.

Gwyneth Paltrow: Pregnant Gwyneth Paltrow looks hot

A NI feature (4 March 2006) on Gwyneth Paltrow includes photographs of her while six months pregnant and on a beach holiday with her first child. The article positions her within the ‘new’ femininity discourse of self-pride and confidence in her (maternal) bodily appearance. The article is listed in the contents page of the magazine as “GLOWING GWYNNIE. Pregnant Gwyneth Paltrow looks hot on a beach holiday” (p. 7). As in the ‘Angelina Jolie’ article, this reference to the maternal body mixes both the traditional adjective applied to motherhood, especially pregnancy, i.e. “glowing” with the sexualized “looks hot”, although this could also be read as a pun relating to the hot weather. The main and subheading for the article are more direct:

“Gwyneth’s a bikini babe

Gwyneth Paltrow is a yummy mummy, taking her second pregnancy in her stride and showing off her belly bulge on a recent holiday with Apple in Mexico”
(NI, 4 March 2006, p. 2)

Gwyneth “is” a “yummy mummy” or “babe” because, she is “taking her second pregnancy in her stride and showing off her belly bulge” and as it states further in the text, “she looks fantastic”. The words “showing off” and taking her pregnancy “in her stride” work to frame Gwyneth as not only comfortable in her larger body but proudly and confidently revealing it. It could also be read as referencing that Gwyneth’s changing body shape has not stopped her appearing in the public gaze in bikinis. The language used conveys both a sense of empowerment but also agency as she chooses to ‘show off’ her body in a public place and later in the article she talks openly about her changing shape. The use of the word “belly” to describe her stomach is interesting. Although the word ‘belly’ can have negative connotations e.g. ‘beer belly’, in this article it seems to take on a more positive positioning. It is perhaps used here as a way of alliteratively describing a visibly larger ‘baby bump’; another commonly used, but more coy, phrase that does not match this stronger framing of Gwyneth and her maternal body.

The main focus in the article itself is Gwyneth’s good health during her second pregnancy and her relationship to her husband and their first child. Nonetheless there is frequent mention of her body. For example, the use of postfeminist discourses of agency

and empowerment in relation to her body are repeated in the first two paragraphs of the article:

Gwyneth Paltrow has proudly displayed her heavily-pregnant belly during a holiday in Mexico with her daughter.

The 33-year-old actress is six months pregnant, and wasn't afraid to show off her expanding shape in a bikini as she lounged around the pool of her beachfront hotel.

(p. 2)

Gwyneth is positioned as being proud of her body and comfortable with her euphemistically described “expanding shape”. She is described as not being “afraid” to show her stomach, i.e. she did not hide her larger stomach under a more traditional loose fitting maternity swimsuit. Her reported behaviour accords with moves toward more revealing media representations of the pregnant body. Later in the article Gwyneth is also described as being “relaxed about her growing but trim figure” (p. 3). She ‘reports’ that her trim and “toned” figure is due to a “strict exercise and diet regime”. This notion of control in both diet and exercise along with the photos of her caring for her daughter, firmly position Gwyneth as the ‘good mother’ who knows being healthy while pregnant is good for her developing baby (Lupton, 2003). In addition, this construction of Gwyneth’s maternal body as toned and under “strict” control could also be seen as positioning Gwyneth within the more current neoliberal discourse of self management and self improvement. Namely it illustrates how even though she is pregnant and has a larger ‘belly’ she ‘has not let herself go’. Despite her large size Gwyneth can still be represented as a “yummy mummy” because she is meeting the idealized beauty norms by keeping her pregnant body under control and toned through diet and exercise (Ussher, 1989; Bordo, 2003).

This example of the “yummy mummy”, in contrast to the previously discussed Kate Hudson example, includes many pictures of Gwyneth with her 21 month old daughter. In this sense she is a visible mother, possibly a consequence of using images taken of her while she was on holiday with her daughter at a beach resort. But three of the five photographic captions refer specifically to Gwyneth’s physical appearance, one specifically to her larger breasts (see Figure 5. below). In the main text Gwyneth is reported as saying that her latest movie was filmed early in her pregnancy when “she was suffering from nausea and sporting a bigger bust” (NI, 4 March 2006, p. 3). She is reported as saying “my boobs are much bigger in the movie, than they are normally. That’s a tell tale sign”.

One of the photograph captions refers to this comment: “Gwyneth admits her bigger boobs from pregnancy were captured onscreen in *Proof*” (p. 2). Use of the word “captured”

functions to convey a meaning of ownership and as it refers to film images, conveys a sense of voyeurism about Gwyneth's larger breasts. Perhaps there is also a pun intended by including the name of the movie "Proof" as the photo seems to provide 'proof' of her "bigger boobs". The photograph the caption references is of Gwyneth in her bikini top with a towel wrapped around/underneath her stomach (see Figure 5.), her daughter is not in the shot and it is taken from a side angle, which helps to emphasise the topic - her "bigger boobs" - arguably representing a more objectified, sexualised framing of Gwyneth's maternal body and fetishizing her breasts.



Figure 5. Gwyneth Paltrow: Bikini babe. NI, 4 March 2006, p. 2

Although in this and the Angelina Jolie and Geri Halliwell articles the framing of the maternal body as sexual was arguably more subtle, and the 'sexy mother' and 'good mother' subjectivities were blurred, there were some instances in the data set where only the 'sexy mother' discourse prevailed. Two short examples that illustrated the exclusive sexy mother lens featured Kate Beckinsale and Liz Hurley – again wearing bikinis, or less. These celebrity mothers are also reported as engaging in 'sexy' behaviour with their partners while their children played around them.

Kate Beckinsale: Looked every inch the yummy mummy

The first extract is from WD, 25 April 2005, and focuses on actress Kate Beckinsale:

“Kate's Pool Party

Kate Beckinsale looked every inch the yummy mummy with her family at a Mexican resort. While her daughter Lily, six, took to the water at the hotel, Kate showed off her curves as she openly canoodled with hubby Len Wiseman, 30, on a poolside deckchair....”
(p. 131)

The description of Kate as “every inch the yummy mummy” along with the photographs (shown in Figure 6. below), underlines construction of ‘yummy mummies’ within the ideal beauty discourse of slim (post-natally), toned and attractive. The four photographs show a montage of the text’s narrative; Kate wearing a bikini walks around the pool, watches her daughter in the water, holds a towel and a hat, and cuddles up to her husband on a sunlounger. They focus more on her bodily appearance and ‘sexy’ behaviour than her role as mother.

Again the postfeminist discourse of empowerment is used in the extract, shown above, to sanction her appearance and in this case her behaviour. She is described as showing off “her curves”, a phrase more resonant of the femininity discourse from the 1950’s (Bordo, 2003), as she “openly canoodled” (a similarly old fashioned word) with her husband at a holiday resort, while her daughter was swimming (WD, 25 April 2005, p. 131). The use of the word “canoodled” works to construct the couples intimate behaviour in a playful way. The simultaneous representation of Kate as both mother and ‘canoodling’ lover may be read as demonstrating motherhood as being ‘sexy’ and in this way produces a counter construction to sexless motherhood (Ussher, 1989). This sexual version of motherhood is aligned with a postfeminist construction of femininity found elsewhere in popular culture and particular in magazines (Gill, 2007).



Figure 6. Kate Beckinsale: Yummy mummy. WD, 25 April 2005, p. 131

Liz Hurley: Proved she's as sexy as ever

Liz Hurley's holiday with her partner and her three year old son was given similar treatment by the same magazine a few months later. The tabloid like title "Liz's sizzling summer" draws on the literal meaning of hot weather, but may also connote sexual meanings around a 'hot', 'sexy' woman thereby referencing both Liz's appearance and behaviour. Such a reading is supported by the accompanying photographs (see Figure 7. below) and in the text of the short article which contains repeated references to Liz as 'sexy' e.g.:

"Liz Hurley looked red hot, turning heads in a barely-there bikini... Liz Hurley proved she's as sexy as ever... The 40-year-old mother showed off her amazing body... Some days she wowed onlookers in a green bikini, while at other times she opted to sunbake topless..."
(WD, 8 August 2005, p. 119)

The centrality of bodily display in postfeminist discourse (Bordo, 1997; Gill 2007 & 2008) permeates the magazines positioning of Liz, evident in the descriptions of her show(ing) "off her amazing body" and choosing to "sunbake topless" (WD, 8 August 2005, p. 119). The repeated reference to her appearance "turning heads" and wowing "onlookers" also conveys a sense of voyeurism and positions her as the subject of the public (arguably male) gaze (Mulvey, 1989). The magazine's framing of Liz as "showing off" and "opting" to go topless could be read as suggesting that she is performing for an audience, and had an awareness and perhaps enjoyed being watched and attracting attention because of her physical appearance. This reading of her behaviour conforms to

the notion of ‘sexual subjectification’ (Gill, 2003 & 2007) and also reflects postfeminist notions of ‘power femininity’ (Gill, 2008; Lazar, 2006). Liz’s reported behaviour could also be read as framing her as seeking approval for her appearance. Both these readings may represent a shift to the newer “self-policing narcissistic gaze” which Gill (2003), in reference to Foucault, suggests has been “internalised to form a new disciplinary regime” (p. 104).

Her appearance or ‘revealed’ body is textually and visually positioned in the article to underline the reading of Liz as a sexually (attr)active woman. But while there is a heavy emphasis on her physical appearance Liz is also framed as a mother through direct reference to her as a “mother” and the picture of her son. Although the reference to her as mother is less emphatic in this article the juxtaposition in the extract above of the reference to her role as mother and “showing off her amazing body” works to bring the dualistic constructions of motherhood together.



Figure 7. Liz Hurley: As sexy as ever. WD, 8 August 2005, p.119

What to wear

The data set contained other textual references to the ‘sexy mother’, all illustrated with photographs of the celebrity mother looking slim and glamorous after the birth of her child. As can be seen with the ‘bikini’ mums magazines honed in on clothing choice in particular as a gauge of whether the mother was considered ‘sexy’ or not. Baggy clothing, for example, was used as a symbol for a ‘frumpy’ or non sexualized appearance;

conversely tight or revealing clothing drew descriptions of mothers as sexy and feminine. Kate Gleeson and Hannah Frith in their appearance research have noted that clothing is an embodied and situated practice (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) and suggest that there are “close interconnections among clothing, femininity and sexuality” (Gleeson & Frith, 2004, p. 112). Articles on celebrity mothers frequently highlighted the importance of clothing choice both in the text and the images used. This section of the analysis will focus on clothing as it is used to represent two celebrity mothers as sexy.

Katie Price: “As soon as I’ve had the baby I’ll be back in my hotpants”

An article about Katie Price, more popularly known in the media as the ‘glamour model’ Jordan, provides one example of how clothing is used to signify sexiness. The article appeared in the WD, 25 April 2005, and took the form of an interview with Katie and her husband under the title “Love, marriage & babies; Jordan’s happy new life” (pp. 26-27). In the article the interviewer asks Katie, in a seemingly playful, possibly ironic way, about her style of dress now that she is pregnant again:

Can we expect to see you in smocks, kaftans and sensible shoes now, Katie?

Katie: I wear exactly what I want to wear - cute little American outfits. I'm not a frumpy girl so I'm proud to show off my bump. As soon as I've had the baby I'll be back in my hotpants, driving around in my new pink car, shouting, "Let's go, girls!"
(p. 26)

Katie’s reply is crowded with references to the ‘Spice Girls’ brand of ‘girl power’ feminism, where outfits were “little” and “cute” and “hotpants” were fashionable symbols of sexual agency (“I wear exactly what I want to wear”) and pride (“I’m proud to show off my bump”) and empowerment through appearance (“I’ll be back in my hotpants, driving around in my pink car, shouting, “Let’s go, girls”). The Spice Girl motif also represents a sexualisation of the female body (Jackson, 2006) which in this context is overlaid onto the maternal body. Katie makes use of these postfeminist discourses constructing the empowered, freely choosing subject, to maintain her sexualised image and distance herself from a more traditional staid asexual construction of motherhood as represented by “smocks, kaftans and sensible shoes”. As her career is based on the sexualised image of the ‘glamour model’ her response could also be read as an opportunity to publicly reinforce this image, despite the emphasis in the article on her role as a mother, perhaps as it holds more commercial power. This reading also conveys a sense that Katie’s neoliberal stance of freedom of choice is, as argued by many feminist writers, also locked within the Foucauldian notion of ‘self governing subjects’ i.e. where women “regulate themselves

without the need for state control or repression” (Gill & Arthurs, 2006, p. 445), and the ‘right’ or appropriate choice is culturally defined (Bordo, 1997 & 2003).

Katie makes it clear in the extract that she has no need to use baggy clothing such as smocks to hide her pregnant stomach as she is proud of her “bump” (WD, 25 April 2005, p. 26). It has been noted in recent research on pregnancy and the maternal body that the word ‘bump’ is used as a more acceptable way of describing the pregnant stomach as it connotes a *small* weight gain that is ‘all baby’, which therefore paradoxically conforms to the slim modern beauty norms (Earle, 2003; Johnson, et al., 2004). This suggests a reading that Katie is pleased to show off her pregnant body in “cute little American outfits” as it conforms to the current (maternal) beauty norm; she has a ‘bump’ i.e. she has not put on weight ‘all over’ and as a consequence can still be described in the article, by the magazine and her husband, as looking “amazing”, “womanly and gorgeous” (WD, 25 April 2005, p. 26).

The gendered colour choice for her car i.e. “pink”, along with her choice of clothing, also represents hyper-girlish femininity (Gleeson & Frith 2004) and could be read as conformity with a postfeminist, neoliberal “celebration of all things feminine” and an acknowledgment of “the power of femininity” in modern society (Lazar, 2006, p. 505). Further, the use of the metaphor of the new car may represent independence but also hints at the commodification of femininity (Bordo 2003) and the “consumer-oriented discourse” found in popular post feminism (Lazar, p. 505). Taken as a whole, Katie’s comments in this extract frame traditional motherhood as unsexy and not glamorous. Her reported choice of clothes in common with her proposed behaviour after her baby is born is more suggestive of her ‘glamour model’ image and provides a post modern construction of femininity that updates and highlights appearance norms for new mothers.

Laura Bailey: From magazine covers to motherhood

A second example of how clothing is used to construct representations of the maternal body as sexy is found in an OK article featuring UK fashion model Laura Bailey who had recently given birth to her first child. This article constructs a less extreme, but no less glamorous, image of how to dress the maternal body soon after childbirth to enhance its appearance as both feminine and ‘sexy’. The article title is lengthy:

From magazine covers to Motherhood LAURA BAILEY after giving birth to baby Luke, the gorgeous model is back in shape and back on her vespa. (OK, 12 April, 2005, p.118).

This sentence works to inform the reader of Laura's 'supermum' status (Choi et al 2005, Ussher, 1989) as she has a career, baby and still looks "gorgeous" (OK, 12 April, 2005, p. 118). And, as in the 'Katie Price' story, a vehicle (this time a Vespa scooter) signifies a reading of independence, fashion and modernity.

The article, again written in the form of an interview, is largely concerned with how Laura managed her appearance both during pregnancy and her reappearance in modelling eight weeks after the birth of her son. It contains many references to clothing to illustrate this. For example, Laura is asked:

How did you manage to remain so stylish during your pregnancy?

I didn't feel any pressure to be stylish and I think it's the case that it's easier and easier to find nice things to wear when you're pregnant. I'm very lucky, though, because I have friends who are designers who made me things - I was very, spoiled with presents during my pregnancy. I was lucky too because I was at the huge stage in the middle of winter when I was bundled up under jumpers and coats.

Did you enjoy getting some new curves?

The thing about your body changing when you're pregnant is that you know it isn't going to last forever. It was nice to be able to wear Vivienne Westwood and other designers who celebrate curves and cleavage. But I'm happy to be almost back to the way I was. It was really fun to go lingerie shopping and go with it and not fight it, but I'm already back to being active and running in the park. I'll be very happy to be back to normal.

(p. 121)

Laura's reflection on her clothing style in pregnancy is illustrated with a photograph of her in evening wear and high heeled, pointed shoes. The caption states "Looking as stylish as ever Laura glams it up at seven months pregnant" (p. 121). Both the interviewer's questions, Laura's responses in the text, and the accompanying image reinforce a more recent construction of the maternal body as glamorous *if* you wear "nice things"; for Laura this included designer garments from Vivienne Westwood and lingerie that celebrated the maternal bodies "curves". Despite her celebration of her curves, a common theme for some women in pregnancy (Bailey, 2001; Longhurst, 2000), Laura qualifies this self representation with reference to being "lucky" to be able to hide her "huge stage" under bulky winter clothes. It has been noted in research that clothing practices are used as a form of appearance management (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) and further that clothing is often used by women to disguise or hide aspects of their bodies which they find shameful (Kwon & Parham, 1994). Robyn Longhurst's (2005) recent qualitative research on pregnant women in New Zealand records that many women in her study felt proud and 'sexy' while pregnant and wore tight clothing to display their body. A minority of women still preferred to cover up as they were too self conscious of their large shape. Laura's rendering of the larger or "huge stage" of late pregnancy invisible through

clothing suggests that although “curves and cleavage” might be “celebrate(d)” some aspects of the normal bodily changes in pregnancy such as a rapidly expanding midriff in late pregnancy is off limits in the fashion business.

In contrast to Laura’s discussion of designer/glamorous clothing in pregnancy the photographs of the post-baby Laura that surround the article frame her in clothing associated with everyday, casual wear rather than designer glamour. It also perhaps reflects her construction of herself as almost “being back to normal” and being “active and running in the park” instead of lingerie shopping. In most of the photographs she models or advertises ‘off the shelf’, but still expensive, clothing available to English readers of the magazine. As it is summer clothing she is modelling the outfits she wears are all strappy or strapless and emphasise her shoulders and her breasts. This clothing along with her strong outward gaze emphasises a representation of Laura as sexy and proud (see Figure 8. below) rather than struggling new mother.



Figure 8. Laura Bailey: The gorgeous model. OK, 12 April 2005, p. 118

This depiction of Laura that is continually reinforced through the text e.g.:

There aren’t many new mothers who would model clothes just eight weeks after childbirth, but just eight weeks after giving birth but Laura Bailey has done exactly that...Laura is already back in the modelling game showing off her enviably svelte figure. (OK, 12 April, 2005, p. 118)

The magazine through this celebratory discourse expresses admiration for her appearance as it recognises that the bodily reality for “many new mothers” is not the same and they would not be comfortable with “showing off” their figures as she has done in the photographs surrounding the article. The phrase “showing off” works to emphasise pleasure and empowerment through clothing and for (re)conforming to the beauty norms (Bordo, 1997; Lazar, 2006). At the same time the statement works to emphasise that ‘svelte’ is the culturally acceptable look for new mothers and therefore worthy of display.

Laura is also described as a breastfeeding mother and while this works to depict Laura as a good/nurturing mother it is highlighted in the magazine as an effective means of reducing her weight e.g. the caption of a photo showing Laura wearing a delicate, strappy floral dress states: “Laura says she lost her baby weight thanks to breastfeeding” (OK, 12 April, 2005, p. 118) Her appearance in the advertised clothing is also described in another caption as “looking fab” (p. 122) and this physical appraisal of her appearance is used in the magazine as the gauge for assessing her ability to cope with her new role as mother:

Juggling mother and modelling is nothing for the woman who was once dubbed “the thinking man’s catwalk kitten as she has many strings to her professional bow.

(p. 118)

This portrayal of Laura as a busy successful, breastfeeding, ‘model’ mother who also manages to look “fab” constructs her as a supermum and perhaps the epitome of modern women where bodily appearance is central (Bordo, 1997; Gill 2008) even for new mothers.

From Fab to Drab

While the OK magazine about Laura reports her use of breast feeding as a means of weight loss for new mothers, it did not spoil the mystique of Laura’s perfect sexy appearance with further, more detailed discussion of the topic. Many researchers and feminist writers such as Ussher (1989) and Young (1990), and at times the media, have discussed the inconsistencies and contradictions in western society around attitudes to breastfeeding. While the ‘breast is best’ mantra is current there is still disapproval around the act of breastfeeding in public; at the same time breasts as a sexual fetish are frequently displayed in the media, but the display of breasts in public to feed a child is frowned on. Although breasts signal womanliness, Young (1990) writes “breasts are a scandal because they shatter the border between motherhood and sexuality” (p. 199). The data set contained a series of articles and references to the actress Katie Holmes that appear to

reflect this negative perspective and give an indication of what is, and what is not, 'sexy' in the magazine construction of motherhood and the maternal body.

