

**TITLE: Prodigal bodies: pop culture and post-pregnancy**

**AUTHOR(S):** [Cunningham,-Hilary](#)

**PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL: Y**

**JOURNAL NAME:** [Michigan-Quarterly-Review](#)

**SOURCE:** Michigan Quarterly Review v 41 no3 Summer 2002. p. 428-54

**PUBLICATION YEAR:** 2002

**RETRIEVED FROM: EXT:** J-STOR

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME HE CALLED YOU BABY? ...

About a year after my son was born, my husband and I unexpectedly found ourselves seated in a restaurant with our son quietly asleep in his stroller. For several seconds we stared at each other in disbelief, careful to keep our expectations low and yet moment by moment becoming increasingly delighted at the prospect of an "adult" dinner together. Naturally there had not been many of these in our first year of parenthood and so, when our son magnanimously decided to stay asleep, we began to explore the menu with delicious leisure. Our perusal of the restaurant's offerings, however, took us to a rather strange destination--on the very back page was an ad for cosmetic surgery.

The advertisement depicted a man's face set close to a baby pressed against his bare chest. It seemed like a rather nice shot--a new father cradling his plump and robust offspring--but the man's expression was somewhat serious and his gaze, directed straight at the viewer, was concerned. Above him to the left were the words: When was the last time he called you baby? (Fig. 1)

Instantly the glow of the meal faded. Like a poisoned dart, the ad hit its mark and began to release its venom into my bloodstream. Without actually depicting the object of the man's gaze, the advertisement conjured up who he was looking at--the mother. I saw him noting her (and by extension also my) still-flabby, still-overweight post-pregnancy body. I speculated that she might also be suffering (like me) from sagging breasts, distended and weirdly spongy after a few months of breastfeeding. Inwardly I winced as I imagined the father noticing the exercise-resistant roll of fat across the top of her abdomen--a gift from evolutionary biology (it's a layer of fat designed to keep the fetus insulated) but the ultimate postpartum nemesis. But even more disconcerting was the ad's implication that a timeline was involved, particularly given the baby's possible age (I guessed three to five months). The man's disconsolate and worried expression seemed to ask the mother why the problems weren't gone yet. "Things are getting critical," the ad seemed to warn, "He's losing interest." And underneath all of this, an entrepreneurial surgeon offered "the ultimate in cosmetic laser surgery. Call now for your free consultation!"

"Getting-your-body-back" is a strangely pervasive phrase among contemporary mothers. Thirty years ago, the phrase associated with a slim, post-pregnancy mother might have been "keeping your figure." Today the phrase is decidedly "getting your body back." The emphasis is no longer placed on a passive female subject who keeps or loses her figure, but on the active woman who, through her own powerful agency, reclaims not just an aspect of herself (her figure) but her very being--her body. It is no wonder that women who do indeed get their bodies back after pregnancies are now celebrated as successful, powerful women--women to be emulated, admired, and envied.

In the United States, Canada, and many European nations, an expectant mother is encouraged to carefully monitor her nutrition and to put on pregnancy weight in a steady, incremental

manner. One of the first and most frequent procedures a pregnant woman will go through with her health-care provider is to step on the scales. North American obstetricians recommend that a pregnant woman gain twenty-five to thirty pounds and that no more than seven of these pounds be maternal fat. (Interestingly, midwives tend to disagree with these figures, indicating that, on average, women should and normally do put on forty-fifty pounds per pregnancy.) Women are often warned not to diet during pregnancy as this can lead to birth defects as well as low birth weight babies. But they are also instructed not to overdo the eating-for-two routine. Pregnancy manuals also warn that women may feel "fat" after delivery, but advise that careful eating habits and regular exercise will, in time, bring their bodies back to normal.

I have asked a number of women what they thought "getting your body back" meant. One mother laughed and said she'd just like to be able to fit back into her jeans. A feminist colleague linked it to a more deeply philosophical and political desire to get the body back from a patriarchal culture that has defined woman so pejoratively in relation to her reproductive role--getting her body back somehow was an indication that she wasn't just a baby-machine. Another woman described the feelings of relief that she felt once her child was born--getting her body back was like returning to "normal" after a prolonged stay of house guests. And in an extraordinary conversation during a child's birthday party, a mother told me that she felt that her body had abandoned her during pregnancy and that she didn't feel quite like her real self until her prepregnancy body had come back. The prodigal child come home. Many of us are familiar with the biblical story of the prodigal son. One son, after receiving his inheritance, leaves home, fritters away a fortune on wine and women, and shames the family with his extravagant behavior. The other son stays faithfully behind, works hard, and leads an upstanding moral life. When the profligate son returns, a feast is prepared and there is great rejoicing. Not surprisingly, the good-boy son is somewhat confused and dismayed by this, and is left with a dispiriting sense of the world's injustice and indifference to his hard work.