Katie Holmes: Struggles with motherhood

Although being 'gorgeous' again weeks after giving birth was a common theme within the data set this did not mark all the stories about celebrities. In the case of Katie Holmes early reports celebrated her "New Body" (WD, 22 May 2006, cover), heralding her as a sexy "hot mama" with an "amazing" post baby body just "three weeks after her daughters birth" (pp. 7-8). Her first formal 'public' reappearance after her daughter's birth is featured on the cover of the magazine (see Figure 9. below), highlighting her swift transformation ("seventeen days after baby") back to the sexy movie star in a photograph which even threatens to overshadow the magazine title.



Figure 9. Katie Holmes: New Body. WD, 22 May 2006, cover

In a similar tone, and one week after the WD cover story, the NI (27 May, 2006) magazine published a picture of Katie in their "Star Watch" pages, see Figure 10. below.

The caption for the photo reads:

Tom's diet plans for Katie are working well. A month after giving birth Tom Cruise' fiancée Katie Holmes looks as if she's never been pregnant. The couple is at Tom's son Connor's Little league game in Beverly Hills
(p. 85).

This brief caption emphasizes Tom Cruise's alleged control over his fiancé which extends to a diet plan to lose the postnatal weight and perhaps suggesting that Katie's appearance is

an important part of her relationship to Tom. But it also highlights Katie's swift 'return to normal' soon after childbirth, to the extent that she "looks like she's never been pregnant".



Figure 10. Katie Holmes: Never been pregnant. NI, 27 May 2006, p. 85.

Despite this apparent glowing approval of Katie's appearance after childbirth the following week the magazine swiftly took a different stance. In response to new paparazzi photographs, the magazine framed Katie as having gone from "fab to drab" (NI, 3 June 2006, cover). This time Katie featured on a magazine cover but framed as an object of derision or pity, as the photograph (see Figure 11. below) highlights with an arrow, indicating the accidental exposure of her unhooked feeding bra. The word "drab" while employing assonance typical in magazine covers (McLoughlin, 2000), also has everyday connotations of dowdiness and can be construed as meaning uninteresting. But the magazine does find the topic newsworthy and Katie's plight or degradation (in the eyes of the media) is further revealed in a two page article. This practice of catching celebrities off-guard and documenting and commenting on normal but less than perfect body parts has become a regular feature of many gossip magazines and is becoming a more common feature in some popular women's magazines (Holmes, 2005). The article inside the magazine is constructed around a series of photographs tracing Katie's 'fall from grace'. The photographs (shown in Figure 11. below) include the cover shot again, plus two photos similar to Figure 10. above, but shot from a different angle, allegedly exposing shameful visible signs of motherhood i.e. stretch marks on her stomach.



Figure 11. Katie Holmes: From fab to drab. NI, 3 June 2006, p. 10

Highlighting arrows are once again used to pinpoint her physical imperfections, which are reiterated in the caption:

Post-baby Katie Holmes looks pale and bedraggled, with her exposed maternity bra in danger of letting her down in public

(NI, 3 June 2006, p.10)

In the main text the magazine further reports a close friend as stating:

'Katie has been very upset about the serious stretch marks that she has been left with – I don't think she was at all prepared for what her body would look like after the birth.'

(p. 11)

And the magazine carries on to report:

And losing her baby weight is not the only problem Katie is struggling with as a new mum.

She has had difficulty wearing her maternity bra and was upset when, during a recent outing, she realised her breast was exposed after she made a mistake in doing up the studs on the bra.

'Katie was always so immaculately put together, and now she knows she is looking bedraggled and tired,' admits one of her oldest friends.

(p. 11)

The stark contrast between the two representations of Katie with only a week between them, together with use of 'revealing' photographs, suggests that motherhood in the media, or at least celebrity motherhood, is only acceptable if it is attractive and "immaculately put together" i.e. showing no visible signs of motherhood. Visible signs of motherhood such as stretch marks or a physical reminder of the mechanics of breast feeding through the visibility of an unhooked feeding bra are deemed abject and a sign of degradation and

drabness. Exposure of the breast by celebrities is frequently constructed as alluring and sexy but apparently not if it also reveals a feeding bra, as this may bring up our social unease with the functionality of the lactating breast (Millsted & Frith, 2003; Young, 1990).

In past magazines Katie was typically represented as young and gorgeous but in this edition her less than perfect appearance is seen as a statement of her ability as a mother, reflected in the article title “Katie Holmes struggles with motherhood” (NI, 3 June 2006, p. 10). The extracts from the article could be read as a sympathetic account of her struggles and her distress. The images used, however, tell a different story. Katie is abruptly no longer pictorially constructed as “slim and gorgeous” (WD, 22 May 2006, p. 8), these later photographs and the captions convey a less than benevolent ‘exposure’ of her newly maternal body. The normal physical signs of motherhood i.e. “stretch marks & feeding bras” (NI, 3 June 2006, cover) are deemed abject and unacceptable for public exposure. In this representation motherhood is not sexy but physically damaging and unattractive. At the same time, Katie’s reported lack of ability to cope, and the notion of letting herself down in public are also at odds with the discourses around self management and self improvement historically linked with both traditional femininity (Bartky, 1990), and neoliberal ‘new’ femininities (Gill & Arthurs, 2006; McRobbie, 2004; Walkerdine, 2004). These discourses are particularly prevalent within popular magazine culture (Bordo, 2003; Upton & Han, 2003).

The exposure of the physical reality of motherhood in this article resonates with much qualitative research with new mothers which indicates that many new mothers are shocked by the “mismatch between ... expectations and the reality of the motherhood” (Woollett & Phoenix, 1991, p. 44). Katie’s “struggles” are, within such research, common to new mothers and construed as normal reactions to a difficult time in life not a sign of failure (Miller, 2005). In this article from the data set, the decline in Katie’s public presentation, as signified by the exposure of her stretch marks and feeding bra, is constructed as an individual failure, causing emotional distress and punished socially by loss of status i.e. from fab to drab. This position is possibly best summed up in the caption for a montage of two small *pre*-baby photographs of Katie at the end of the article:

A year ago gorgeous Katie had the world at her feet, jetting around the globe with one of Hollywood’s hottest actors and wearing a dazzling smile.
(NI, 3 June 2006, p. 11).

Chapter Summary

The articles examined in this chapter suggest that the construction of mothers as sexual beings is being promoted in popular women's magazines. Although at times the traditional construction of mothers as 'madonna' i.e. asexual and child focused was used to depict mothers, there were other elements in the articles such as photographs, captions, or headlines which contradicted this image or opened it up to include sexuality.

The overt or implied sexuality or 'sexiness' displayed by the mothers in these articles largely related to the magazines interpretation of their appearance and behaviour. Mothers were portrayed in a sexualised manner if they were slim, considered to be confident of their bodies and dressed either glamorously or wearing revealing clothing – often the bikini. The maternal body was praised as 'sexy' if it showed no taint of abject aspects of motherhood such as excess weight, stretch marks, or the mechanics of breast feeding. The visible signs of maternity if not erased were expected to be hidden. Visibility of the abject maternal body or visible signs of motherhood such as feeding bras and stretch marks were treated with scorn and the woman's status as a 'yummy mummy' was quickly jeopardised.

In all these representations the mother's appearance took precedence over her ability as a mother. At the same time acceptable appearance or degraded appearance was seen as a measure of the woman's ability to cope with motherhood. A sexy appearance was taken as evidence that the women had 'got back to normal' and reassumed their role as a celebrity or strong empowered individual.

CHAPTER FOUR

HEALTHY MOTHERS: “TRIM, TAUT AND TERRIFIC, AND HAPPY AND HEALTHY”

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the common focus on postnatal bodies with postfeminist discourses conflating of sexual appeal and proudly displayed slim bodies. Within such a focus on the body magazines in the data set also commonly mobilised a health discourse. Sometimes references to health were brief and were nested within larger articles about celebrities, but at times the mother’s and/or her baby’s health was the main focus. There were two noteworthy aspects of references to health¹. First, the traditional notions of mothers as guardians of their families’ health, even in utero, were frequently used to justify magazine comments on appearance or mother’s behaviours. Paradoxically this often butted up against discourses about women taking charge of their own bodies that strongly emerged in second wave feminism and later appropriated in neoliberal discourses of self management and self improvement.

The second aspect of interest relates to the entanglement of health and appearance discourses in the magazine articles. It must be acknowledged that the articles in the data set were chosen for their focus on the maternal body which enhanced the likelihood of finding such confluence. However the tendency to conflate health and appearance in women’s magazines has been noted by other researchers. For example, Barnett (2006) noted “some scholars have suggested that while women’s magazines seek to promote health, they in fact, promote only body image” (p. 3). Within the data set appearance and health and how to improve both, were often inextricably interwoven. Notably psychological concerns around appearance and self esteem in relation to weight issues predominated over other physical health issues. Even in relation to obesity, physical health seemed to be glossed over in favour of appearance issues.

In a similar manner to the previous chapter, presentation of analysis is preceded by an examination of relevant literature concerning constructions of health and motherhood.

¹ In this analysis I will be using the current World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of health which was adopted in 1946 and has not been amended since 1948. The WHO definition of health is: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (2003).

The analytical section examines both celebrity and readers' stories in which mothers 'health' is variably constructed in relation to physical well-being of mother and baby, and emotional 'well-being' of mothers

Construction of health in motherhood

Women's magazines are said to have become a "productive source of health information" (Kirkman, 2001, p. 751) and as such they cover a wide range of health issues either directly through advice pieces, letters pages, human interest stories, or less directly through advertisements for products to help maintain health and well-being such as dietary supplements or weight loss and exercise programmes (Madden & Chamberlain, 2004). American research suggests that magazines come a "close second" after doctors as a means of keeping informed on health matters (Where Women, 2000, p. 10). Alongside women's magazines, other key sites for the dissemination of medical advice or information are government media campaigns and the publication of the results of research through press releases (Where Women). Kirkman (2001) notes that 'research' news is now a regular feature in some women's magazines.

Research on Weight and Motherhood

Reviews of medical literature about the health aspects of pregnancy weight gain and postnatal weight retention, both crucial aspects of maternal body image, suggest the issue of maternal weight gain is paradoxical and complex (Abrams, Altman & Pickett, 2000; Tooke Crowell, 1995). Recommendations about appropriate weight in motherhood have varied up and down over the last century as new research and risks are assessed, and as society's attitudes have changed (Tooke Crowell). Researchers in health psychology also point out that language used in medical text books to describe physical functioning has been found "to be ideologically loaded" (Lyons, 2000). Similarly, it is suggested the increasing focus on, and pathologising of, maternal weight and women's health by medical researchers is also not value free. For example, Manchester Metropolitan University recently issued a press release about the research findings from a study on pregnant women and diet. They found that many women in the study were eating fewer calories than recommended and often less than non pregnant women. The press release includes a comment from the author, Dr Emma Derbyshire:

“the evidence is worrying and suggests some women are still more focused on not gaining weight than on properly nourishing themselves and their babies”

(Unique study, 2006)

Another example is contained in a Television New Zealand media release concerning a recent, large, American study on ‘gestational’ or pregnancy weight gain and preterm birth. It includes comments from the research team which reflects both on the ambiguity of much of this area of research and the power of the public health discourse in society:

“The robust association between low (weight) gain and spontaneous preterm birth suggests that in this era of appropriate concern over an obesity epidemic, we must strike careful balance between excessive and inadequate weight gain”

(Pregnancy weight gain, 2006)

Findings from studies on weight retention after childbirth suggest ‘excess’ weight can provoke considerable distress in new mothers but the researchers solutions are frequently based on assisting weight loss rather than targeting psychosocial issues. For example, Walker (1998), a researcher in health promotion to women of child bearing age, reflects on the role of weight concerns in our society:

“it appears that motherhood, even in the early months of post partum (2.5 to 6 months), does not fully shield women from the normative discontent about weight pervasive in the larger society” (p. 41)

Walker (1998) acknowledges that it is normal for new mothers to be heavier after childbirth and talks of the critical role of society in weight loss issues. But her solution to this issue and the distress it causes is to suggest targeting mothers’ weight management after child birth. Walker stresses this should be an “essential” part of postnatal care, although she does recognize that weight management should be in line with the mothers’ goals (p. 41).

Health and Motherhood

Comments from researchers such as those discussed above, may be viewed as problematic as they not only further medicalise pregnancy and childbirth (Longhurst, 1999; Lupton, 1996 & 2003; Ussher 1996) but also emphasise and further pathologise women’s weight as a health issue. In this case not just for the mother’s health, but potentially that of the baby. At the same time researchers do not provide clear, unequivocal evidence of how to solve the proposed ‘problem’, rather they imply through

the use of medicalised and scientific discourses that despite these uncertainties careful monitoring of weight is necessary. This adds to the increasing emphasis in Western society on the importance of self surveillance and self control which are especially prominent in relation to women in discourses on weight control and diet (Bartky 1990; Bordo, 2003). Further it has been noted that self surveillance in relation to diet and food consumption has come to represent a moral goodness; there are 'good' foods and 'bad' foods, those who eat too much are often vilified while those who are slender are generally applauded (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Bordo, 2003; Lupton 1996 & 2003; Madden & Chamberlain 2004).

Researchers in both the sociological and psychological aspects of health have also recognised a growth in the media of discourses of 'risk' which focus on the body, particularly in the area of diet and health, and the promotion of individual responsibility for health (Lyons, 2000; Lupton 2003). Lupton (1995) writes "disease is no longer a misfortune, all of us have the potential to be 'totally healthy'" (p.71). In most societies women have a double responsibility of not only caring for themselves but also their children (Barnett, 2006; Kirkman, 2001; Lupton, 1995; Madden & Chamberlain, 2004). This is particularly so when women are pregnant and breastfeeding, a time when medical, scientific, risk and moral discourses around diet and behaviour abound (Longhurst, 1999; Lupton 1996). This aspect of motherhood has come under increasing focus both in the medical literature and popular culture; now pregnant and breastfeeding women in these roles who do not eat 'healthily' are seen as selfishly putting their child at 'risk' as well as themselves (Longhurst, 1999; Lupton, 1996; Zahorick, 2000). Many commentators and researchers, such as Lupton (1996), have noted that 'eating properly' has become aligned with morality. She suggests that mothers who eat 'unhealthy' food are therefore seen as morally lacking and positioned alongside those mothers who continue to drink or smoke.

Food/health/beauty Triplex

Deborah Lupton (1996) in her exploration of food and the body has proposed that society currently subscribes to a food/health/beauty triplex. This triplex represents the popular discourse that having "the appropriate diet produces a healthy body, which in turn is a slim, attractive, youthful, sexual body" (p.137). Thus a slim, attractive body is a signifier of health and effective self discipline that "symbolises one's inherent morality" (p. 585). Current popular culture demands that for women the 'attractive' body is slim

and toned (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003; Lupton 1996) which means that for many new mothers their body after child birth is problematic where it is heavier than the pre-pregnant weight, un-toned or stretched out of shape. Under current attractiveness norms this culturally abject body, although 'developmentally' normal, should therefore be taken under control in order to achieve both health and regain physical desirability.

Numerous commentators and researchers note that health has become a personal responsibility; a notion which works in conjunction with appearance discourses framing women's bodies as a 'project', with the result that our bodies are now our personal 'projects' in relation to the maintenance of both health and an attractive appearance (Barnett, 2006; Bordo, 2003;). The 'work' that individuals need to carry out on their bodies to achieve the desired results not only involves healthy diets but also exercise (Duncan, 1994; Lloyd, 1996; Mutrie & Choi, 2000). Lupton (1995) writes "'fitness' and 'health' have generally become synonymous in everyday discourse" (p. 143). She suggests that "fitness activities" have come to represent self transformation, finding the "true fit, lean self" that has been hidden "beneath layers of flesh", and gaining control of the body imbues a sense of both mastery and agency (p.143). This discourse suggests that fitness improves not only physical but also mental health. And as with a healthy diet, fitness has come to be viewed in a moral sense as a 'good', and generally applauded as a means to weight loss and increases in health (Lupton, 1995).

There is wide acceptance in medical literature and popular culture that exercise is beneficial to both body and mind (Prichard & Tiggemann 2005). For example, at appropriate levels, exercise can decrease the risk of heart disease and diabetes and it can reduce depression and anxiety and increase self esteem and psychological well being (Mutrie & Choi, 2000). It has been noted that there is a growing emphasis on health and fitness and this is reflected and promoted in the media, particularly in magazines (Duncan, 1994; Tiggemann & Williamson, 2000). However fitness or physical activity is also promoted as a way of achieving the toned body that is so desired in modern western culture. Lupton (1995) writes that the desire to be attractive is frequently used by health educators to motivate people to control their diet and also exercise regularly. Researchers such as Mutrie & Choi (2000) have observed that because of these associations exercise too has become equated with health and beauty, such that if someone is in "good shape", i.e. slim and toned they are also seen to be attractive, healthy, and high in self esteem as the body is testament that they 'care about themselves'. Conversely, deviation from the cultural norms of the body as 'slender and toned' is often negatively framed as personal

failure, letting yourself go, being out of control (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004). This simple, dualistic concept of personal appearance also perhaps implies the notion of personal choice; if you choose to eat healthily and exercise you will look and feel great.

The ‘Problematic’ Maternal Body

These twinned discourses of health and beauty are particularly problematic when applied to pregnant women or new mothers whose body shape is by design of nature out of step with modern norms of feminine beauty. This paradox is not overlooked in current representations of pregnant women and new mothers in the media and is being increasingly targeted. For example, Dworkin and Wachs (2004) analysis of “Shape Fit Pregnancy”, an American magazine whose title is self explanatory, describe the numerous methods that these women are encouraged to use in order to maintain both health and beauty throughout pregnancy and into motherhood. Exercise is framed positively in all stages of maternity - as helping in childbirth, helping the new mother ‘bounce back’ after birth and in coping with the rigours of family life. Within this magazine there is *no* excuse for ‘letting yourself go’.

A reading of the material in the current data set suggests a similar representation of the maternal body in relation to diet, weight and health. Mothers who had lost weight were often simply described as, for example, “looking trim and healthy” (WD, 8 August 2005, p. 121). Mothers who were very thin or “looked less than glowing” could be described as “hurting and in pain” and rumoured to be suffering from poor psychological health for example, PND (WD, 22 May 2006, p. 15). Those who had retained some weight were framed as having ‘overeaten’ or eaten the ‘wrong’ foods when pregnant and were depicted as being unhappy about their weight. These negative descriptions illustrate both the continuous monitoring of the maternal body and a moralising tone that frames the maternal body as problematic and in need of control. As well, celebrity mothers themselves are at times encouraged to comment on the issues. For example one celebrity, who is described as looking “amazing” after having her baby, is reported to remark that some women “grow really fat” when they are pregnant and “stop looking after themselves” (WD, 25 April 2005, p. 26) which adds to the condemnation of many women’s bodily experiences as mothers. Alongside the conflation of health and weight noted previously, current popular discourse acts to position the maternal body not only as problematic and in need of ‘monitoring’ but also in need of ‘work’ in order to bring it back into shape, regaining

physical attractiveness and by association health. This body work is framed as beginning with the pregnancy and continuing after the birth of the baby, a theme explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

Analyses and Discussion

The analysis of the construction of the ‘healthy’ mum begins with an exploration of how mothers are represented as responsible for both their families’ health as well as their own. The analysis then moves on to examine examples of articles which focused on the mother’s health alone. The mother’s health in these articles was used as the justification for disciplining of, or caring for the maternal body in order to (re)gain the slim, trim ideals of feminine beauty.

Nurturing mothers: Pregnancy

A number of celebrities included in the data set credited ‘bouncing back’ into their normal shape to a healthy diet and exercise in pregnancy. However, it was noticeable that within the data set there were no in-depth articles about diet and exercise in pregnancy unless it related to something newsworthy in a celebrity’s appearance. Monitoring of weight gains assumed the key focus such that gaining ‘too much’ or ‘too little’ appeared to be newsworthy and received more column inches. These articles made use of health and well being discourses to justify their commentary and the focus fell on the pregnant celebrity’s food intake and in turn the well-being of their unborn child.

Britney Spears: ‘Let herself go’

Some celebrities were criticised in articles for gaining too much weight; for example, Britney Spears was described as having an “incredible 23kg weight gain” in her first pregnancy which “reduced the singer to tears” (NZWW, 26 September 2005, p. 102). A more recent article adopted a similar construction in its focus on Britney’s second pregnancy.

In this short article Britney is described as being “so exhausted by her second pregnancy that she’s let herself go” (WD, 21 August 2006, p. 113). ‘Letting herself go’ is not a positive comment as it represents failure to maintain a socially acceptable

appearance and perhaps 'lack of self control'. To reinforce this, the article is accompanied by a picture (see figure 12 below) of pregnant Britney at the shops with "stains on her top" (p.113). Britney is said to be self conscious about her size and is quoted as "moaning, 'I'm not supposed to be this huge pregnant superstar'" (p. 113). The use of the adjective "moaning" does not reflect a sympathetic tone, and Britney's comment perhaps works to further denigrate her with the audience. Although her weight gain is not quantified in the article her own description of herself as 'huge' reinforces this reading. This juxtaposition of text and photograph works to suggest that a large weight gain in pregnancy has negative implications which are not only evident in the woman's body shape but also can be seen in a downturn in her general appearance; large in this case may be read as abject.



Figure 12. Britney Spears: Let herself go. WD 21 August 2006, p. 113

Britney's relatively unkempt appearance as she left a shop is constructed by the magazine to be an indicator of her health, an increasingly common interpretation in Western society (Lupton, 1996). This construction is underlined by the magazine's comments about her diet; she is described as eating the 'wrong' food, junk food and not enough vegetables, which are framed as not only bad for her but *also* her baby:

Britney resolved to improve her diet after her health scare, when doctors advised her junk food was not good for the baby.

"She wasn't eating enough vegetables" her friend says. "Britney is determined to stay healthy ... But she's craving weird food. She munches through tubes of Sean's organic baby biscuits."

(WD, 21 August 2006, p. 113)

Britney's portrayal in this article is not representative of the socially approved, healthy, fit 'mother to be' and as such she does not conform to 'the good mother' image. It could be read that her nutritionally poor diet of "junk food" has led her to gain a 'large' amount of weight which has distressed her and put her baby's health in danger. The comment that she's trying to do better but "she's craving weird food" and eats large amounts of it, functions to imply that her eating is out of control and, although she has switched from junk food to organic, she is eating too much of it. Cravings or eating unusual things in pregnancy is often constructed as normative but in this extract it is constructed as abnormal. Alternative readings of this text might be that she lacks knowledge about healthy food, or that she is selfishly choosing to disregard the 'expert' or "doctors" advice to satisfy her own cravings. All these readings work within a 'healthy eating' discourse that positions eating junk food or too much food as the cause of weight gains and ill health. When applied to pregnancy Britney's eating behaviour is doubly problematic as in modern society it is considered not only unhealthy for her and her unborn baby, but at the same time renders her unattractive (Lupton, 1995 & 1996) and the subject of scorn.

While the health concerns about gaining large amounts of weight in pregnancy were targeted in articles held in the data set, there were also articles which focused on the issue of being underweight. The health issues of being underweight when pregnant, a notion which is against normative expectations, was more clearly and explicitly spelt out in these articles. Perhaps this is due to 'anorexic' celebrities being currently more newsworthy or topical (Wykes & Gunter, 2005), and in some way more glamorous or 'edgy' than overweight ones; and 'being too thin' is associated with high end fashion models while obesity is a common problem in the general public. Angelina Jolie, for example, like Victoria Beckham, has often been rumoured in the popular press to have eating disorder problems. She came under the spotlight once again in more than one magazine in the data set where 'concerns' were raised about her gaining too little weight in her first pregnancy.

Angelina Jolie: 'Gain weight for the sake of (your) unborn baby'

The NZWW (6 March, 2006) included a brief but detailed article that was devoted exclusively to a discussion about how little weight Angelina had gained so far in her pregnancy. The article states that Angelina is "finally giving in to her doctors orders" to put on

more weight (p. 9). This statement implies that she has been resistant and perhaps deliberately tried not to put on weight. The magazine reports that “health professionals” have “urged” her to “gain weight for the sake of the baby”; this emotive language works to underscore the idea that Angelina has been willful in not gaining weight and also suggests an element of selfishness. The construction positions Angelina as outside the traditional feminine role of the ‘good mother’ who is selfless and places her babies health above her own desires (Brown et al. 1997; Ex & Jansens, 2000) and, as such, works to frame her as morally suspect (Lupton, 1996).

The article also includes details of Angelina’s age, weight gains at two prenatal checkups, number of week’s gestation and a calculation of how much weight she should have gained at this stage of her pregnancy. Such detail positions the magazine as expert, enhanced by its use of ‘facts’ to ‘objectify’ their arguments. The magazine uses a risk discourse to spell out the possible dangers of low weight gain in pregnancy, writing:

it may cause health problems for Ange in her final trimester, as well as putting her baby at risk of being earlier and smaller than it should be

(NZWW, 6 March, 2006, p. 9)

The medicalised language and risk discourse (e.g. “trimester” and “at risk”) also adds to the positioning of the magazine as expert and an authority with regard to pregnancy and weight gain. The sense of concern around weight gain in pregnancy and talk of ‘risk’ mobilises current medico-scientific discourses which scrutinize women’s health behaviour particularly in relation to their eating habits (Bordo, 2003; Lupton, 1996; Madden & Chamberlain, 2004). One of the ways that this medical language functions is to frame the mother as unknowledgeable. Alternatively the magazine text cited could be read as suggesting that Angelina is more concerned with her own appearance than with her baby’s health; a framing of her that many readers would be familiar with given her regular construction as being obsessed with her bodily appearance in popular media.

The Angelina and Britney articles both illustrate the contradictions within the popular magazine discourses around the pregnant maternal body. The ‘Britney Spears’ article frames Britney’s appearance and size as socially important and as an indicator of health, also constructing her lack of concern about appearance as, inadvertently, affecting her baby’s health. In contrast, the ‘Angelina’ article suggests that Angelina’s over concern about her appearance is damaging to both herself and her unborn child. Both articles, however, reflect the notion that the pregnant body is increasingly subject to public and medical scrutiny (Longhurst, 1999; Lupton, 1996), and position these pregnant celebrities

as being in need of expert guidance in relation to weight gain and diet. Along with other women, these ‘pregnant women’ are being scrutinized in the media and being defined by their weight – ‘too much’ or ‘too little’, lacking control or too controlled. Under such scrutiny, these women are framed as unhealthy and failing to care for their unborn child rendering them morally questionable.

Nurturing mothers: Post-baby

The magazine’s ‘health’ monitoring of women as ‘nurturing’ mothers, who through their own diet were held responsible for their babies health, extended past pregnancy to incorporate postnatal ‘care’ such as breastfeeding. Within the data set the focus at times related to mothers who wanted to lose weight while feeding their babies. The fusion of the weight loss and breastfeeding issues can create a tension in neo-liberal discourses of femininity as breast feeding is essentially a baby or other focused behaviour whilst weight loss is generally held as an individualistic self focused behaviour. Society, through ante natal education, the popular media, medical institutions and government campaigns, promotes the widely accepted credo ‘breast is best’ for the health of the baby. Although there is a popular notion that breastfeeding promotes weight loss after childbirth, women’s experiences in practice vary widely (Zahorick, 2000). As efforts to lose weight while breastfeeding may compromise a mother’s ability nourish her baby this sets up tension between the ‘ideal’ or ‘good’ mother discourse, where care for the baby is given priority over the mother’s needs, the medicalised ‘breast is best discourse’, and the gendered appearance discourses where the ideal woman is slim (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003).

The interplay between the ‘good mother’ (breastfeeding), health and beauty discourses was a strong feature in weekly ‘weight loss’ columns written by former New Zealand netball representative and now television celebrity, April Ieremia. April’s (also known in the magazines as April Bruce) weekly column focused around her use of the SureSlim breastfeeding diet. April’s efforts to lose weight after childbirth were also referred to in other articles included in the data set. Extracts from April’s weekly columns and an article about her which relate to health are the first focus in this section. An article featuring Geri Halliwell is also included in this section. The Geri Halliwell article provides a contrasting account of the ties between appearance and the mother and baby’s well-being to the ‘slow but steady’, diet company approach undertaken by April Ieremia.

April Ieremia: “How I beat the baby blues”

April Ieremia acknowledged in her first weekly column that she was desperate to lose the weight she had gained in her second pregnancy *but* she wanted to continue to breastfeed her son at the same time. She reports she had been keen to lose weight as soon as possible after the birth of her second child and did not want to wait until she had finished breast feeding as she had done with her first. April relates how she tried to diet and exercise on her own “the minute I got home” (NZWW, 9 May 2005, p. 8) after the birth of her baby. However she reports she found she was unable to diet and exercise as well as care for her two small children on her own. She positions herself as the good mother as she describes her children were “healthy and happy” but her efforts to lose weight and get fit were a failure and were a danger to her health and she describes herself as “knackered”.

The word ‘knackered’ refers to tiredness, and can be used to denote physical as well as mental exhaustion. It interesting to note that in a separate article (3 April, 2006, pp. 10-11) April reveals that during this first three months after the birth of her second child, she suffered from PND. This article was published concurrently with her final weight loss column (which is to be discussed in chapter 5). The timing of this article to coincide with the April’s final weight loss column in which she proudly announces she has achieved her weight loss goal is curious. Perhaps the concurrence of these stories could be read as implying that weight loss after childbirth brings improved psychological health. The combination of the two headings, i.e. “Goal! April’s 35kg loss” and “SHOCK SECRET ‘How I beat the baby blues’” (NZWW, 3 April 2006, cover), around the photograph of April and her children (see Figure. 13 below) could be read as suggesting a relationship between that weight loss and April beating the “baby blues” or PND.



Figure 13. April: Baby blues. NZWW, 3 April 2006, cover
(Image courtesy of New Zealand Woman's Weekly)

The article itself is headed “our slim-line STAR” and has the title “The hidden pain behind April’s smile”(p. 10), which suggests she ‘put on a brave face’ and tried to cope, a reaction commonly found in PND research (Nicholson, 1999; Ussher, 1989). But once again these two headings imply a connection between weight and psychological wellbeing. However a more careful, detailed reading of this PND article suggests that the two were largely separate issues. For example the article recounts how April took a while to recognize her ‘symptoms’ as depression, and how with some advice from her Plunket nurse and actively “taking time out from the kids”, “getting rest” etc, she was able to get the PND “under control” and “felt much better” (NZWW, 3 April, 2006, p. 11). The article states:

With her depression under control, April was suddenly given a chance to tackle another big challenge – her weight
(p. 11)

The magazine’s association of depression with weight as “another big challenge” perhaps suggests, however, that weight loss is held as equally important. The maternal body is depicted as overweight and “fat” in this article and April reports that she “blew up like a hot air balloon” (p. 12). This strong desire to lose weight coincided with an approach from SureSlim to try “its weight-loss programme for breast-feeding mums, and New Zealand Woman’s Weekly asked her to write a column” so “she knew the time was right” as she stated that breastfeeding alone wasn’t helping her slim down (p. 11).

Throughout the article April is positioned as the good mother e.g. “I wanted to do the best I could for the little one”, “the children were more important to me than anything else” and the caption to two photographs of April and her children reads “Family fun with Xanda and Atlanta – and April wants two more” (p.11). This depiction of her helps to sanction her efforts to lose weight with SureSlim while still breastfeeding as it suggests that she would not do anything that would harm her children. The SureSlim diet is portrayed as allowing her to nurture and care for her children while at the same time allowing April to get her unruly maternal body back to her “pre-baby shape”.

In her first weekly ‘weight loss’ column April states her personal goal:

By 2006, I’m determined to be taut, trim and terrific, as well as happy and healthy.

(NZWW, 9 May 2005, p. 9).

The first part of her statement accords with current beauty norms and suggests appearance is her prime rationale for weight loss, and reflects the notion of the female body as an ongoing project (Bordo, 2003; Chapkis, 1989) even after childbirth (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004). The second part of her goal statement (“as well as happy and healthy”) could be read more as an afterthought, included perhaps to justify the effort and investment in the weight loss programme (NZWW, 9 May 2005, p. 9). Alternatively this juxtaposition of appearance with psychological and physical health reflects the common conflation of beauty and health which is held to “reinforce(s) an aesthetic of health based on physical attractiveness” (Blood, 2005, p. 77). It also reproduces the “feeling good means looking good” slogan commonly found in women’s magazines and which is said to account for “real health issues” being “subordinated to beauty issues” (Duncan, 1994, p. 51). The timeframe April sets to accomplish this transformation, nearly a year, also positions her as a sensible mother who will not put her own or her child’s health at risk through a ‘crash diet’; particularly as she had previously learned this could lead to exhaustion possibly compromising her own health.

The SureSlim diet is frequently referenced in the weekly columns as safe and healthy e.g.:

This programme is designed for breast-feeding mums by nutritionists because I want to continue breast-feeding Xanda for at least six months

(NZWW, 9 May 2005, p. 9)

April’s use of the words “programme”, “designed” and “nutritionists” connote a rational, scientific diet rather than a diet ‘fad’. Her more colloquial language “mums” works to normalize the diet as being suitable for ‘ordinary’ mothers and perhaps also

reinforces the notion of herself as a caring ‘normal’ mother who wants to (and chooses too) nurture her baby in the healthiest way available. This depiction of both April and the diet company continues even when, because she had gained weight, she switches from the Breastfeeding diet to the more rigid “Quick Loss Programme”, where the food amount “practically halves”, (NZWW, 26 September 2005, p. 30). April refers to this switch as “time to bring in the big guns”; the use of the battle metaphor reinforces the notion of dieting as a fight against excess weight, but also suggests that more powerful ammunition in the sense of a stricter diet is necessary to effect weight loss.

April refers to another mother using this diet which works to justify her own decision and protect her image as caring for her baby’s health. She writes:

Sarah’s ability to shed the kilos and our similar predicaments makes her my idol. Until recently, I thought Sarah was on the same programme as me but, in fact, she was doing Quick Loss. This amazed me because I wondered how she could have enough food to do everything she had to and still breast-feed. Sarah said she was ready to stop breast-feeding when she began Quick Loss but her breast milk got better so she kept feeding until her little one had enough at 15 months”

(NZWW, 26 September 2005, p. 30)

Sarah is depicted as being able to continue being the ‘good’ mother guarding the health of her child by continuing to breast feed while on the new diet. Not only did Sarah nurse her baby until it was “15 months old”, but her “breast milk got better”. These comments plus the repeated use of “her little one” denotes a caring mother who prioritises her baby’s health, and she is someone who April looks up to as a role model i.e. “my idol”. However, April’s choice of the word “predicaments” to describe the desire to lose weight *and* breast feed, suggests a note of tension. The word “predicament” means being in a dilemma, mess or ‘in a corner’ and its use could be read as summing up the situation that both April and Sarah, as modern mothers, find themselves; that is mothers, celebrity and non celebrity, who, while unwilling to compromise their child’s health, acknowledge that appearance is important to them. It also suggests that there is pressure to lose weight quickly to conform to increasingly stringent cultural appearance norms. Although April is a local celebrity her colloquial language and her frequent references in her columns to other ‘mums’ such as ‘Sarah’ as inspiration and support, works to normalise this desire/need to lose weight after childbirth. However, April’s weight loss method allowed her to fulfil the social sanctioned dual roles of nurturing mother and slim, attractive woman in a healthy way that ensured her own and her baby’s wellbeing.

Geri Halliwell: 'Geri Geri slim again'

In contrast to April's story, a feature on Geri Halliwell constructed weight loss as posing a risk to the breastfed baby's health. Geri featured in the previous "sexy mothers" chapter where, in a separate article, she is framed as baby focused, and where she stated she was not concerned about weight loss. In this later article, under the headline "**She's Geri, Geri slim again**" Geri is described (in the sub heading) as having "dropped a whopping 19.2kg in four weeks" (WD, 21 August 2006, p. 23). The word 'whopping' is a strong adjective and conveys the idea that Geri has lost a large amount of weight. The paparazzi photographs accompanying the article (see Figure 14 below) show Geri getting out of a taxi and running down the street laughing. She is dressed in jeans and a blouse and arguably looks 'happy and healthy'.



Figure 14. Geri Halliwell: Slim again. WD, 21 August 2006, p. 23.

Contradictorily the article is entirely focused on health concerns in relation to Geri's diet and its impact on the health of her breast fed baby, although there is a clue in the close up of the box of "macrobiotic" food that Geri is carrying. The entire article is shown below:

Health experts are worried that breastfeeding mum Geri Halliwell could put her baby at risk with her extreme dieting.

Geri, 33, has wasted no time in trying to get her figure back after the birth of daughter Bluebell Madonna in May, and has already lost an incredible 19.2kg.

The former Spice Girl dropped the weight just four weeks after giving birth thanks to her strict macrobiotic diet, which involves cutting out all meat and dairy products.

But dieticians advise that breastfeeding mothers eat more, not less, to keep their energy up and ensure that the baby doesn't miss out on vital nutrients.

They warn that poor breast milk can lead to poor growth for the baby.

Friends say Geri – who has admitted suffering from anorexia and bulimia in the past – would never do anything to harm her little girl.

“She is the queen of diets,” says one source, “but probably doesn't realize this could be damaging.” (WD, 21 August 2006, p. 23)

Lupton (1996) holds that infant feeding has become highly medicalised and “the infant's body becomes a symbol of a mother's ability to feed and care for it well.” (p. 42), a notion tied to the traditional gender role of women as nurturer. In the article shown above the use of medicalised discourses (“health experts”, “vital nutrients” “anorexia and bulimia”, “dieticians advise”) and risk discourses (“could put her baby at risk”, “they warn that....can lead to”) suggests a similar construction although in this case in the absence of the baby, the mother's body is used to comment on her baby's wellbeing. Geri is depicted as naïve and lacking knowledge e.g. she “probably doesn't realize this could be damaging” but also a good mother “would never do anything to harm her little girl”. These medicalised discourses of risk and the discourse of naivety work to justify the article's focus on Geri and her efforts to lose weight, but also perhaps make the article more newsworthy (Blood, 2005). But they also reflect a traditional construction of women as in need of expert guidance. Feminist analysis suggests experts are considered necessary to help guide the ‘weak’ undisciplined woman towards gaining control of her body (Bordo, 2003; Malson, 1997; Ussher, 2006).

The twin pressures to be a ‘good mother’ as well as regaining a slim body shape represents a double bind for breast feeding mothers in western society where good health is equated with the slim body. As such the article reflects this tension as it presents comment on Geri's weight loss (“lost an incredible 19.2kg”) which could be read as praise, alongside a moralizing tone around the risk to her baby (“poor growth for the baby”) caused by her “extreme dieting”(WD, 21 August 2006, p. 23). The reference to past eating disorders and describing her as the “queen of diets” is suggestive of an obsession with weight and appearance being resurrected post birth, and works to pathologise Geri's behaviour rather than criticizing social pressures.

Construction of Geri's weight loss is at odds with that of April Ieremia. April's investment in a ‘slow but steady’ diet designed by experts is praised as she is able to

achieve the twin modern feminine roles of the good mother and the healthy slim attractive mother. In contrast Geri is claimed to be risking her baby's health through her drastic diet and is constructed as naïve and possibly obsessive. Both have achieved a socially sanctioned slender body but Geri is treated as foolish and morally suspect through the magazine's focus on the risk to her baby's health caused by her rush to "get her figure back after the birth of her daughter". Both suggest a more traditional framing of women as nurturer which is compatible to modern notions of self care through weight management but only if the woman invests in the 'right' kind of diet. In this way careful weight management for appearance purposes can be legitimized through health discourses as a morally appropriate and sensible way to remedy the abject maternal body.

Post-Baby Weight

Analysis of the data set showed other instances where the focus on weight and appearance in relation to the *postnatal* maternal body was couched within a 'health and well-being' discourse, but not in relation to nurturing the child. A number of articles referred to health issues around weight retention after child birth and how it affected a mother's well-being but also used health to justify criticism or praise of women's appearance. Many articles relating to health and well-being after childbirth were, as might be expected of magazine culture, often accompanied by before and after photographs which were illustrative of the story being told (Duncan, 1994). This pre – post device may work to reinforce the popular notion that appearance signifies 'health' in the broad sense of both physical and psychological well being i.e. feeling good about yourself (Blood, 2005; Lupton, 1996). The notion of 'look good feel good' a common motto in magazines and society (Blood, 2005; Lupton, 2003) is a focus in the following analyses. Typically, magazines constructed being overweight or seriously underweight as unhealthy, underlining the fusion of appearance and health. Articles about Kate Winslet and Kate Hudson serve to illustrate how the magazines used the size and appearance of the maternal body to infer a level of health and well being. The 'Kate Winslet' article, for example, reflects a common discourse that weight loss leads not only to improved physical health but also to improved psychological well-being. Conversely the second example features Kate Hudson where the article frames her as unhealthy because of an 'extreme' weight loss purported to have diminished her glamorous appearance and star quality.