In some respects, this story parallels the story of the post-partum body. One body (the pre-pregnancy body) goes off--literally disappears--while the other (pregnant) body works dutifully toward its biological task. This second body endures swollen breasts and slowly expanding hips, and stores fat on the upper thighs, arms, neck, back, and face. It eventually delivers a child, nourishes it, and even thriftily retains some of the fat just in case another child is on the horizon. Yet despite its remarkable performance, its frugal habits, and its unquestioning persistence through nine months of gestation, this body is hardly celebrated. It is in fact reviled, hidden under loose clothing, often treated as an embarrassment and subject to erasure. It is that other body that is the desired one, the body that abandoned the mother during reproduction but becomes the beloved prodigal if and when it returns.

The media and press have been at the forefront of celebrating this prodigal body, featuring its return in an increasing number of articles which highlight before and after shots of women who get their bodies back. These media-hyped bodies have now become paradigms of the ideal pregnant and post-pregnancy body. Most of these bodies, not surprisingly, originate in Hollywood and the world of celebrities where a growing number of movie stars and supermodels have decided to become mothers. In May 1997 *People* offered its readers one of the first galleries of Hollywood's "hottest new moms." The story featured the trim, shapely bodies of celebrity moms holding their new babies, including Demi Moore, Baywatch beauty Pamela Anderson Lee, Madonna, model Niki Taylor, Courtney Love, and Heather Locklear among others. Since the 1997 article, many sexy-new-moms have joined the gallery: these

include a growing list of supermodels (Elle Macpherson, Cindy Crawford, Iman, Vendela, and Jasmine Guinness) as well as sundry actresses and pop music stars such as Catherine Zeta-Jones, Spice Girl Victoria Beckham, Celine Dion, Shania Twain, and Madonna a second time round. All of these women have produced, in addition to babies, the coveted post-pregnancy body--the prodigal body.

It could be argued that Hollywood's version of the postpartum body is just another reflection of a culture obsessed with bodies and, in particular, thin bodies. Perhaps this is too simple an answer. This particular postpartum body has proliferated at a time when women's social identities as mothers have dramatically diversified, particularly in terms of their roles at home and at work, the twin towers structuring western debates about contemporary motherhood.<sup>(FN1)</sup> These days, for example, pop culture depicts women as doctor-mothers, lawyer-mothers, waitress-mothers, model-mothers, stay-at-home mothers, etc. We see these mothers negotiating a number of jarring family-job scenarios as well as the reorganization of the family. But what appears to unify most of these reproducing and often working women is--well, a slim, sexy, supple form. Something that suddenly seems to go with mothers of all ages. The erasure of the postpartum, the return to a taut prepartum body seems to have become a constant in a world of shifting gender roles. As the meanings of and practices around motherhood have changed, has the postpartum body-back become a core symbol of what is supposed to be fixed about "the female" in a world of social flux?

Interestingly, the slim postpartum body is the body that begins to negotiate changing family structure in white, postwar America. This is particularly noticeable in television sitcoms featuring stories about mothers and their relationships with the working world of men. In many of these sitcoms, women often unsuccessfully attempted to enter the work force (e.g., Lucy's continually foiled efforts to get into Ricky's nightclub act). Or they transitioned into being a working mother after years of being at home (as Donna Reed did in the later episodes of her show or as Shirley Jones did in the *Partridge Family*). Sometimes they decided to stay at home but led productive lives as community mothers who occasionally, and usually comically, became involved in their husband's work (e.g., Laura Petrie in *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, Elizabeth Montgomery in *Bewitched*, and Florence Henderson in *The Brady Bunch*). Slim and attractive--belonging to good mothers, supportive wives, and (where applicable) flourishing workers--these bodies are the bodies of mothers successfully negotiating the dramatic gender shifts of white, postwar America, and in particular, the slow but steady entrance of middle-class women into the workforce.

Not surprisingly, the exceptions to the slim postpartum body in TV culture have generally belonged to mothers who are in some way socially marginal. The overweight, billowing bodies of Edith in *All in the Family*, Vicki Lawrence's "Mama" for the *Carol Burnett Show*, or a Roseanne, are joined to the world of white, working-class motherhood. And the stocky physiques of African-American mothers such as Esther Rolle from *Good Times* are those of "mamas" belonging to black inner city families--found even among those who have "moved on up" (e.g., Isabel Sanford of *The Jeffersons*). This pattern is echoed in the often obese, mammoth bodies of the "white trash" and "black" mothers on the *Jerry Springer Show*. In this show, these are the bodies of women who have produced social deviants: offspring who swear, come to blows with one another, cheat on their husbands, steal each others' girlfriends and boyfriends, produce "mixed-race" offspring, and ultimately do not heed their "mamas." (Conversely, the slim, postpartum body can also mark class advancement and the attainment of a middle-class aesthetic, as is the case for the mother, Phylicia Rashad, of *The Cosby*

Show.)