Kate Winslet: 'Body Bliss'

This article was featured in the WD (21 March, 2005) and was given prominence in the magazine with before and after photographs of Kate shown on the cover, thereby signifying its importance to the editors as a 'hook' to draw in readers (McLoughlin, 2000). The two 'before' and 'after' cover photographs of Kate are shown in Figure 15 below. The candid 'before' photo shows a distinctly heavier Kate wearing baggy clothes, her hair roughly scraped back into a pony tail and she appears to be frowning. The baggy clothing may be read as representing comfort or perhaps concealment of a less than 'perfect' body (Kwon & Parham, 1994). This photograph may also work to frame Kate, caught outside of a 'stage managed' public gaze and without the glamorous celebrity styling, as a 'normal' woman. In contrast, the 'after' photo is posed and shows a slimmer Kate who is dressed in figure hugging clothing described in the article as "sleek" (WD, 21 March, 2005 p. 8). In this "sleek" image she has well groomed hair and make-up and a large smile; the accompanying caption reads "Kate Winslet's **BODY BLISS**, How she dropped 3 dress sizes" (cover). The carefully chosen contrast displayed in the images is reminiscent of the makeover genre currently very popular in the media (Weber, 2006). The photographs and title illustrate this genre's progressive narrative of transformation from degradation and distress to happiness via an improved appearance. As the makeover genre is so widespread (Derry, 2004; Duncan, 1994) magazine readers could be expected to be very familiar with this theme and accordingly it is likely to stand as the preferred reading.



Figure 15. Kate Winslet: Body Bliss. WD, 21 March 2005, cover

The reference in the title to “body bliss” and photographic evidence reinforces this preferred reading and suggests Kate’s increased ‘well being’ is a result of having reduced her weight to become slim and toned (Lupton, 1996; Mutrie & Choi, 2000). Kate’s contrasting facial expressions in the images perhaps particularly suggest a reading that bodily management results in happiness. This conflation of a slim body with happiness is a common idea found in media representations of women’s bodies (Bordo, 2003; Gill, 2007; Blood, 2005).

The body of the article has the title “KATE’S **sexy slim-down**” (WD, 21 March, 2005, p. 8). The word “sexy” is highlighted in pink with the effect that it stands out. This title works to position Kate’s action to lose weight within the beauty discourse which equates the slim female body with sexual attractiveness and adds to a positive reading of her weight loss. Motherhood is frequently referenced in the article. It is represented as being the cause of an unhealthy weight gain and therefore weight related distress. For instance the magazine mentions three times that Kate’s weight gains were due to having children: e.g. “she topped the scales at 82kg after the birth of her daughter” (p. 9). The article also refers to Kate’s past resistance to weight loss but reveals while she was:

happily telling everyone for years she was fine being “a large lass” behind the scenes she was desperately, trying to shed her weight, even taking up smoking again
(p. 9).

The use of the phrase “behind the scenes” in this extract conveys secrecy and connotes a ‘reality’ outside of the ‘public persona’. The effect of the latter functions to suggest that Kate actually *was* distressed and unhappy about her weight retention after having her children. This idea is further reinforced by the magazine elsewhere in the article describing her as having “battled her weight” in the past. Kate’s reported use of the old fashioned phrase “a large lass” may convey that her public stance of being comfortable with a larger figure is also out of date for a modern celebrity, but it also references Kate’s contradictory media persona as ‘an ordinary girl’ with an unruly body (Redmond, 2007). Kate is framed as verbally denying her desire to lose weight, but actively and “desperate(ly)” resorting to covert weight loss methods such as smoking. The use of the word “even” in the last phrase implies that taking up smoking was a last and ultimately unhealthy resort.

In contrast to this image of the celebrity desperate to loss weight at any cost, the magazines also paradoxically and perhaps ironically frames Kate as not obsessed by dieting:

Kate insists she isn't fixated on dieting, and only made an effort to slim down after the birth of her children.

(p. 9)

This extract not only once more frames motherhood as a cause of weight gain but the denial of Kate as being "fixated on dieting" could be read as framing her as sensible and therefore works to distance her from both other celebrities and the risk of eating disorders. To underline this the magazine describes her latest diet as "sensible" and her "13 kg weight loss" as "gradual" further underlining this reading (p. 8). The article also describes how she now "watches what she eats and recoils at having to consume more than necessary"; also since the birth of her second child "Kate has been even more vigilant about sensible eating" (p. 9). These extracts frame Kate as *now* in control of her eating and, it is proposed, therefore inherently morally 'good' (Bordo, 2003; Lupton 1996 & 2003; Madden & Chamberlain 2004). The idea of watching what she eats also positions Kate within the current neo-liberal discourses of self management and self improvement. Her construction as watching what she eats and being "vigilant" is accords with the Foucauldian concept of the Panoptican and internalised self discipline (Foucault, 1995). In Foucauldian terms this increased self monitoring in conjunction with continuous media focus on her body will help Kate control her impulses and keep her weight 'under control'.

The magazine credits a specific diet with effecting Kate's weight loss. The diet is framed as 'sensible' and healthy; it involves "strict two day detox" and replacing "irritating foods" with "soothing foods" (WD, 21 March, 2005, pp. 8-9). The content of these two food groups is not elaborated, but the idea of ridding one's diet of "irritating foods" and replacing them with "soothing foods" is likely to be read as sensible. The framing of the foods in such a way, along with the detox diet, fits within modern concepts of certain foods linked with good health (Madden & Chamberlain, 2004; Lupton, 1996). The magazine also describes the creator of Kate's diet "Elizabeth Gibaud" as a "nutritionist" (WD, 21 March, 2005, p. 8). This framing positions "Elizabeth Gibaud" and her "facial analysis detox diet" within a medicalised discourse and therefore perhaps helps to legitimise her dietary advice as healthy and medically sound, at the same time distancing her from the more extreme end of the 'diet guru' continuum. Such framing also works to position Gibaud as 'expert' who is needed to instruct women on how to control their undisciplined body (Malson, 1997; Ussher 2006).

Kate's weight reduction story is framed throughout the article as positive and healthy, specifically in relation to psychological wellbeing. The heavier Kate was

constructed by the magazine as 'desperate' and unhappy with her appearance. They use Kate's own words to illustrate this. She is quoted as: "wailing that she looked like the back end of a bus" and that her bottom resembled "purple sprouting broccoli" (WD, 21 March, 2005, p. 9). Kate's graphic confessions work to render her 'weighty' body as abject and physically unattractive, and the magazine's word "wailing" reinforces the notion of her distress at her appearance. However after sticking to the diet's "eating rules" she is now transformed:

stepping out recently in a sleek black trouser suit, the star showed she is also glowing with health and happiness.

(p. 8).

The magazine uses her slimmed down appearance and "sleek" clothing to signify her improved wellbeing. Kate's colloquial use of language to describe her body helps to promote her more as an 'ordinary mum' than celebrity and therefore someone readers can more readily identify with (Holmes, 2005; Redmond, 2007). In summary the textual and photographic construction of health, weight and the maternal body in the Kate Winslet article could be read as suggesting that once a mother addresses her problematic weight issues by monitoring what she eats (with the help of experts) she will attain health and happiness as well as the socially desired "dramatic new look".

Kate Hudson: 'gone too far'

In contrast to the 'lose weight and become healthy' mantra is an article concerning Kate Hudson and the visual evidence of her "unhealthy weight loss" (NZWW, 26 September, 2005, p. 16). This article has the following title: "shocking pics – Has Kate's weight loss gone too far?" (p. 16) and also uses the device of two contrasting photographs (see Figure 16, below). The smaller photograph shows her posing for cameras at a red carpet event. In this photograph she is wearing a shimmering strapless gown, has well groomed hair, and is looking directly at the camera. The accompanying text states "Kate (with Goldie) looked much healthier in July" (p. 16). The larger and more recent photograph shows Kate walking down a street, looking extremely thin and wearing jeans and a long, baggy t-shirt, dark-glasses and a hat. In this image her hair, by comparison, looks unkempt and she is not smiling. The text reads "Even that big t-shirt can't hide her bony frame" (p.16) a description common to accounts of anorexia as wearing baggy clothing to disguise weight loss. An anorexic account is further connoted in the subheading "Kate Hudson's always been thin – but now she looks more skeletal than sexy" (p. 16). However, the description of her new appearance as

“skeletal” not only has connotations of unhealthy, extreme weight loss, illness and mortality but also refers to the title of her latest film “Skeleton Key” which is mentioned in the article. The text suggests that being too thin is undesirable and not sexy, and her body is now perhaps only newsworthy for its ‘shock’ value and as an object of censure.



Figure 16. Kate Hudson: ‘Weight loss’. NZWW, 26 September 2005, p. 16

The phrase “shocking pics” appears to set the tone for the body of the article which focuses on Kate Hudson’s dramatic weight loss reported to begin as an effort to lose weight after the birth of her son. The text opens with stating that Kate:

has always seemed the picture of good health. But the 26 year old looked gaunt and frail as she went shopping (p.16)

Both the text and full length picture graphically depict Kate as underweight and unhealthy (“gaunt” and “frail”).

The article discusses Kate’s weight gain during pregnancy (“almost 32kg”) and she is reported to have worked hard to lose weight in order to be ready for her first movie role since the birth of her son. Motherhood is described as a list of costs or “tolls” i.e. “32kg” weight gain, “C-section”, “the twin pressures of motherhood and trying to get back in shape” (p.16). The magazine states these factors took “a mental toll as well” (p.16) reporting Kate had suffered from PND. The actress is quoted as saying “Not a very intense depression – but I had a phase” (p.16). She is depicted sympathetically; for example, the article states she was under these “pressures” while she was breastfeeding. This constructs Kate as trying to do

the ‘right’ thing for her baby and therefore as a ‘good’ mother and nurturer (Lupton, 1996). The article claims “she recently admitted she put herself through a punishing weight loss programme” (p. 16). Her personal agency in this extract is in line with ‘new femininities’ however it also places the responsibility for her plight at a personal level and not at a social level (Bartky, 1990, Bordo, 2003, Lupton 2003).

Kate herself describes trying to lose weight fast through this (unnamed) programme, but the exercise is depicted as excessive and exhausting:

I’d be working out and working out, having no reward. I was breast-feeding so I was sore, I was tired and I’d cry on the treadmill. (p.12)

Her “reward” for her efforts was weight loss. The construction of Kate as trying to be the ‘good mother’ breast feeding her baby as well as attempting to regain her pre baby figure in order to re-enter her career, “three months” after childbirth in the extract is strongly reminiscent of the ‘supermum’ motif (Choi et al 2005; Ussher 1989). As well it suggests she is under pressure to be seen as the glamorous Hollywood celebrity ‘mom’ (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). In this example however, unlike the Geri Halliwell article (pp. 84-86), the health of the baby is not mentioned, instead the focus is entirely on the mother. The words ‘punishing’ and ‘reward’ (i.e weight loss) used in the article to describe Kate’s weight loss programme may be read as a sympathetic depiction of her strenuous efforts to lose weight, but alternatively they suggest a theme of atonement or perhaps self castigation for having put on so much weight (“almost 32kg”) during pregnancy.

Kate’s story could be read as evidence that trying to lose weight while breast feeding as well as trying to prepare for work is an impossible task so soon after childbirth and perhaps that she was foolish to undertake it. Alternatively it could be seen as an indictment of celebrity culture which “pressures” women to conform at any cost, a point which is to some extent acknowledged in the text. It is interesting to note that the smaller ‘red carpet’, ‘before’ photo where she is described as “looking much healthier” was taken after this period of intense exercise and distress. A similar photograph that appeared in the NI, (referred to in Figure 3. p. 50) described her at this time as a “yummy mummy” (NI, January, 2006, p. 88). This suggests that in the magazine world her exhausting and distressing efforts were laudable and were framed as healthy as long as she, like ‘Kate Winslet’, looked glamorous. But going “too far” to lose baby weight violates cultural beauty norms and is constructed as unhealthy weight loss; a ‘story’ that provides good copy for tabloid style magazines.

Readers stories: “I cured my post-natal depression with a duathlon”

Although the data set mainly featured celebrities, the three reader’s stories that were included all focused on psychological, and to a minimal extent physical, health problems which ‘necessitated’ weight loss after motherhood. Despite the talk of excess weight in all three narratives (on Sam, Tania and Joanne), there are only two direct references to the problems of obesity and its impact on physical health. The first is contained in the ‘Sam’ article in the sub heading “**Exercise or die**”, but despite this alarming imperative, the statement is not explicitly referenced in the body of the text (WD, 21 August, 2006, p. 32). The second relates to ‘Tania’ who is reported to have been warned by her doctor of the consequences of obesity on her physical health i.e. “an eight percent chance you’ll die through obesity related illnesses” if she did not have a gastric bypass (WD, 8 August, 2005, p. 33). Despite these rather dramatic claims and the passing use of risk discourse (Lupton, 1996), physical health is not constructed as the main reason that prompted the women to diet, exercise, or have surgery to reduce their excess weight.

In all three narratives, improvement in appearance is, as Duncan (1994, p.55) writes, “advanced under cover of the rhetoric of health”. In this way they are similar to the previous examples where appearance concerns were closely linked to impressions of health. The women’s extreme weight loss (27.5 kg – 50kg), accorded them feature status, locating them in the popular “success story” genre (Duncan) and providing “tabloid drama” (Barnett, 2006, p. 9). And as noted in the previous chapter reader’s stories allow a point of identity for readers (Kirkman, 2001). These three narratives may therefore work as consolation to readers that weight gain as a result of pregnancy and childbirth is common, but they may also act as inspiration that transformation through weight loss is possible for ‘ordinary’ women, no matter how big.

The three stories, discussed here, all recount the women’s past ‘battles’ with weight but construct motherhood as the primary cause of substantial weight gain e.g.:

It was after two troubled pregnancies and the births of her daughters that her weight problems really began

(Tania; WD, 8 August, 2005, p. 32).

Two of the women, *Joanne* and *Sam*, refer explicitly to PND, linking it to weight issues:

- The postnatal depression was difficult to get through. Joining Weight Watchers was the one thing I could have some control over.

(Joanne, NZWW, 10 October, 2005, p. 42)

- Determined to beat the postnatal depression for good, as well as shed the weight that had plagued her since her early 20s, she set herself a goal of completing this year's Special K Duathlon (Sam, WD, 21 August, 2006, p. 32).

These extracts illustrate a common linking between weight or appearance concerns and psychological health which ranges from the clinical levels of anorexia to the more prevalent 'look good feel good' discourses prominent in magazines (Blood, 2005; Lupton 2003). The juxtaposition of talk about dealing with depression and weight loss in these extracts suggests that concern about 'physical appearance' is an issue of equal importance to the women and the magazine. Notions of self control and self determination are used in the last two extracts to express the effort required to "beat" and "get through" PND and achieve weight loss. These notions are constructed in neoliberal discourses of self management and self improvement and in the texts work to position the women as strong, contrasting with more traditional notions as needy and weak (Bordo, 1997; Ussher 1989)

Unlike Sam and Joanne who dieted and exercised only to reduce weight, the third 'reader', Tania, lost weight by undergoing a gastric bypass. She is reported to have been "clinically obese" (WD, 8 August, 2005, p. 32). Her narrative is largely centred on describing graphically the abject nature of the obese body, including how people treated her differently because of her weight – all of which she has written about in her book "Fat Like Me" which is featured within the article. She states that despite eating "very well" and exercising regularly she lost little weight prior to seeking help through surgery, producing moral justification for the more extreme weight reduction technique as a last resort. The magazine commentary also draws attention to Tania's declining psychological health, stating that prior to surgery she was also:

Stressed and depressed trying to fit in diet and exercise around the pressures of being a busy wife, mother and teacher.

(WD, 8 August, 2005, p. 32).

This extract frames Tania as motivated but caught within a 'supermum' motif (Choi et al 2005; Ussher 1989) that is implicated in her failure to achieve satisfactory weight loss on her own (she "only" lost 10kg in six months). The "busy" life works as explanation that despite her efforts, she needed to seek expert medical help. The narrative therefore does not frame Tania as lacking moral strength or motivation even though she is overweight, as she was trying to improve her appearance through a healthy diet and exercise. However it does paradoxically suggest that her body was beyond her control and as such is reminiscent of notions of the female body, particularly the maternal body, as 'weak' or

‘unruly’ and in need of help and expert advice (Ussher, 2006), justifying more extreme measures (Throsby, 2008).

The narratives also made use of neoliberal discourses of self care to justify their concentration on weight loss. Marketing research suggests that the use of a self care discourse that constructs women as better mothers is becoming increasingly popular in Western culture and is used to help sell self care products to this valuable target market (Holistic health, 2006). Therefore the traditional good mother discourse of women as nurturers and care givers (Barnett, 2006; Lewis & Ridge, 2005) may work as a rationale for weight loss. The deployment of neoliberal notions of personal responsibility and self care, as the strategy to achieve it, creates new discourses of motherhood. In turn this may work to relieve some of the maternal guilt attached to self focused care, or allay concerns that caring for your appearance denotes selfishness.

But as with physical health concerns the references to ‘family’ reasons were relatively brief. Sam is credited with the longest and most pointed reference to her family and her role as nurturer as motivating weight reduction. She states:

I remember looking at my children and my husband and thinking, I chose to have them and I owe it to them to be alive and healthy. I had to get better for them as well as myself

(WD, 21 August, 2006, p. 32).

Although Sam’s language of personal choice (“I chose to have them”) perhaps suggests a neoliberal ‘free choice’ discourse, her talk of responsibility to others (“I owe it to them”, “I had to get better for them”) reflects the more traditional feminine concept of nurturer and caregiver. Sam’s framing of herself in this extract works to construct her as a ‘good mother’ who puts her family first, but allows justification of self care, through looking after her own health via weight loss as a way of ensuring that her ‘care’ continues. The notion of caring for her family, as discussed above, also helps to justify the time and effort she spent on exercise in preparation for the duathlon and “doing things for myself”, as she implies by looking after herself she will become a better mother (Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Throsby, 2008). Joanne and Tania also briefly make use of the ‘become a good/better mother’ discourse to justify their investment in weight loss techniques i.e. losing weight has allowed them to ‘keep up’ with their children and now they have lost weight they report being able to enjoy playing with them and taking them on outings. Throsby (2008) found many of the participants in her study of women’s weight loss surgery experiences, highlighted their “ability to be better parents and providers post-surgery” (p. 123). Heyes (2006), in her study of Weight Watchers literature, also notes that the notion that weight

loss allows increased physical play with your children is “an extraordinarily popular trope” used to promote the diets (p. 141).

Although losing weight for family reasons rated mention in all the women’s narratives, the main reason given by all three for persevering with their weight loss efforts was for ‘themselves’; a construction mobilising modern neoliberal discourses of self management and self improvement. For example the final quote from Sam in her article is:

My reason in the beginning was for my family, and now because I feel great I’m doing it
(*continuing to diet and exercise*) for myself

(WD, 21 August, 2006, p. 33).

Here Sam suggests the notion of empowerment and pleasure in her bodily transformation. This, and her promise of continued self management, works to construct her less as a traditional mother and more of a modern neoliberal/postfeminist woman. Tania positions herself somewhat differently. Initially she also used the ‘better mother’ discourse by proposing that her obesity troubled her because it affected her ability to manage her children and restricted her activities when they went on outings. In contrast, she then states: “But worst of all, people treated me differently” (WD, 8 August, 2005, p. 32). Tania in this statement constructs her excess body weight as the cause of distress, a theme noted by other writers and researchers (Greenberg & Worrell, 2005; Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997).

In all three narratives, the mother’s physical appearance and how others saw them is privileged as the central reason for their determination to lose weight. The women’s concerns about their appearance, because of their excess weight, are positioned as a cause of psychological distress; for example, Sam and Tania are reported as being sensitive to other peoples gaze:

- She was overweight... and was so deeply troubled about her appearance that she ...refused to take part in family photographs.

(Sam, WD, 21 August, 2006, p. 32).

- When you’re clinically obese people see you as a monster...I would never go out dancing because I would just jiggle.

(Tania, WD, 8 August, 2005, p. 32).

These extracts suggest the extent that the women felt that the ‘critical’ gaze of others positioned their overweight bodies being outside current beauty norms as freakish. The words “deeply troubled” and “people see you as a monster” point to high levels of anguish about their appearance.

The extracts also point to the degree to which the ‘critical’ gaze of others featured in women’s accounts of how they had been emotionally affected by their ‘overweight’ bodies. The regulating function of the gaze of others is conceptualised in Foucault’s notion of the Panopticon; here the internalisation of feelings can be seen in self description as a “monster” requiring self discipline and action to lose weight. ‘Before and after’ photographs of the women surround their articles, somewhat paradoxically bringing the ‘monstrous’ body under public (readership) gaze, a technique one writer refers to as “enfreakment” (Throsby, 2008). The photographs illustrate and contrast the women’s previous excess weight and degradation with accolades for their new shape and enhanced, glamorised appearance.

All the narratives linked physical appearance to psychological health and credited weight reduction with improving their psychological health and emotional wellbeing. This was frequently done through reference to clothing; for example, Sam stated that at her heaviest “I had only one pair of pants I could wear and even those were too tight”, but after she dieted and exercised in preparation for the duathlon she “dropped three dress sizes and the postnatal depression was gone from her life” (WD, 21 August, 2006, pp. 32-33). In all three articles clothes and clothing sizes were repeatedly used as a metaphor to signify both the abject nature of the large body and the women’s new found pride in, and enjoyment of, their thinner bodies; for example, Joanne spoke of having “thrown out old baggy pants” and that “now she loves her slim size-10 figure” (NZWW, 10 October, 2005, p. 42).

Lupton (2003), has noted that weight loss and gain has clearly been linked with women’s self esteem in modern culture. This notion was also highlighted in the women’s stories, where weight loss is eulogised e.g.:

- Joanne says losing the weight was the ultimate achievement following years of heartache.
(Joanne, NZWW, 10 October, 2005, p. 42)
- In terms of a life-changing experience, losing weight is up with having a child.
(Tania, WD, 8 August, 2005, p. 32).

Equating weight loss with having a child suggests it is very important to Tania. This trope may also signify the ‘birth’ of a new self, as losing weight was “life changing”. Tania also refers to the concept that weight loss allows the real person trapped inside the large body to emerge and be seen:

I felt a real sense of rediscovery – of finding the little person that was always there inside. (p.32)
Tania’s reference to revealing the “little person” that was always “inside” (p. 32) reflects a common theme found in stories of bodily transformation (Heyes, 2007; Throsby, 2008).

This concept appropriates a Cartesian mind/body dualism where the body is construed as alien and a threat to self-integrity (Bordo, 2003; Malson, 1997). The word “rediscovery” could be read as referring to Tania finding her previous ‘identity’ again, perhaps again a reference to returning to normal both physically and mentally after having children.

All three women in the narratives are constructed as being empowered and having increased self confidence and improved psychological well-being through losing weight. Although their physical health possibly improved as a consequence of diet and exercise, if there were benefits they were glossed over in favour of appearance and its link to psychological health. The women’s role as mothers was referenced as the cause of weight gain and degradation but was also used to shore up the justifications for self care and body management. This privileging of diet and exercise for weight loss and appearance over physical health reflects findings from other research on the portrayal of women’s health in popular magazines (e.g. Barnett, 2006).

Chapter Summary

Analyses of the material in this chapter demonstrate the regular conflation of health and beauty discourses. This aspect is similar to previous research which proposes that women’s magazines promote weight loss and appearance under the pretext of health (Barnett, 2006; Kogan, Kellaway, Rickard & Borrayo, 2003; Madden & Chamberlain, 2004). The magazines also made use of traditional femininity discourses around women as nurturers to justify criticism or approval of pregnant or breast feeding celebrity mothers’ appearance, particularly in association to their weight. Within the data set the maternal body was constructed as problematic as it was overweight. Rather than mobilising a physical health discourse around the problematic overweight body, articles predominately constructed a psychological discourse that intersected with femininity discourses to construct ‘feeling good’ as ‘looking good’. Thus the maternal body which had not returned to ‘normal’ (i.e. slim) was constructed as unattractive and the cause of psychological distress in both celebrities and ‘readers’. A ‘healthy’ diet and exercise were credited by the magazines with alleviating psychological distress and raising the women’s self esteem and happiness through improvements in bodily appearance. However, this was qualified; for example, excessive dieting or exercise or women trying to lose weight on their own without expert advice were depicted as leading to ill health and unfavourable appearance. In contrast, mothers who invested in ‘approved’ diet and exercise

programmes were constructed as successful in achieving appropriate weight loss, good health, psychological well being and most importantly a socially acceptable slim, attractive body. The means of attaining this transformation from abject to health and happiness, i.e. the diets and exercise promoted to remedy the maternal body, will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

LABOURING MOTHERS: “GETTING BACK TO NORMAL”

Introduction

One of the most noticeable features of the data set was the number of references and articles written about ‘bouncing back after babies’ or ‘getting back to normal’. This ‘bouncing back’ concept largely rested on the repeated framing of mothers’ bodies as fat and flabby which worked to position the maternal body as problematic or object in relation to our current societal norms and, therefore, in need of remedial action and discipline (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Chapkis, 1986). Remedial work is represented as not only (re)constructing the body ideal but also enhancing health as discussed in the previous chapter; i.e. being slender is considered healthy, and a personal and moral responsibility especially for women (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Lupton, 1996). Losing weight and ‘shaping up’ in articles signaled that the undesirable maternal body was back under control, and the celebrity mother was getting back to her ‘normal, slim, attractive, sexy’ self. Achieving this involved constant advice from experts or the journalists, and heavy promotion of the, often costly, weight-loss technologies available to help the body return to its ‘normal’ pre-pregnant state. While this framing of women’s bodies in general as problematic is not new and has been widely written about (e.g. Bordo 1993 & 1997; Ussher, 1989 & 2006), it is not only the extent of cover given to reshaping the postnatal maternal body that is a new trend but also, more alarmingly, the rapidity of achieving the slim ideal. The gathering momentum and apparent acceptability of post baby body ‘repair’ in the magazines draws impetus, to some extent, from the heavy investment of the multimillion dollar appearance industry in product and profit.

This chapter examines the ways in which the magazine articles constructed the ‘new labour’ of the postnatal period, a labouring to contain and re-shape the maternal body as quickly as possible after birth. The first section reviews how magazines as a whole construct mothers’ ‘new labour’, including the interface of magazines with consumer femininity. The chapter then turns to specific aspects of the labour required to quickly re-shape the post-birth body through the analyses of articles referring to quick-loss success stories of celebrities. While such stories dominated the texts examined, longer term labouring presented a companion narrative, as did narratives attempting to counter the

imperatives for celebrities to ‘get back’ their pre-maternity bodies. Examples of these complementary and counter stories complete the chapter.

‘Buying (into) the body remedies’: Consumer femininity and women’s magazines

Myra Macdonald (2004), in her exploration into the history of the ‘reconstruction’ of femininity through advertising, states that women “since at least the late nineteenth century, have been particularly associated with consumerism” (p. 41). She contends that once women’s spending power as keeper of the household purse was recognized they became targeted by producers, and by the 1930s this factor was held as “almost single handedly responsible for the burgeoning of the women’s magazine press” (p. 44). Advertisers learnt to adapt to different trends in femininity; for example, using or developing discourses to appeal to women’s differing sensibilities. The strident advocacy of the second wave of feminism, particularly around sexism in advertising, presented particular challenges in advertising to women. But by the late 1980s and 1990s consumer discourses aimed at women took on the cloak of postfeminism and were drenched in “the terminology of self assertiveness and achievement”, and the collective rhetoric of traditional feminism was transformed into “atomized acts of individualism” (p. 56). But Macdonald suggests that the postfeminist ‘superwoman’ style “iconography depended on spending money” and that important issues such as freedom, independence and pleasure were “reduced to matters of lifestyle and consumption” all of which was used to encourage continuous consumption through advertisements (pp. 56-57).

Advertising is the life-blood of magazines such that producing women as ‘continuous’ consumers is a given. Moreover, media scholars have noted that magazines promote multiple identities which create niche markets, a strategy which maximizes advertising potential (Carter & Steiner, 2004). As a result, Carter and Steiner (2004) contend that each niche is supplied with their own “set of problems and challenges which can be explained and solved by subscribing to the magazine and by using the products and services it advertises” (p. 17). In this way it could be argued that mothers have become a potentially lucrative new niche market for the attention of magazines and their advertisers. The ‘problematic’ for new mothers in the ‘new labour’ is how to ‘get back’ to the pre-natal body as fast as possible and, indeed, one of the most prolific ways in which women’s magazines construct ‘consumer femininity’ (and its continuous consumption) is through advertisements and articles on how to achieve the “ideal feminine appearance”, represented as crucial to self esteem and women’s social worth (Gill, 2007). Gill writes

that by taking up 'consumer femininity' women construct themselves "as an object requiring work" (p. 98). This notion has been labeled by scholars as 'body work', and is noted to be a common discursive theme in women's magazines where women's bodies are framed as flawed, or having the potential to get out of control, and therefore in need of "remedial work, specifically body reduction" (Blood, 2005, pp. 102-103).

Consistent with Gill's (2007) observations, studies of women's magazines suggest that the number of articles about appearance, and in particular diet and exercise for weight control, have grown over the last few decades to the point where they have become ubiquitous (Bartky, 1990; Malkin, Wornian, & Chrisler, 1999; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1990). Davalos, Davalos, and Layton (2007) studied the cover headlines of ten different popular women's magazines over the last three decades of the 20th century. Their results showed that the number of cover headlines relating to beauty and body image articles had almost doubled over that time while those relating to domestic and child rearing issues had declined. They conclude: "The dominant messages that appear to be clear are that women should be thin, beautiful and attractive to males. Other messages appear secondary to those." (p. 255). This change in focus also suggests that, at least in popular women's magazines, motherhood as it relates to childcare and domesticity is no longer the strong selling point it has been in past generations (Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, & Hebron, 1991).

Dworkin and Wachs (2004) suggest that contemporary motherhood has a "new set of tasks" besides work, household labour and childcare (p. 616). They describe this "third shift" as "bodywork". Their premise is based on the findings from their extensive textual analysis of "Shape Fit Pregnancy", an American magazine devoted to pre and post natal fitness and body shape. The authors propose that "bouncing back" after babies is part of "dutiful femininity" (p. 616), and is normalized in both the titles of the articles and texts throughout the magazine. The notion of control featured strongly in their findings such that getting back control of a body perceived to be out of control, symbolized getting back control of their lives. Dworkin and Wachs (2004) note that there was also an emphasis in the texts on identity and empowerment – mothers frequently asserted that they were not just a baby machine, they wanted to 'get back to normal' and were doing it (improving their bodies) for themselves, both popular postfeminist and neoliberal discourses. Exercise constituted an imperative and stood as a symbol for liberation. Women were encouraged to get moving as soon as possible after giving birth in order to get fit again and normalize their appearance: "fitness should be at the top of your postpartum list" (p. 617).

For some, the failure, or impossibility, of fitness and dietary regimes may impede ‘getting back to normal’ requiring alternative approaches if the goal seems mandatory. Plastic surgery, once the prerogative of the rich and famous, has become a commonplace on the wave of popular television shows featuring the ‘make-over’ (Tait, 2007). Magazines have also been implicated in the normalization of plastic surgery. Brooks (2004) in her study of this phenomenon found a large number of mainly favourable accounts of the procedure within four popular U.S. magazines: Vogue, Harpers Bazaar, US Weekly and People. She pinpointed two narrative frames: new technology, where cosmetic surgery is seen as innovative, “accessible and healthful, forward-looking and medically legitimate; and, the candid account, where it was framed as courageous, virtuous, a treat, a sign of “independence and rebellion; common sense and pro-activity” (p.p 215 & 219). Heyes (2007) writes: “Scholars have noted the erosion of critical accounts of cosmetic surgery within women’s magazines...a process whereby magazines have co-opted and distorted feminist discourse to render surgery an expression of self determination” (p. 122).

Resisting the ‘norms’

Karen Throsby (2008), in her research on weight loss surgery, writes that in the current social and cultural context “the body is constantly to be worked upon and is never left to its own devices” but there is a tension between “the competing socially prevalent exhortations to both listen to the body and to contain and control it” (p. 124). Pregnancy is arguably one time when women are allowed to ‘listen to the body’ and take up a larger space as it is construed as natural and normal, although this is now subject to its own restrictions and disciplines through the medicalisation of pregnancy and concerns around obesity (Longhurst, 1999; Lupton, 1996; Root & Browner, 2001).

Researchers have found that while some women are distressed by their larger body in pregnancy others see pregnancy as a time to step away from ‘body work’. Within qualitative research pregnant women have frequently positioned their bodies as beyond or out of control and subject to the force of nature (Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997; Ussher, 2006; Warren & Brewis, 2004). For some women this notion represented liberation from the ‘body project’ (Warren & Brewis, 2004), time out from commodified beauty and an ‘excuse’ to relax bodily standards and weight control (Bailey, 1999; Earle, 2003; Fox & Yamaguchi 1997; Johnson et al. 2004). Larger women in particular are reported to find

pregnancy a welcome relief from pressures to conform, some even wearing previously avoided clothes or willing to be seen going swimming because pregnancy was perceived as a valid defence for their larger body size (Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997; Wiles, 1994). In this way pregnancy with its unavoidable natural/normal weight increase can be positioned as a site of at least temporary resistance to current strict beauty norms.

The postnatal period however presents a different position as the 'excuse' for a larger body has literally been removed. Some researchers have noted continued resistance to a return to strict beauty norms amongst new mothers after childbirth. Lucy Bailey (2001), for example, found that while many women had negative reactions to their bodies after childbirth for others the postnatal period represented a time of empowerment as it meant a lack of focus on bodily display and a stronger baby focus. Therefore the postnatal period for some women may also be construed as a time of resistance to the cultural pressures to be slim and toned. But this position perhaps represents what has been described as "resistance by default" as it may not embody a conscious decision to rebel against societal beauty norms (Root & Browner, 2001 p. 211).

Bailey (2001) also noted that despite these women's positive perceptions of the maternal body in the first few months after childbirth, later interviews suggested that "ambivalent feelings about body shape were starting to re-emerge, with some women feeling it was important to get their bodies back to normal (p. 120). These findings reflect the complexity and fluidity of women's negotiations with their postnatal body and societal expectations. The findings may also represent the women's recognition or their realisation that being overweight and/or out of shape in Western society frequently leads to social reproach and feelings of disempowerment (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003; Weber, 2005). Acknowledging that beauty brings power (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn & Zoino, 2006), getting the body back under control and into line with beauty norms after childbirth although it may appear as accommodation to cultural norms, may also be seen as an act of empowerment. As such (re)attaining the slim toned body and erasing the visible signs of motherhood from the body could be framed as an act of resistance if "its intent is to reject subordination" (Weitz, 2001 p. 682). Despite this positive construction many feminist researchers, such as Bordo (2003), warn that the act of trying to achieve these strict cultural standards can also be "utilised in the maintenance and reproduction of existing power relations" providing evidence of Foucault's notion of the 'docile body' (p. 168).

In the analyses that follow, the ways in which magazines (re)produced consuming and labouring identities for women in the post-birth period and the notion of temporary

resistance and normality are examined. The extracts used in the first section are taken from more brief and fleeting references to re-shaping the post-birth body quickly within magazine articles. In the remaining sections, feature articles are analysed.

Analysis and discussion

Rapid weight loss after birth was a dominant theme in the magazines, particularly in celebrity stories. The frequent (re)construction of post birth weight as ‘fat’, ‘baby weight’, ‘baby fat’, “unwanted kilos after babies” (WD, 19 September 2005, p.20) and “pregnancy weight” littered articles on new mothers and justified regimes to lose weight. Constructions of post-birth weight as fat drew further support from the common reports of how many ‘kilos’ the mother gained during pregnancy. Such constructions ignore the normality and necessity of weight gain in pregnancy, with its attendant weight retention after childbirth, and obscure the difficulty of losing weight quickly (if desired) due to practical matters (e.g., breastfeeding or less time to devote to body maintenance; Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997).

The conflation of pregnancy and/or post baby weight as “fat” or “overweight” appeared throughout articles in the data set, positioning weight gain in pregnancy as an undesirable, unacceptable state of being for both health and most importantly for appearance. One example of the conflation appeared in an account about Sally Ridge, a New Zealand media personality and mother of three. Sally was quizzed about her relationship with her body in an article entitled “Secrets of a Slim Woman” (NZWW, 10 October 2005, p12). She was asked “have you ever been overweight?” her reply was direct “No, apart from when I’ve been pregnant”.

Following the construction of the pregnant and post birth body as “fat”, articles presented methods and instructions on how to shed the unwanted weight and return the body to ‘normal’ (read pre-pregnant shape) and how to do this as quickly as possible. The practice of stating weight gains and losses to measure their progress was ubiquitous, but it was notable that the time weight loss took was an increasingly common feature in the data set articles. Sometimes articles referenced the weight loss with clothing sizes. For example, New Zealand sports celebrity, Mandy Barker, was reported as: “even back in her size eight jeans already” six weeks after the birth of her first child (NZWW, 11 July 2005, p. 8). Katie Holmes was said to be “looking slim and gorgeous only three weeks since Suri’s April 18th birth.”, and is said to be determined to lose “18kg in 12 weeks” (WD, 22 May 2006, p. 8).

The 'Geri Halliwell' article, analysed in the previous chapter, referred to the star having "dropped a whopping 19.2kg in four weeks" (WD, 6 August 2006, p. 23).

Victoria Beckham's post baby weight loss came under particular scrutiny by several magazines. In OK she was described as:

...wearing some choice designer items and revealing a figure that defies belief since she had only given birth to her third son Cruz, five weeks previously
(OK, 12 April, 2005. p. 64)

In the following month NZWW (9 May, 2005) tucked the following into a side bar accompanying an article on her marriage:

After the birth of Cruz, Victoria was obsessed with regaining her figure as quickly as possible. It took her only five weeks to lose the 13kg she put on during pregnancy and she credits seaweed-wrap treatments with helping her astonishingly sudden shrinkage.
(p.13)

The use of the words "obsessed" in the first sentence, along with the suggestion that she was in a great hurry to lose her weight, work to depict Victoria as fanatical about her appearance. Nonetheless, the magazine uses a celebratory discourse, which undermines the first negative depiction of Victoria as body obsessed, championing her weight loss as "astonishing" because it took "only five weeks". The selection of words "astonishing" and "only" in particular invite a positive reading of adulation and amazement at how fast she was able to lose the weight after child birth. This celebratory reading positions her more as a superstar in relation to weight loss and reinforces her media image as the epitome of the modern cultural ideal of the female body.

The magazines' reports about celebrities such as Victoria not only calls attention to weight and shape issues post pregnancy but may also work to promote an element of competition in which celebrity mothers appear to vie for the quickest 'return to normal' after childbirth. Feminist scholars have noted that in current society "women are encouraged to see themselves in competition with each other" (Whelehan, 2004, p. 5). Gillespie (1996) suggested that repeated exposure to beauty ideals (in this case read quick postnatal weight loss) "helps create a competitive hierarchical society ...where women need to maintain the edge" (p. 78). If the female body is seen as a commodity in a culture where women's appearance is highly valued (Chapkis, 1986; Holland, 2004), which may be particularly true for women celebrities, then a quick return to 'normal' holds heightened importance and value.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the magazines' seeming preoccupation with detailing individual's weight and shapes in this way positions it as functioning in the

manner of the Panopticon (Foucault, 1995). Their vigilance towards celebrity mothers' weight loss appears unrelenting and the detailed descriptions suggest close monitoring similar to that of the prison guard who has the power to inflict punishment for aberrant behaviour; the magazine 'punishing' its subjects in the form of critical comments and unflattering photographs. Repeated reporting of weight loss and comparisons also resembles the 'weigh in', a popular method of checking on progress and encouraging individual weight loss by diet companies such as Weight Watchers, and one which will be familiar to many readers. This practice of detailing weight losses after childbirth may provide a measure for readers to compare themselves with, and the constant surveillance and measuring may therefore act to normalize for women the cultural importance of quick weight loss after childbirth.

From a consumer femininity perspective, reports of "astonishing... shrinkage" (NZWW, 9 May, 2005, p. 13) so soon after giving birth, may also work to create an element of desire for the product that helped achieve this effect. As many of the articles in the data set construct the maternal body as heavier than normal it is therefore, without question, in need of remedy; and the magazines frequently reference the product used to bring about the changes. In the case of Victoria Beckham, for example, it is through her identity as a consumer that the "sudden shrinkage" is achieved; her "secret" is the purchase of seaweed-wrap treatments. Seaweed-wraps in this extract are depicted as a miraculous product which enabled rapid weight loss. They are also by implication "credit(ed)" as the solution to Victoria's distress or "obsession with regaining her figure as quickly as possible". The turn of the weight loss industry's gaze toward recent mothers as a target market, producing them as consumers, is the core theme of the remainder of the analysis.

Designer new mother diets: "specialized programme developed for me"

Within the data set there were many references to how new mothers maintained their figures or 'got back into shape' through diet and exercise. Even mothers who were described as having achieved their looks 'effortlessly' are reported to have been watchful in their diet and to have exercised. It could be argued that the frequency of this message over time may work to normalize both these behaviours in connection with mothers. It should be noted that exercise was more often mentioned in combination with diet, and receives relatively little attention compared to the talk of food and dieting. Although mothers were described as trying to 'firm up' or rid themselves of 'flab' after child birth,

exercise was infrequently discussed at any length, except in relation to how difficult it is to fit into a busy schedule, how exhausting it can be, or in relation to its physical and mental health benefits and, conversely, harm if overdone. The talk of diet on the other hand was especially vigorous.

While there was frequent mention of a more generalised ‘eating well’ or ‘sensibly’ during pregnancy, or dieting/‘watching you eat’ after the birth, there were also references to specific diet programmes, products and companies which have targeted new mothers. These citations were sometimes positioned within a larger article about other aspects of the woman, and as such are reminiscent of product placement². An article about New Zealand soap opera star, Amber Curren’s use of a Weight Watchers ‘lactation programme’ provides an example. The extract shown below was nested within a two page article which focused on the birth of her baby and her relationship with her partner and new baby daughter:

Amber's now concentrating on balancing being a new mum with her acting job, studying towards a degree in business psychology and losing the baby weight.

"The camera makes even normal sized people look huge!" she admits. "But I'm going to do the Weight Watchers lactation programme so that I can still breastfeed while I diet, and I want to do more walking. I'm not happy with the way I look right now but I'm determined to do it!"
(WD, 19 September 2005, p.11)

The magazine clearly positions Amber as supermum (Choi et al., 2005) and the inclusion of losing baby weight alongside this supports Dworkin and Wachs (2004) notion of “body work” as the third shift for mothers. Her reference to the camera resonates with the Foucauldian notion of surveillance. As an actor she recognises that her appearance, through the camera, will be monitored and judged by the public who have the potential power to be critical of an imperfect female body. This reflects not only the idea of the camera as the public eye or the Panopticon (Foucault, 1995), but also perhaps evidence that Amber has internalised this sociocultural surveillance (“I’m not happy with the way I look right now”). In turn this is working to exert pressure on her to discipline her body through diet and exercise and get it back into the right shape i.e. not to “look huge” (WD, 19 September 2005, p.11).

Amber’s use of a discourse of discontent about appearance, especially considering she is an actress and under public scrutiny, works to legitimise her attempts at weight loss while breastfeeding her new baby and her subsequent investment in Weight Watchers. At the same time she frames herself as a breast feeding mother which positions her as a

² Product placement is a modern advertising concept where a product is shown or referred to in “return for payment or other valuable consideration” (Ofcom Broadcasting Code, Section 10. n.d.).

‘good’ mother who wants to nurture her baby in the best way possible. Her reference to the camera making people seem bigger than normal, suggests that she may feel the need to slim down to a smaller than ‘normal’ size to be successful in her career where appearance is very important. This dual depiction of herself works to enhance the Weight Watchers diet as an ideal remedy for the twin social pressures: to be a ‘good’ mother and just as importantly lose “baby weight” in order to achieve ideal femininity.

Like Amber, April Ieremia is another ‘celebrity’ New Zealand figure to endorse a slimming product specified as tailored for new mothers (see Chapter 4). April’s story of weight loss appeared in a regular weekly column where she detailed progress toward her goal:

I've given myself nine months to do it. By 2006, I'm determined to be taut, trim and terrific, as well as happy and healthy.

(NZWW, 9 May 2005, p. 9)

April continually referenced SureSlim in glowing terms throughout her columns, crediting it with providing the mechanisms and supports that were essential for her to achieve her weight loss as a mother, particularly ‘a breastfeeding mother’. Along with references in the weekly column, April was featured in two separate SureSlim advertisements. The pre-Xmas advertisement featured a photograph of a smiling April holding a small gift tied with ribbon in her hand (see Figure 17 below). The title of the ad is “**Enjoy more presence this Christmas**” (NZWW, 5 December 2005, p. 117), the pun perhaps indicating that weight loss makes a person more worthy of notice. The text takes the form of a personal testimonial from April thanking the company for its support and espousing the benefits of using an individualised SureSlim “program”. The diet programme is framed as both scientific and safe through reference to how the individualised programme is based on blood tests screened by the “SureSlim doctor”. April makes reference to the company’s ability to recognise “any special circumstances; which in my case, was breast feeding a new baby!” (p. 117), which works to enhance the diet as adaptable for women’s various roles in life and specifically motherhood. April’s repeated reference to herself as ‘a breastfeeding mother’ positions her as a ‘normal’ woman rather than celebrity, and devoted ‘good’ mother. This construction of April helps promote the diet as suitable for all mothers and at the same time adds to the positive endorsement of the company as being devoted to the health and wellbeing of both mother and baby and therefore morally sound.



Figure 17. April Ieremia: Presence. NZWW, 5 December 2005, p. 117
(Image courtesy of SureSlim)

The NZWW 3 April 2006 issue, contained a different SureSlim advertisement which is headed “**Congratulations April Bruce!**” (p. 30) and is placed opposite April’s final weight loss column (see Figure 18 below). The body of the text in this advertisement takes the form of a private letter from April to her weight loss ‘mentor’ who was part of the SureSlim package. The mentor, another breastfeeding mother who lost a significant amount of weight, was constructed as a significant source of support through April’s weight loss journey and referred to in her columns. In the letter April again thanks and praises the company for its support. As an advertising device the letter works as a personal testimonial and suggests ‘reality’ and authenticity as readers have witnessed her successful slim down. As with the previous advertisement the company, working through April’s letter, directly targets new mothers with the reference to “specialised programme developed for me” when “breastfeeding” (p. 30). In this advertisement April confidently constructs herself as ‘supermum’ noting that despite her “busy life” working and “raising” her children, she was able to reach her “goal weight”(p. 30). One way that this reference to a busy mother’s life alongside references to the individualised, adaptable diet plan and personal support available through other mentors who are also ‘mums’ may work is to enhance the concept of the programme as suitable for any women – along the lines of ‘if I can do it anyone can’.



Figure 18. April Ieremia: Goal. NZWW, 3 April 2006, pp.30-31
(Images courtesy of SureSlim & New Zealand Woman's Weekly)

The heading for the advertisement, “Congratulations April Bruce”, credits April with achieving the weight loss i.e. constructing it as a personal achievement (NZWW, 3 April 2006, p. 30). While this on the surface seems at odds with promotion of the company, it reflects the idea that personal empowerment is enabled through consumption, a regularly used discourse in advertising beauty products to women (Bordo, 1997 & 2003; Gill, 2007, Lazar, 2006). While April and SureSlim celebrate her successful weight loss, tucked within this last extract is also a reference to her ongoing investment in the company’s product through the SureSlim maintenance programme called the “SureSlim Lifestyle eating programme” (NZWW, 3 April 2006, p. 30). The name suggests something planned and ongoing, reflecting Western society’s concept of the body as a project and the continuous nature of ‘body work’ for women throughout their lives, both of which are heavily promoted in the media (Blood, 2005; Bordo, 2003; Dworkin & Wachs, 2004). Feminist scholars, such as Bordo (2003), have argued that women’s efforts to control their unruly bodies through continued investment in body work has the potential to instil them with a sense of empowerment (Warren & Brewis, 2004), an argument which can be seen to be reflected in this extract

The magazine reports of Amber and April have been raised as examples of the new trend toward producing new mothers as consumers, in this case of dieting products touting to cater especially for post-birth mothers. But the emphases in these representations were not directed at the speed of reshaping the postnatal body which often accompanied the

explicit magazine advice on the diets, exercise and beauty products. Other articles referred to the many diets and products now available to erase the visible signs of motherhood, and how to do achieve erasure quickly. One example of a feature article that provided such detail about how celebrities lost weight quickly after birth is discussed in the next section.

Quick fix slimming secrets: How stars lose flab fast

In 2006 on its cover NI heralded the revealing of the “secret” ways in which celebrities had quickly shed their weight after giving birth (see Figure 19 below). The magazine cover shows a montage of three smiling celebrity mothers, Gwyneth Paltrow, Katie Holmes and Jordan, alongside the heading: “**Quick-fix slimming secrets. How stars lose flab fast**” (NI, 20 May 2006, cover). The phrase “lose flab fast” is suggestive of two aspects of the maternal body which are currently under the media spotlight. The word “flab” could be read simply as alliteration with the word “fast”, a device often used in magazine headings, but it also reflects the common framing of heavier female bodies as flabby, unfit and unattractive (Bordo, 2003, Chamblis & Blair, 2005). The word ‘fast’ echoes the phrase “quick fix” and emphasizes the notion of a speedy remedy (“fix”). Therefore this title may work to reinforce the notion that ‘quick’ weight loss after child birth was not only possible if these “slimming secrets” are followed, but desirable and something we as readers want to know about. Further as the article focuses *only* on bodily transformation after childbirth, this heading constructs the maternal body not as normal, but as flabby and therefore socially defective, undesirable and in need of remedy. The dominance of the article’s image on the cover, the large font size and design of the title suggests it was positioned as a selling point for the magazine. As well, its prominence on the page over references to other issues such as leukemia, and a child’s “desperate fight for life” are suggestive of its assumed social importance and commodity value (NI, 20 May 2006, cover).



Figure 19. Quick fix slimming secrets. NI, 20 May 2006, cover.

The contents page carries two references to the article which read:

New celebrity mums are busting to get back to their pre-baby weight for the red carpet and,

STARVING CELEBS. Stars will do anything to lose their post-baby weight.

(p. 9).

The tone of these sentences is different to the cover which connotes exciting weight loss “secrets” (cover). These statements could be interpreted in a number of ways. For example, the wording “Starving celebs” and “Stars will do anything” suggests the article will take a more critical view of the celebrity mothers’ weight loss methods. These statements also reinforce the construction of the maternal body as being over weight and undesirable, something to be gotten rid of at any cost. At the same time it constructs the celebrities as driven to conform to the socially expected celebrity body norms before exposure to the world via film and photography on “the red carpet” (p. 9). This once again suggests that the lens of the camera, acting as the public eye, functions much as the surveillance of prison guards in Foucault’s (1995) Panopticon to regulate celebrities’ compliance with an idealized female body through rejection or erasure of the postnatal body.

Inside the magazine the article is headlined “Bouncing Back after Babies” (NI, 20 May 2006, p. 10), a common phrase which has multiple meanings such as the notion of

resilience, being able to cope, and getting back to normal life (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004). In this example the reference purely relates to appearance and body shape. The article leads with the following sentence:

some stars will stop at nothing to regain their slim pre-baby figures within days of giving birth
(NI, 20 May 2006, p. 10)

This sentence works, through exaggeration and a chastising tone, to position ‘stars’ as more reckless than admirable in their weight loss plans after childbirth and echoes the “starving celebs” rhetoric of the content page (NI, 20 May 2006, p. 9). The first paragraph has a moralizing tone and asks readers about celebrities who lose weight quickly after childbirth i.e. whether “their drastic post-baby diets putting their health at risk?” (p. 10). The question is perhaps designed to dramatise the story and draw the reader in. It also reflects the more traditional construction of mothers as guardians of family health (Barnett, 2006; Kirkman, A., 2001; Lupton, 1995), discussed in the previous chapter, and suggests a positioning of these ‘quick fix’ celebrities as ‘selfish’ mothers.

The magazine continues this negative construction of rapid postnatal weight loss throughout the introduction. For example, it calls the stars diets “fads” and contrasts this negative positioning of ‘quick fix’ celebrity mothers with Jennifer Garner who is depicted here as an example of “slow and steady” weight loss i.e. “letting breastfeeding work its magic”; which suggests a construction of her as a ‘good’ mother (NI, 20 May 2006, p. 10). In line with the discourse around health, the magazine in the final paragraph of the introduction “suggest(s)” that readers use the magazine’s own “sensible eating plan” in order “to look after your long term health as well as your figure” (p. 10). The articles’ introduction depicts the *need* to lose weight and shape up after childbirth as unquestioned, and this notion, in combination with the emphasis on “your” in the last extract, reflects the popular concepts of the body as a personal project (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003) and harnesses the popular conflation of slimness and health (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Lupton 1996). In this way health and beauty are used to promote the magazine’s diet. The stance is also consistent with Dworkin and Wachs’ (2004) research finding that ‘body work’ for mothers was unquestioned in the magazine analysed, i.e. “Shape Fit Pregnancy”. They also noted that the magazine traded on the conflation of health and beauty to promote investment in products necessary to achieve weight loss and reshape the maternal body (Dworkin & Wachs).

In an interesting contrast to the drama of the introduction, which emphasizes ‘fad diets’ and rapid weight loss as risking health, within the article only one of the six stars featured is directly criticised for their weight loss methods. Jordan, who is often framed

as extreme and therefore subject to derogatory comments in the media, is criticised for her “juice diet” which the magazine describes as “drastic” and “not considered safe, especially for breastfeeding mums”. There is some irony in this stance as four months earlier the same magazine treated her weight loss method in a much less critical manner. For example, in the January 2006 issue the magazine reported that Jordan’s diet “bans food made with wheat and sugar, but allows you to eat as much as you want of the good stuff, such as fruit, vegetable and low-fat protein.”, and “gives you energy to burn” (p. 11).

The other celebrities and their reported methods are listed below:

- *Katie Holmes*; exercises and uses the ‘Flavour Point’ diet also used “by Victoria Beckham”, other followers of this diet “lost around 7kg in just three months”
- *Heidi Klum* who they report as “looking slim and radiant” at the Emmy Awards “just 100 hours after giving birth to her son”; uses the “strict” “ABCDEF plan” and sticks naked pictures of herself on the fridge as a motivational device
- *Brooke Shields*; reported to be “already on a strict diet” after having “given birth only three weeks ago”. However, they explain this diet is known as the “three year old diet” i.e. being really busy running after her older child who is three years old
- *Gwyneth Paltrow*; “hasn’t lost all her baby weight” but is “well on the way to fitting into her pre-pregnancy clothes” by following “Dr Joshi’s detox diet”. This “detox” not only focuses on what is eaten but also involves cupping “to draw out toxins”
- *Jennifer Garner*; reportedly follows “kinesiology” and has “shunned extreme diets in favour of a more moderate exercise regime and sensible eating”. However, the magazine states “its no wonder she’s having trouble shifting some of her extra kilos” (NI, 20 May 2006, p. 10-11).

Notably the article visually divides the celebrities in two ways. The first page contains pictures of the celebrities who are credited with fast weight loss posing in glamorous clothing while the second page contains candid photos of the three celebrities who have not lost their all their “extra kilos” wearing casual clothing (see Figure 20 below). In the text *Katie Holmes* and *Heidi Klum* are hailed as admirable for their weight loss “just” “3 months”/ “100 hours” after giving birth, which works to emphasize the

speed of their return to ‘normal’ (p. 10). But despite the magazine’s critical stance towards *Jordan’s* extreme diet and apparent endorsement of “sensible” diets in the introduction, *Jennifer Garner*, who is described as a mother who has not undertaken an “extreme” diet, eats sensibly and takes “moderate exercise”, is ironically positioned as lagging behind in the race to lose the baby weight (p. 11). This paradoxical treatment is even more perplexing given that the magazine uses her as an exemplar of healthy and sensible weight loss in the introduction, and as such this provides a good example of the contradictory discourses frequently found within women’s magazines (Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer & Hebron, 1991; Gill, 2007).



Figure 20. Bouncing back after babies. NI, 20 May 2006, pp. 10-11

The article also features a sidebar, highlighted in blue and taking up half a page (see Figure. 19 above), revealing the magazine’s own “After-baby Diet” designed to “help you kick the baby weight” (NI, 20 May 2006, p. 11). Although the verb “kick” connotes swift and forceful movement, this diet is paradoxically proffered as a “sensible” solution to the weight issues associated with motherhood. Its physical separation from the celebrity diets is perhaps designed to signify that it is both suitable for ‘ordinary women’ and safe to use. The magazine provides a somewhat cautious promise that sticking to the diet for a month “could see you lose up to at least 3kg”. It enhances the health aspects of the diet further by positioning itself as expert: knowledgeable about sound nutrition and postnatal health.

They state their diet is not “suitable” for breastfeeding mothers or any woman “who has delivered in the previous two months” explaining they need “higher levels of nutrients such as calcium and iron to restore your energy” (p. 11). The magazine further advises women to be wary of diets which *do* cut nutrients and “always consult your doctor before starting any weight loss scheme” (p. 11). The use of medical discourses and authoritative tone gives weight to the magazines positioning of itself as health expert and its diet as safe *if* recommendations are followed. This ‘cautionary’ information is contained in the introductory paragraph to the diet, giving it primacy. This may be read as indicating the magazine has taken a responsible stance in relation to postnatal weight loss and has the readers’ best interests at heart. But as these cautions are not highlighted visually through italics, bold type or contained in a separate highlighted box this may effectively lessen the impact of the health warnings.

The provision of a ‘safe’ detailed five day diet plan, and the magazine’s arguably pro weight loss positioning, works to underline a preferred message that the postnatal body is too large to be acceptable, that carrying extra weight after childbirth is not glamorous, and new mothers should invest in these ‘disciplinary practices’ in order to reconstruct a more acceptable, slimmer, more glamorous body. As such this construction of the maternal body as socially unacceptable and promotion of diets to this group is likely to contribute towards both the normalization of quick weight loss for new mothers, and endorsement of the need to buy the magazine and invest in products advertised or referenced in order to attain the correct femininity. Again, because of the lack of sociocultural criticism in the article, and pathologising of individual celebrity mothers, the notion of ‘body work’ as the third shift for mothers is reinforced in this article (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004).

Shortcuts: Plastic Surgery

Another ‘quick fix’ for the problematic maternal body which is not alluded to in the previous articles but was occasionally, although briefly, referred to within the data set is plastic surgery, the ‘extreme makeover’ technique. The following example from the data set appeared in the “TV Talk” section of “OK” magazine (OK, 12 April 2005, Hot Stars insert, p. 62) and states the case plainly. Incorporated within an article about televised plastic surgery, the extract was entitled “Under the Knife”.

POST-NATAL TUMMY TUCKS

Rumours have circulated recently about new mums having this treatment done, but it's still regarded as controversial. Following a Caesarean, surgeons remove the excess skin - stretched by the pregnancy - and stitch the tummy back up....

UMBILICALPLASTY

This is basically surgery to the belly button, either by adding one, or repairing if damaged during pregnancy.

(OK, 12 April 2005, Hot Stars insert, p. 62)

The extract initially positions plastic surgery as something hidden and unspoken (“rumours”) reflecting both the common discourse that plastic surgery is somehow cheating and readers knowledge that use of this technique is an ‘accusation’ frequently denied by celebrities (Throsby, 2008). But the extract seems to position cosmetic surgery more as ‘new technology’ a narrative framework frequently found in magazines (Brooks, 2004). The OK magazine article, however, does not promote plastic surgery as a safe procedure, stating it is “still regarded as controversial”, and provides a fairly neutral, perhaps overly simplified, description of the procedure accessible to a lay audience, as signified by words such as “mums”, “tummy” and “belly button” (OK, 12 April, Hot Stars insert, p. 62). The neutral stance around using plastic surgery in the extract perhaps also suggests a positioning of the body as an object. This idea is underlined by the magazine’s constant use of “the” instead of a personal pronoun in describing the surgical procedures, which not only works to reinforce notions of mind body dualism, but suggests that the body as object can simply be reshaped or remodeled as needed to suit the current social beauty norms (Bartky, 1990). This reading reflects Bordo’s (2003) concept of the “plastic body” where the body can be sculpted through diet, exercise or plastic surgery into whatever is currently desirable and socially valuable.

Although the extract does not overtly ‘promote’ plastic surgery the description of its techniques does however contribute to the notion of the maternal body as imperfect ‘damaged goods’ which has been “stretched” and “damaged” because of pregnancy and after childbirth has “excess skin” in need of surgical “repair” (OK, 12 April 2005, Hot Stars insert, p. 62). This framing also reflects the traditional concepts of the feminine body, particularly the maternal body, as potentially monstrous, prone to excess and in need of control (Ussher, 1989 & 2006; Bordo, 2003).

While the Hot Stars article reflects a still common depiction of plastic surgery in the media as a suspect short cut and something to hide, a magazine feature on Gwyneth Paltrow reflected the emerging cultural shift towards a more accepting stance (Brooks, 2004; Gillespie, 1996; Gimlin, 2000). In this newer paradigm plastic surgery is constructed as an acceptable solution for intractable bodily flaws that can not be remedied through diet and exercise and are the cause of individual's deep distress (Brooks, 2004; Gimlin, 2000; Throsby, 2008).

Gwyneth Paltrow who was 'praised' for being "well on the way to fitting into her pre-pregnancy clothes" (NI, 20 May 2006, p. 11) in the 'Quick fix' article previously discussed (see p. 115), received a contradictory report on her body two months later in a different magazine. This later article in WD (21 August, 2006) was listed in the contents page as "**Stars in crisis:** Ellen, Gwyneth and Geri battle their weight woes" (p. 7), a reference to its position on a two page spread reporting on celebrities with 'body issues'. Blood (2005), notes that being overly concerned about appearance is considered a typical feminine trait in magazine culture, but this title suggests something more pathological.

The title "Gwyneth's Shortcuts" (WD, 21 August 2006, p. 22), arguably represents plastic surgery as cheating (Throsby 2008). As well, the caption for the accompanying photo (shown in Figure. 20, below), which is prominent through its positioning and highlighted on a red background, suggests a less understanding reading. The caption includes a quote from the article and reads:

unhappy Gwynnie says, 'My stomach is rippling, my breasts don't feel good'.

(WD, 21 August 2006, p. 22)

This highlighting of Gwyneth's 'intimate' concerns, may invite a sympathetic reading of her plight. However, taken out of the context of the article these concerns seem slight and a less significant or distressing problem. This reading is further anchored with a description of her as "unhappy Gwynnie". The description of her feelings as "unhappy" does not reflect the notion of distress expressed in the article which is analysed below. Alongside this, the use of a 'pet' version of her name ("Gwynnie") perhaps indicates a mocking, trivialising or dismissive tone. It has been postulated this "mocking perspective", now frequently used in popular media, affords readers a position of power or knowingness in relation to celebrities (Holmes, 2005, p. 25) and here arguably works to diminish or make light of her concerns.

The positioning of her story in the magazine alongside two narratives about celebrities with 'unhealthy' body image issues invites a different reading of the article.

Blood (2005), suggests that women's confessions of "bodily flaws and dislike of their bodies" is often read, in body image discourses such as this, as evidence of pathology (p. 97). The article's inclusion alongside the other body image discourses and the repeated 'confession' of her bodily flaws in both the caption and the article may strengthen a contradictory reading of Gwyneth as being overly concerned about her appearance, which in turn functions to pathologise her unhappiness. This contradictory pathologizing construction of Gwyneth places the distress surrounding physical flaws within the individual and disregards sociocultural pressures that may play a role. It has been noted that points of contradiction in magazines allow space for resistance (Blix, 1992). In this case it may be that readers are invited to dismiss Gwyneth's concerns as exaggerated and resist the message that physical appearance is of great importance. Alternatively, Gwyneth may be being positioned as a woman who is narcissistic, irrational and obsessed with her 'body image'.

In the short article, shown in full below, Gwyneth is reported to be considering plastic surgery to remedy her misshapen maternal body and is depicted more sympathetically:

Gwyneth's Shortcuts

The star is keen to lose 9kg of post-baby weight

Health conscious Gwyneth Paltrow is so unhappy with her post-baby body she is considering plastic surgery.

The actress, who has always preached the benefits of eating a strict macrobiotic diet and Ashtanga yoga, feels that childbirth has left her with problems only surgery will fix.

"My stomach is rippling, my breasts don't feel good. I want to do something about it," she admitted to a group of friends while dining at a trendy London pub, before quizzing them about surgery.

Gwyneth gave birth to Moses, her second child with husband Chris Martin, by caesarean in April. The couple have a two year old daughter, Apple.

The actress is still trying to lose 9kg of the 18kg she put on while pregnant with Moses. "I've got the appetite of a breastfeeding mother," she admits.

Having tried workouts, Gwyneth told friends she was serious about looking at the option of surgery to get her back to her best.

(WD, 21 August 2006, p. 22)

Being a mother is repeatedly framed as the cause of Gwyneth's "weight woes" and less than toned body. Although the 'problems' listed are common for women after childbirth and therefore 'normal' (Kitzinger, 1978), in this article they are depicted as abnormal and therefore distressing. The article's photograph, see Figure 21 below, shows Gwyneth wearing dark glasses, looking glum and wearing normal (i.e. not glamorous or

figure hugging) clothing, almost as if in disguise. This image of Gwyneth Paltrow is a very different representation of her than other photographs found in the data set. This implied visual contrast perhaps works as proof that maternity has dulled her bright flame, rendered her unworthy, and could be read as indication that she is ashamed of her body and trying to hide it through clothing (Kwon & Parnham, 1994).



Figure 21. Gwyneth Paltrow: Shortcuts, WD, 21 August 2006, p. 22

Gwyneth's detailed description of her bodily flaws within the context of the article works in a number of ways. As current beauty norms require a taut stomach and firm breasts Gwyneth's intimate confessions could be read as shameful and provides strong evidence of a less than 'perfect' body, a construction which has often been used as a rationale for plastic surgery (Gillespie, 1996). As readers may recognize that Gwyneth's appearance is vitally important to her career, this notion may strengthen an understanding of her need to "get...back to her best" using whatever technologies available (WD, 21 August 2006, p. 22). These readings reflect a newer construction of plastic surgery, noted by Gimlin (2000) and Brooks (2004), in which it is depicted as a "proactive step towards self improvement or economic success" (p. 221). This reading therefore also works as a reasonable justification for plastic surgery for a person whose body is valuable to their career, and also accords with current neoliberal discourses. The magazine's depiction of Gwyneth as physically *not* at "her best" is also reminiscent of Chapkis's (1986) concept of the "physical elite". Chapkis contends that in the media it is only the physical elite who

are deemed worthy of “passion” and “pleasure” - but only while they are ‘perfect’ (p. 140). Those who fall short feel unworthy of being admired or desired until they have purchased the right beauty products or dieted and exercised and achieved transformation (Chapkis). It could be argued that as Gwyneth is constructed as not at “her best” she will be denied adulation in the media until she has erased the physical signs of motherhood and returned to ideal femininity, thereby becoming once again one of the ‘physical elite’.

Gwyneth is also positioned in the article as having tried hard to get control of her body through a healthy diet, yoga and workouts but these were all unsuccessful in erasing what are depicted as intractable visible signs of motherhood. As a result she is reported as “feeling” these problems will only be fixed by surgery (WD (21 August 2006, p. 22). In this way the magazine article sets out a case in favour of Gwyneth’s plastic surgery: she has been damaged by something she could not control and despite having tried everything to fix it, the “problems” remain leaving her with no alternative. Researchers such as Weber (2005) and Heyes (2007) have noted that this is a common narrative used in the media based ‘makeover’ genre to justify ‘extreme’ measures to rectify bodily flaws as it positions the individual as being in need and worthy of help, rather than narcissistic, irrational and vain.

Within the article Gwyneth is reported as more rational in her attitude towards her problematic maternal body than may be suggested by the article’s position in the magazine. For example, her statement “I want to do something about it” (WD 21 August 2006, p. 22), reflects personal agency, accords with neoliberal discourses of self improvement and self management, and symbolizes modern femininity rather than obsessive narcissism or body image issues. A reading of personal agency also suggests that Gwyneth is aware of feeling powerless because of her less than perfect body and as such plastic surgery is framed as providing empowerment through reshaping her body towards the culturally constructed beauty norms (Chapkis, 1989). At the same time the effort the actress is reported to have gone through to try to achieve ideal femininity, i.e. diets, exercise and now the possibility of plastic surgery, reinforce the idea that women, particularly after childbirth, can only achieve a perfect appearance through continuous consumption and expert help. Therefore Gwyneth and her ‘problems’, as depicted in this article, represent not only an example of Bordo’s (2003) plastic body, where the body is reshaped at will through technologies, but also consumer femininity (Gill, 2007). In this article, despite the paradoxes, the maternal body is constructed as abject, distressing, damaged and in need of restoration through

investment in new technologies to restore it to its former slim, trim pre-pregnant state (“its best”) – quickly, whatever the cost.

Despite the strong emphasis in the data set on the importance of starting bodily transformation after childbirth as soon as possible, there were nonetheless a few examples of magazines documenting counter-stories against this growing mantra amongst the celebrities. Often, however, such stories were partial and at some point returned the narrative to one of idealized femininity. One example was a feature article on Catherine Zeta Jones.

Catherine Zeta Jones: Contradictory ‘normality’

Catherine Zeta-Jones is reported to have resisted the pressure to lose weight for two years after having her children but, as was typically the case, the story of her ‘resistance’ is set within a one-off article about her eventual return to ‘normal’ and re-compliance with strict feminine beauty rules. Her transformation narrative is celebrated on the cover of the magazine and in a two page article (shown in Figure 22 below), which features a list of her own “10 Unbreakable diet rules” (WD, 19 September 2005, p. 21). Within the narrative the theme of interest here is the conflicted and contradictory construction of word ‘normal’ as it was paradoxically used both in the discourse around ‘resistance’ and in the justification of Catherine’s return to the slim beauty norms.



Figure 22. Catherine Zeta Jones: Lost fat fast . WD, 19 September 2005, pp. 20-21.

I enjoyed myself, but by the end of it I really wanted to get back to normal

The above article appeared in the WD, 19 September 2005, and although it refers to Catherine's pregnancies and motherhood it focuses entirely on her bodily appearance. As usual in the data set the article clearly links pregnancy and motherhood with weight gain e.g. "when she started having kids Catherine went up to size 18" and distorting her body shape e.g. "Having children really does take its toll on your body. Your boobs don't recover for ages." (p. 21). The discussion around her weight gain placed marked emphasis on her eating habits in pregnancy. Both the magazine, and reportedly Catherine herself, describe this as "overeating" but, unusually for magazine discourses on weight and appearance, this is constructed as 'normal' (p. 21). The magazine states that Catherine "says" she has "a natural tendency to 'blow up'" (p. 21). As well the magazine quotes Catherine stating that during pregnancy "I just ate whatever I wanted....I can't help myself. I put on weight, I'm a normal woman" (p. 21). This depiction of her body as being 'normal' and therefore prone to "blow up" reflects the traditional cultural construction of the female body as prone to excess, and uncontrolled or ill disciplined (Bordo, 2003; Ussher, 2006). Here 'normal' is used to convey 'natural', a reading which suggests Catherine's body was subject to the laws of nature and therefore beyond her control in pregnancy. Her somewhat confessional tone also suggests that this extract could also be read as a defense or deflection of guilt experienced due to a large weight gain (Root & Browner, 2001). At the same time this feeling of losing control of the body during pregnancy is a common discourse found in qualitative research on motherhood (e.g. see Fairburn & Welch, 1990; Warren & Brewis, 2004) and similar to that expressed by April Ieremia in Chapter Four (see p. 81).

The magazine uses discourses of liberation to describe Catherine's feelings when pregnant, suggesting a notion of resistance to the strict cultural beauty norms. It is reported that Catherine "even said pregnancy brought relief from worrying about her weight" and quotes Catherine as saying "I almost felt liberated when I was pregnant. I have to say, I enjoyed myself" (WD, 19 September 2005, p. 21). These extracts, although tentative ("even said", "almost felt"), again echo discourses of liberation and relief from weight concerns frequently found in research on motherhood (e.g. see Longhurst, 2000, or Warren & Brewis, 2004). These commonly expressed discourses about the maternal body help to strengthen a positioning of Catherine as a 'normal' woman rather than a 'supermum' or an example of the

intangible, always perfect celebrity mother referred to by Douglas and Michaels (2004).

Magazine comments reinforce this construction of her e.g.

The star has always honestly admitted that maintaining a Hollywood figure doesn't come naturally – or easily – to her.

(WD, 19 September 2005, p. 20).

The words “honestly admitted” work to create a sympathetic reading of Catherine's struggles with weight. This depiction of Catherine suggests she has a ‘normal’ female body rather than the “Hollywood figure”, a reading which is reinforced in the direct quote that followed: “‘I've always been round and you can make yourself nuts,’ she says” (p. 20). In the second part of this statement “you can make yourself nuts” Catherine further positions herself as ‘normal’, but in a psychological sense. A little further on in the text Catherine specifies “nuts” as referring to eating disorders, a problem she claims she frequently saw in others when she was a dancer. The magazine again reinforces her stance as being psychologically ‘normal’ with the following:

Catherine has long asserted, that while she cares about her appearance, she is not about to let diet obsession rule her life

(WD, 19 September 2005, p. 21).

The references to disordered eating or diet obsession in these last two extracts work to pathologise the individual, particularly as there is no criticism of the social pressures at play. In this way the depiction of women as obsessed with their appearance is maintained (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006), while Catherine's delayed return to ‘normal’ after childbirth is positioned as resistance to diet obsessions and eminently sensible. In denying that Catherine is obsessed with her appearance the magazine is careful not to position her as denying ‘normal’ femininity (“she cares about her appearance”). This works to moderate her resistance to appearance issues and maintains a sympathetic reading (WD, 19 September 2005, p. 21). In these extracts being constructed as ‘normal’ means not being abnormal or obsessed but also means being ordinary. All these meanings of ‘normal’ work to justify Catherine's resistance to the pressure to lose weight quickly after childbirth; she is positioned as a normal woman and mother, not a perfect celebrity, and as sane i.e. not obsessed with diets and appearance issues.

Paradoxically, ‘normal’ is also used by the magazine in this article to mean the socially constructed narrow beauty norms as represented by the “Hollywood figure” (p. 20). Catherine, herself, also uses this meaning in the reference to enjoying herself during pregnancy and concludes with the following: “but at the end of it I really wanted to get back to

normal” (p. 21). Here ‘normal’ takes on a physical manifestation and is represented in the magazine’s depiction of Catherine’s slimmer body as “her best-ever shape” and a glamorous ‘now’ photograph (p. 20). This is further defined in more detail by the magazine as being able to once again “fit size 10 clothes” (p. 21) and “looking super svelte, showing off a tiny waist and flat stomach” (p. 20). These references suggest that the erasure of visible signs of motherhood, such as the fuller stomach, is part of getting back to ‘normal’.

Catherine’s own statement about wanting to get back to normal represents a turning point in her two year long resistance to the stringent “Hollywood” ‘beauty norms’. The magazine explains her change of attitude as being necessary to further her career: ‘Catherine knows what effect being in such amazing shape will have on her career’ (p. 21). This points to the notion of empowerment through appearance and as such reflects postfeminist discourses. However, while empowerment may bring an end to the subordination that Catherine may have felt as a larger woman, there is a sense that her stance is more about accommodation to disciplines of femininity rather than challenging them (Weitz, 2001).

It is ironic that having depicted Catherine as “naturally” “round”. The magazine, and Catherine, also uses the “Hollywood figure” to represent ‘normal’, although statistically this type of beauty is not ‘normal’ (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006; Weber, 2005). Further, both Catherine and the magazine depict attaining this “Hollywood” norm or ‘normal’ body as hard work e.g. “she says she has “worked like a dog” to shift unwanted kilos” and “she embarked on a strict three-week programme” (WI, 19 September 2005, pp. 20-21). The admissions of the hard work and discipline which were needed to achieve this “super svelte” body shape appear to negate the concept of the “Hollywood figure” as being “normal” (pp. 20-21), a point which has been noted by many feminist scholars such as Bordo (2003) and Bartky (1990).

The magazine therefore presents a contradictory almost circular argument in its narrative about Catherine Zeta-Jones. While depicting her as a ‘normal woman’ she is also abnormal because as a larger woman she is outside the bounds of strict culturally constructed beauty norms. But now that she has worked hard to change her ‘normal’ (“naturally”) round shape to a contrived “super svelte” shape she is hailed for being, as she herself defines it, as “back to normal” (WD, 19 September, 2005, p. 21). This complex and contradictory representation reflects the difficulties women experience negotiating appearance norms in their efforts to achieve correct femininity. This reading of the narrative also suggests that while Catherine was able to resist the strict feminine beauty norms for a while, in order to achieve empowerment and resist subordination in

Hollywood and further her career it was necessary for her to once more accommodate to social expectations of normative femininity. This reading is confirmed by a “friend” in last two sentences of the article “She wants to focus on her work now...And in all honesty being slim is a big part of that.” (p. 21).

Taken in its entirety (that is including Catherine’s “10 unbreakable diet rules”) this article is more than an example of resistance to hegemonic beauty norms. It also represents an example of Bartky’s (1989) notion of the ‘fashion beauty complex’ where industry invokes pleasure but at the same time it creates feelings of deficiency *and* offers the solutions to the problems. In this instance the pleasure in being able to dress well again, to once more look fabulous and attract media attention and admiration is offered as evidence of the transformative power of weight loss. Those who don’t measure up to the strict feminine beauty norms and need to lose weight (e.g. mothers) are offered the solution through purchase of the magazine and access to its diet and motivational story. The magazine has used this article and therefore Catherine’s body to promote and sell the magazine, weight loss products, and to reinforce the message that attaining correct femininity through continuous consumption brings rewards and pleasure (Gill, 2007). This suggests that Catherine’s body and perhaps her ‘self’ have been commodified through this article. This article as a whole shows that motherhood has indeed become a niche market with its own set of distinct problems and its own set of solutions (Carter & Steiner, 2004).

Chapter Summary

The articles analysed in this chapter reinforce the concept that the normal maternal body is undesirable and in need of remedy, discipline or repair through body work or *new* ‘labour’. Each article predicated its discussion of weight loss or bodily reshaping by depicting the maternal body as overweight and out of shape and therefore undesirable and, in some cases, deeply distressing. This depiction of the maternal body served to position it as a ‘problem’ to mothers who were largely depicted as desperate to ‘get back to normal’. Having established the problem the magazines presented readers with the solutions.

These solutions were frequently surrounded by health discourses which positioned the magazine as expert, and beauty discourses which conveyed the notion of the value of the slender female body. Postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of empowerment and self care and self improvement were widely used to encourage women to ‘labour’ and reduce their body size and tone up the postnatal body. The importance or ‘need’ to return to the

'normal' pre-pregnancy shape was underlined by reference to the value of a slim attractive body as a means of attracting attention and adulation, its positive associations to self esteem, and, in the case of celebrities, its power to enhance career opportunities. New mothers were offered solutions by the magazines to effect a 'return to normal'. These solutions ranged from a wide variety of diets, some talk of the benefits of exercise and the possibility of plastic surgery as a final solution if all else fails.

Close surveillance of the mothers' size and shape was used to comment on the need to lose weight, progress and success. Weight gain and loss was frequently measured in kilograms, clothing sizes and styles. Photographs were frequently used to monitor changes in body shape and size in a similar manner. The time taken to lose weight after child birth was a common discourse found in the magazine articles, and worked to convey a sense of urgency and competition and often admiration for rapid weight loss.

The magazines treated weight loss after childbirth as being an unquestioned, normal part of 'bouncing back' after babies, a part of 'dutiful femininity' (Dworkin & Wachs 2004). 'Labouring mums', who had achieved successful weight loss or erasure of the visible signs of maternity and returned to pre-pregnancy body shape, were hailed using celebratory and empowerment discourses, and accompanied by new posed photographs of the mother on their own, smiling, well groomed and wearing figure hugging clothing. The frequent highlighting of these articles on the magazine covers and the increasing space devoted to changing the maternal body indicates its commercial value to the magazine both through sales and advertising revenue. It also reinforces the notion that through continuous consumption it is possible for a woman to achieve a slim attractive body at any point in their life regardless of circumstances and the physical damage caused by childbirth, and this is rewarded with attention and praise.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: (RE) APPEARANCE RULES

...Ange has been focusing too much on her body. An insider says her self-image issues have seen her refusing food and avoiding leaving the house.
'She's lost some of the baby weight but thinks she still has fat on her stomach,' the insider says. 'Brad tells her she doesn't and that it's all in her head but she still thinks she sees it'
(NI, 11 October 2008, p. 7)

In the concluding chapter of this thesis I highlight key aspects of the way maternal bodies are represented in a sample of popular women's magazines available to New Zealand women. To begin I will discuss the findings from the analytical chapters, underlining significant shifts in how mother's bodies are being constructed in these magazines and how this impacts on representations of motherhood. I will also relate these findings to general representations of women noted in literature over the last few decades. In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the limitations of this research and consider future directions for this study and possible implications of the outcomes of this research.

As the preceding chapters demonstrate, detailed examination of the appearance of the postnatal body, largely through the camera lens, is now common in popular women's magazines. Of particular note is the focus on women in the first few months after childbirth. Conversely scant attention has been given to the postnatal body in academic research to date, highlighting the clear need for research such as presented here. Findings documented in the preceding analyses suggest a shift away from representations around home and baby in magazines. Arguably, findings also point to the possibility that the increased visibility of celebrity mothers soon after childbirth has been a major factor in the shift. The possibility is increased by the tabloidization of several of the popular NZ women's magazines (Kirkman, 2001) including those in the data set which produces an emphasis on celebrity culture rather than the traditional themes of motherhood (Ballaster et al., 1991; Davalos et al., 2007).

Celebrity stories about childbirth and the 'body work' involved in reshaping the postnatal body were not only common features in the magazines examined but also often featured on the magazine covers. The photographs of celebrity women dominated, and

often shaped, the articles and celebrities' bodies were analysed in detail for flaws, rated, and critiqued in the captions and within texts. Discussions about the appearance of the women after child birth were found not only in specific articles that focused on this exclusively but also situated within other texts, which were largely about the birth or discussions of women's experiences as mothers, their families or their latest career moves. The references to the mother's body shape, size, weight gains and losses, what they were doing to lose weight and their general appearance was common. The magazines also regularly noted how long it was since the celebrities had given birth.

Analyses presented in the previous chapters locate these depictions of the maternal body and the detailed critique or praise of it within postfeminist and neoliberal discourses which in tandem emphasised the importance of women's appearance. Postfeminist and neoliberal discourses were mobilised to promote the slim postnatal body as crucial to mothers being considered sexy and desirable (see Chapter Three) and as a sign of physical and particularly emotional wellbeing (see Chapter Four). Further, all these discourses were invoked to encourage mothers to undertake the body work or the 'second labour' needed to obtain the culturally valued slim, toned body shape (see Chapter Five). Only mothers who had regained this desired shape were depicted by the magazines as beautiful, healthy and sexy.

Postfeminist and neoliberal discourses were also utilised by the consumer industry to generate health and beauty needs and market their products in the magazines specifically to mothers. The prominence afforded to narratives of disciplining the maternal body and the images of celebrity mothers in these magazines also indicates that they enhance magazine sales, and suggests this is likely to ensure their continuance and appearance as a regular topic. It appears that the maternal body has been enveloped by the broader 'body market', where women are positioned as consumers and celebrities' bodies are used to sell products to women (Gill, 2007).

The ways of representing the celebrity maternal body similarly featured in stories about non celebrity mothers in 'reader's stories'. These articles also scrutinized and analysed the mother's bodies and 'how' they became thinner after childbirth. Again, these representations were found to be constructed within postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of empowerment and self improvement. Analyses suggested that the location of celebrity and 'everyday mothers' within postfeminist and neoliberal discourses arguably made a number of new subjectivities available to recent mothers.

Sexy mums

One such subjectivity was the ‘sexy mum’ illustrated in the descriptions of mothers and their bodies as ‘sexy’, ‘yummy mummies’ or ‘hot’, variably in reference to their appearance and also their behaviour. These representations of ‘yummy mummies’ were entangled in postfeminist discourses of sexual empowerment through the body and celebratory in tone. Academics have long noted that discourses of sexual empowerment are regularly used in relation to femininity in general in the media (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003; Gill, 2007 & 2008; Lazar, 2006), but this application to motherhood is relatively new (Coward, 1997; Douglas & Michaels, 2004). The frequency with which the discourses of sexual empowerment were found in relation to motherhood suggests that at least within popular culture postfeminist sexual subjectivity in motherhood is becoming standard.

The positioning of a mother now specifically as sexy was mostly found to be based on her appearance and was normally heralded with the use of sexual words such as ‘hot’ to describe her body within the texts and/or in photographic captions. The magazines at times also described celebrity mothers’ behaviour using sexualised terms e.g. “turning heads in a barely there bikini” (WD, 8 August, 2005, p.119). Accounts of mothers who were construed as displaying sexualised behaviour were described using neoliberal discourses of personal agency, which suggests a representation of these mothers as sexually desiring subjects (Gill 2003 & 2008). Notably, sexualised discourses were more explicit and more likely to refer to behaviour as well as appearance when applied to mothers of older babies/children. However, even mothers of very young babies were represented as looking ‘sexy’, although analysis suggests more often rather tentatively so and more frequently in images than text. While a ‘sexy mum’ subjectivity accords with common media depictions of the ‘supermum’ (Choi et al. 2005; Douglas & Michaels, 2004) it strongly contrasts with much of the research on motherhood. Rather than feeling sexy, most women report experiencing a downturn in feelings of sexuality in the first stage of motherhood (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2002; von Sydow, 1999), largely due to exhaustion and the demands of their new role as mother.

Sexual subjectivities also represent a marked shift away from mothers’ positioning in traditional discourses of motherhood where they are depicted as ‘madonnas’, i.e. women untainted by sexuality or as asexual beings, and sexual behaviour by mothers seen as morally suspect (Ussher, 2006; Brown et al. 1997). This positioning of mothers in line with postfeminist notions of sexual empowerment could be viewed as liberation from the

more restricted traditional positioning of mothers. In this sense, there is potential for readers to see the framing of motherhood and mothers as sexy as reflecting their own feelings around wanting to remain sexually desirable when they become mothers, and as such they may welcome and enjoy this representation of motherhood. But within these magazines 'sexiness' was only conferred on those mothers who had regained what was often described as their 'pre-pregnant' shape/body, i.e. those who had (re)conformed to the current rigid feminine beauty norms. This idealised way of being, constituted by the magazine, was therefore confined to slim and attractively presented mothers; mothers who had not lost weight or not dressed well were considered dull and frumpy. Furthermore, in the magazines analysed being labelled 'sexy' hinged on an appearance norm based on a younger or disciplined body. The naturally larger, stretched postnatal body was considered outside the norm and not desirable. The construction of motherhood in line with idealised femininity is therefore also a restrictive one as only a specific body type is rewarded. It is argued that this call to be a 'sexy' or 'yummy' mother as evidenced in this analysis, may work to impose further social pressures on mothers to attain, through diet and exercise, an unrealistic physical body type that in essence denies, or seeks to erase, all bodily evidence of motherhood. Moreover, pursuit of the 'yummy mummy' is timed to coincide with what is suggested to be a period of physical and psychological vulnerability (Choi et al. 2005; Miller, 2005).

Healthy Mums

A 'healthy mum' was another subjectivity available in the magazines in representations of new mothers. While a healthy mum subjectivity was located in a health discourse, the conflation with the beauty discourse gave emphasis to notions of 'look good feel good' and 'slim equals healthy' (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Lupton, 1996). Further, as in previous media research, real health issues (e.g. obesity) were found to be secondary to issues around beauty and appearance (Duncan, 1994).

In the data set the mother's appearance was used as an indicator of 'health' and/or health discourses were used to validate the magazine's visual and textual attention to the mother's appearance. Articles regularly used health discourses in their construction of mothers as 'over weight' and justified recommendations of weight loss, critique on any dietary/exercise measures undertaken, or comments around lack of individual discipline and self care. Accounts referring to being 'overweight' or 'too thin' after childbirth worked as evidence that the woman was struggling and not coping with motherhood. The

magazine articles enlisted doctors and diet and exercise ‘gurus’ to dispense expert advice to the women in articles or the magazine itself took on the mantle of expert to advise women who were depicted as having difficulties with weight and appearance issues. It is interesting to note that although many current media and medical campaigns constantly emphasise the negative physical effects of weight retention, the health discourses found in magazines analysed were more likely to reference psychological wellbeing as a concern rather than physical health.

This ‘concern’ around psychological wellbeing in the magazines related to the premise that not measuring up to current appearance norms caused women deep distress and, in contrast, achieving weight loss brought happiness and increased self esteem. In this way, articles depicted diet and exercise to achieve weight loss as panaceas, primarily for the women’s psychological problems and incidentally for their physical health. Contradictorily, mothers who were considered to have lost ‘too much weight’ or tried ‘too hard’ to lose weight after childbirth and looked ‘gaunt’ or ‘frail’ (and therefore unattractive), were pathologised and criticised using expert, risk and moral discourses. This finding reflects current media trends, which have been noted by researchers such as Blood (2005), in which the individual woman is criticised and pathologised for excessive weight loss while the sociocultural pressures to discipline the female body are not discussed and are left unchallenged. Interestingly, some articles activated more traditional discourses of mothers as nurturers and guardians of family health to critique mothers’ weight. The construction of mothers as nurturers was combined with risk discourses relating to the foetus or baby’s health and the newer moral discourses in relation to healthy eating habits, to sanction concerns about the mother if she was perceived as *too* thin or *too* fat. These traditional discourses were used to frame these mothers negatively as caring more for themselves than their child.

Conversely, analysis also showed the use of conventional discourses of the caring mother were also used in a ‘positive’ way, with a neoliberal spin, to justify mothers’ efforts to lose weight to achieve the right, socially sanctioned slim (but not too thin) body type. These ‘healthy mums’ were depicted as caring for themselves in order to care for their family. Notably, articles repeatedly invoked neoliberal discourses of self improvement, self management and personal agency to encourage and praise women who were engaged in weight management strategies, and women were regularly portrayed as ‘wanting’ to lose weight to better their health and emotional wellbeing. In this way the articles in the data set provided another subjectivity for new mothers that was based on

appearance - slim mothers were seen to be 'healthy mums' and were depicted as happy, disciplined, empowered, desirable and caring for their families as well as themselves.

Labouring Mums

In the constitution of a 'labouring mum' subjectivity, the labour pains of birth transform into the labouring pains of body management after birth. One of the strongest findings to emerge from the analysis was that the maternal body was continuously represented as abject and damaged and a problem in need of urgent remedy. In response, the magazines offered the solutions of diets, exercise, body treatments and clothing - all designed to remedy the abject body or disguise visible signs of motherhood. References to products and treatments could be found embedded within articles, in a similar manner to product placement, and in features entirely devoted to shaping up after babies, and in advertisements targeting mothers specifically. These findings support McRobbie's (2006) comment that celebrity motherhood and the phenomenon of the 'yummy mummy' have added to the extension of consumer culture into maternity.

In general, articles exhorted all mothers, celebrities and readers alike, to reshape their maternal bodies as soon as they were able, based on the continual framing of the normal maternal body as unattractive, frumpy and drab and of little social worth. Although 'body work' has long been promoted in Western culture as a necessary part of dutiful femininity needed to control and improve the unruly female body (Bartky, 1990; Blood, 2005; Bordo, 2003), the findings from this study suggest the concept is now regularly being mapped onto mothers soon after childbirth in the popular women's magazines. While Dworkin and Wachs (2004) similarly found an emphasis on remedying the maternal body their study featured an American magazine specifically targeting mothers. The trend identified in the current study of popular women's magazines suggests the possibility of a much broader, more generalised trend of 'new labour' and a 'labouring mum' subjectivity.

The articles analysed indicated the close and ongoing surveillance of celebrities' pregnant and post birth bodies via photographs, features and articles. In this way, magazines monitored the mother's progress to regain the slim pre-pregnant body shape as well as reference, rate and promote the diets, lifestyle programmes, clothing and beauty treatments used to restore the desired slim, glamorous body shape. I would argue that this detailed monitoring creates a standard which allows other mothers to rate themselves, and covertly drives a sense of competition to lose weight as quickly as possible after

childbirth. The inclusion of 'before' and 'after' photographs and the use of celebratory discourses and narratives around the journey back to the pre-pregnant body found in the data set are similar to techniques used in the makeover genre currently very popular in the media (Deery, 2004; Weber, 2006). The celebratory discourses around the successful (re)appearance of the slim pre-pregnant body shape strengthen the notion that the normal maternal body is drab and socially undesirable and in need of correction through discipline.

Texts and photographs constantly depicted the 'normal' or undisciplined maternal body as undesirable across articles analysed, particularly when referring to celebrity mothers. I would suggest that the detailed descriptions of how the female body is changed by motherhood, represents a new shift in the construction of motherhood in popular magazines. Douglas and Michael's (2004) and O'Donohoe (2006), in reference to celebrity mothers in the late 20th century and the more modern 'yummy mummies', both note that these women look as if pregnancy and childbirth had left them untouched. They suggest this promotes the myth that motherhood is effortless. However it was not unusual in the articles discussed in this study for the celebrities themselves, or the magazines, to depict the 'negative' physical changes brought on by motherhood in some detail. This may be due to the tabloid style presentation, e.g. the inclusion of paparazzi style photographs that these magazines have taken up, but it also suggests a less romanticised or more realistic depiction of motherhood than has been seen in our society in the past. Researchers have spoken of the myth of motherhood and how the reality of the postnatal body for first time mothers in particular is big shock and known to contribute to distress and grief over loss of embodied identity (Beck, 2002; Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997; Upton & Han, 2003; Woollet & Phoenix, 1991). In this way the trend of frank portrayals of the maternal body, in both texts and photographs of articles analysed can be seen as a new shift in the representation of motherhood. These more realistic and unglamorised representations of the post-baby body found in the magazines could therefore work to normalise the effects becoming a mother has on women's bodies and helping prepare women for these changes – a request that has been made by researchers on the effects of motherhood (e.g. Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997). Conversely, constantly depicting the 'normal' maternal body as 'abnormal', damaged and unattractive, outside the cultural standards of beauty and in need of a makeover as found in these magazines, is unlikely to be helpful in allaying women's distress and could contradictorily compound any negative feelings.

Magazine representations of the ‘normal’ maternal body as abject is reinforced by the unquestioned approach to ‘body work’ in the texts analysed. While some mothers depicted in the articles took longer than others to lose weight, reshape and return to ‘normal’ after childbirth, the imperative to lose weight and attain the valued pre-pregnancy state of appearance was undisputed in the texts. Such normalisation demonstrated the extent to which neoliberal discourses of self improvement and self management alongside discourses of femininity, health and sexual empowerment underpinned the magazines’ promotion and praise of successful body work. The recurrent message conveyed about the wellbeing of new mothers was that the pre-pregnant body shape paved the way to personal happiness and prosperity.

Concluding comments

Findings from this study concur with the feminist argument that femininity is now generally constructed in visual terms, underlining the emphasis on the female body and its cultural value (Bordo, 1993). The shift from ‘invisibility’ to the regular and detailed visibility of the maternal body in these magazines could be seen in the primacy of comments about the appearance of the women’s bodies over their abilities as mothers. I would suggest that this highlighting of the physical appearance of the mother and the detailed commentary on mother’s progress back to ‘normal’ and suggestions on how to do this represents a new direction in the depiction of motherhood in popular women’s magazines. Motherhood has long been regarded as a ‘normal’ developmental phase for women who are able or choose to follow this pathway. But within the articles analysed here which pay attention to the postnatal body, there is a sense that it is an abnormal phase in women’s lives, something that is shameful and that should be remedied as soon as possible. In these magazines women won most praise for looking glamorous and sexy despite motherhood, rather than for motherhood.

I would argue that the numerous photographs of the women after childbirth will work in the manner of Foucault’s (1995) Panopticon to create a constant vigilance over a body that used to be hidden. Although being proud of our bodies is very much a postfeminist notion, the positive aspects of this are undermined by our culture which establishes standards, constantly reproduced in the popular media, which are very difficult for most women to achieve. Drawing on Foucauldian theory, I propose that the increased focus on the maternal body, as found in this research, may engender the internalisation of new beauty norms established for mothers in these magazines. The subjectivities of ‘sexy

mum' and 'healthy mum' constructed in these magazines are premised on appearance and only those who work hard and 'bounce back after babies' to the slim, trim, toned pre-pregnancy body shape i.e. 'labouring mums' achieve these accolades in the magazines analysed.

The focus on the maternal body found in this study represents a new attention to a period of a woman's life that hitherto enjoyed some protection from a scrutinizing gaze and bodily evaluation based on stringent beauty norms. Rather, this research suggests that motherhood is now represented as a great danger to personal value and self esteem, as measured in appearance, and a time to invoke extra vigilance and effort in order not to overstep the socially constructed standards of acceptable bodily change in motherhood. Rapid resumption of body work after childbirth to regain the appropriate, socially constructed and rewarded slim, trim body type is taken for granted and encouraged, both in the magazines' articles and by their advertisers for whom motherhood presents a lucrative market.

As with all social constructionist and post-structuralist research it is important to acknowledge that the analyses in this thesis represent only one way of reading these magazines and their construction of the maternal body. As discussed in the methodology, I have children of my own and it is possible that my own experience of early motherhood in the first half of the 1990s has biased my selection and interpretation of the articles, extracts and images used in this thesis. Endeavouring to present a fair representation of what I read in these magazines was a process for me in the work as I learnt to be more plural in my interpretations along the way and I consider this has been reflected in my analysis.

In addition to noting the constraints around a particularised reading of the data, it is important to note that the selection of magazines was confined only to those which contained articles, captions, references, images and comments pertaining to women's post baby bodies. In this sense the selection neglects a body of popular culture that may depict other representations and construct other subjectivities available to mothers that are less body focused. For example, it would be interesting to explore the representations of mothers found in the *Australian Woman's Weekly*, as I was unable through random selection of this magazine to find references to the maternal body and its appearance. Moreover, the selection of a convenience sample of magazines necessarily limits the meanings and subjectivities around motherhood that are made available in popular women's magazines, a microcosm among all media. Nor does it represent an accurate

estimate of the frequency with which these subjectivities and constructions of the maternal body appear in popular women's magazines. This thesis nonetheless contributes to a very sparse amount of research that has looked at media constructions of motherhood and the maternal body (Bailey, 2001; Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997). As such it represents a small but significant step in understanding what is being depicted and is available to mothers and 'mothers to be' in New Zealand society.

While an examination of magazine texts has been an important step toward identifying and elaborating new representations of motherhood via women's bodies, an important question for future research is how these magazine texts are received by women themselves and what the impact on women may be. Many researchers observe pregnancy and childbirth to be widely described by women as a very difficult and demanding phase during a period when their bodies undergo extreme natural changes (Johnson et al., 2004; Tiggeman, 2004; Ussher, 1989). Given these observations, repeated emphasis on the appearance of the maternal body in these magazines is a cause for concern. Since research on 'body image' has shown that media representations of the slender body ideal is a contributory factor in body dissatisfaction among women (Blood, 2005; Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002; Wykes & Gunter 2005), it is important to understand what is currently being portrayed in relation to motherhood. At the same time it is necessary to explore how salient these representations of the maternal body will be for women at a time when many feel their bodies feel are out of control. It seems likely that, based on previous body image research, the portrayal of the maternal body found in this study could intensify issues that new mothers already may be facing.

Indeed, both the newer research evidence and the recent phenomenon of 'pregorexia' suggest that mothers are aware of, and sometimes influenced by, celebrity mothers' rapid slim down. Together with the known social pressures to become slim in order to be valued, this new trend in magazine culture has the potential for negative health consequences for women. Alternatively, from a postfeminist perspective, representations of sexy, slim, healthy and happy mothers may be read as empowering and perhaps liberating. The potential for different meanings to be made is underlined by the research which shows that women do not passively absorb what they read but actively make meaning of text, and their reading of women's magazines may be from flicking through rather than reading in depth (Bird, 2003; Hermes, 1995). Accordingly, it is important for future research to investigate how mothers make sense of representations in the magazines

and other media and to examine to what extent they are taking up resisting or ignoring the subjectivities made available in representations of mothers³.

Whatever sense women themselves may make of the magazine texts, there can be little argument that the representations of postnatal bodies found in this research are based on beauty standards which are hard for most women to achieve. Where society once allowed women time to recover physically and emotionally from childbirth I suggest this new cultural environment based on the recent visibility of the maternal body demands swift action by mothers to restore the right body shape. The construction and representation of the maternal body in the media based on physical appearance as evidenced in this thesis appears to be gathering momentum. It is important therefore that continued research such as that undertaken here, addresses trends and the issues arising from media representations of the maternal body making 'visible' the problematics and generating scrutiny of them. At the same time, the frank disclosures of many of these representations reveal some of the physical and emotional difficulties of being a new mother. Such representations expose the part of the 'mommy myth' that promotes motherhood as effortless (Douglas & Michaels, 2004) and counters the notion of the untouched body promoted by the 'yummy mummy'. As Wendy Chapkis (1986) commented: "In reality...the female body is a constantly changing landscape... To call beauty only the still life of unchanging "perfection" is no praise for creatures so lively and diverse as womankind" (pp. 16-17). Open discussion around these matters, provoked by the media representations of the maternal body, could help to normalise the embodied experiences of motherhood and assist with reframing them more positively allowing women's different body shapes as they move through life to be celebrated instead of condemned.

Angelina Jolie has her mojo back! After spending almost three months in hiding, battling baby blues and body image issues, the actress has made a spectacular return to the limelight, proving she's determined to put her troubles behind her.

Onlookers gasped as the A-lister strode up the red carpet for the New York premiere of her movie *Changeling*, looking ravishing in a black Versace dress that made her look every inch the yummy mummy.

(NI, 18 October 2008, p. 8)

³ A second phase of the study has been undertaken involving focus groups with mothers. Findings from this project will be presented in a follow up publication.

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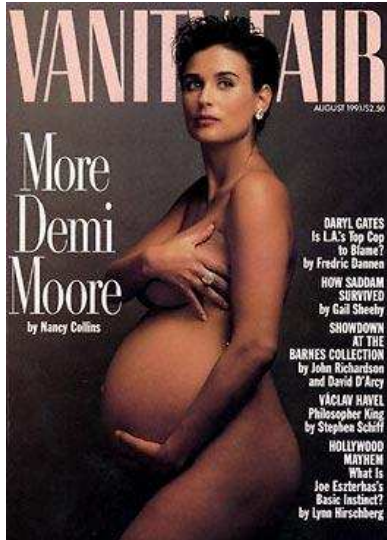
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APPENDIX 1

PREGNANCY COVER SHOTS



Demi Moore, Vanity Fair, 1991



Britney Spears, Harpers Bizarre, 2006.



Heidi Klum, Vitals Woman, 2005



Eva Herzigova, Vanity Fair, 2007.

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF MAGAZINES INCLUDED IN THE DATA SET

New Zealand Woman's Weekly

9 May 2005
20 June 2005
11 July 2005
25 July 2005
22 August 2005
26 September 2005
10 October 2005
21 November 2005
5 December 2005
5 January 2006
9 January 2006
20 February 2006
6 March 2006
3 April 2006
8 May 2006

Woman's Day

21 March 2005
25 April 2005
8 August 2005
19 September 2005
22 May 2006
19 June 2006
26 June 2006
21 August 2006

New Idea

January 2006
4 March 2006
20 may 2006
27 may 2006
3 June 2006

OK

12 April 2005