Today, the postpartum body of white America is still slim, still attractive, and it belongs to women continuing to wrestle with the archetypal home-work dichotomy. But it is also a body that increasingly is associated with women who are "sexy" and "wealthy"--in other words, these are the bodies of the elite supermoms who now set a kind of body standard for all mothers.

Some argue that "intelligent" people are supposed to be above the meanings and manipulation of such texts. Some argue that there is so much to criticize about popular culture that explication of it seems unnecessary. Yet women, no matter how vigilant, are never truly allowed to ignore these kinds of bodies. For one thing, pop culture constantly maps female identity vis-a-vis the body--what it wears, how it looks to men, how it performs in bed, and now how it weathers motherhood. Whether we like it or not, the ads for postpartum plastic surgery and the photographs of stick-thin mothers are now the images which both establish dominant models of motherhood and feed the imaginations of the next generation of mothers. In addition, there is a long tradition within feminist criticism which explores cultural values and gender politics vis-a-vis the life experiences of the female body. Feminist writers have written extensively on the female body, exploring themes such as its enslavement to biological determinism (Simone de Beauvoir 1952), its objectification under the gaze of science (Evelyn Fox Keller 1985), and its cultural subjugation in capitalist society (Susan Bordo 1993, Naomi Wolf 1990). Anne Oakley's (1979) and Adrienne Rich's (1976) classic explorations of childbirth and Emily Martin's brilliant work, *The Woman in the Body* (1987), not only gave powerful voice to women's experiences of childbirth, but also exposed the philosophical underpinnings of western obstetrical practice. More recently Rayna Rapp (2000) has resituated the debate on biomedical models through an examination of reproductive technologies and the complicated choices prospective mothers make regarding amniocentesis.(FN2)

Anthropology has added much to what might be called a critical sociology of reproduction, mainly by challenging dominant cultural myths regarding motherhood. Margaret Mead's popular columns in *Redbook*, as well as Edith Clark's *My Mother Also Fathered Me* and Beatrice Whiting's studies of child-rearing practices (1964), were some of the earliest American works exploring cultural variety in parenting styles, thereby challenging dominant versions of motherhood and mothering. Biological anthropologists have also contributed much to these debates by discussing motherhood (as Hrdy, 1999, has provocatively done) in terms of human and non-human primate behavior as well as evolutionary models.(FN3)

Relatively little, however, has been written on the postpartum body and this phenomenon of getting your body back. Given that the prodigal postpartum is now a media-pervasive body, it, too, is a timely topic to add to this rich, critical tradition exploring motherhood and maternal bodies.

#### SELF-RESPECT: THE POSTPARTUM'S MORAL UNIVERSE

Any self-respecting woman in this day and age, with or without three kids, should have nothing but admiration and respect for Demi Moore. Show me an "unbuff mother of three" who despises her, and I'll show you a lazy, jealous woman who doesn't have the brass to get off her butt and do what it takes to make herself happy.

Letter to People, July 1996.

In the bodies of Hollywood's new moms, there is not only a dramatic return of the prepartum body, but also an emphasis on doing it fast. Supermodel Niki Taylor, for example, gained

seventy pounds during her pregnancy with twins but lost it within three months; Pamela Lee gained twenty-five pounds for her first son (lost in three months); TV actress Debbie Dunning fifty pounds (lost in six months); Jennifer Flavin-Stallone gained forty-seven pounds (lost in five months). Madonna put on a reported thirty-one pounds during her pregnancy with Lourdes, but also produced a very slim, shapely figure for the Golden Globe awards only three months after the birth.

These images--increasingly available for public consumption--seem to pit the celebrity moms against each other, on the one hand reproducing Hollywood's starlet hierarchy, and yet clearly pressuring both these women and their publics to conform to a beat-the-clock postpartum time-frame. (In her 2000 interview for *Vanity Fair*, for example, Catherine Zeta-Jones talked gleefully of women who hated her for her svelte post-pregnancy body. But she also bemoaned the fact that shortly after Dylan's birth, she was deliberately rear-ended by fans who wanted her to get out of her car simply to see if she had lost her pregnancy weight.) It seems that the shorter the time to get your body back, the greater the stature of the star.

The abbreviated time in which many of these women lose pregnancy weight, control sagging breasts, erase stretch marks and "return" a waistline seems to go along with an extraordinary body discipline, one that underscores a commitment to rigorous dieting and exercise. (Interestingly enough, cosmetic surgery is rarely admitted by celebrities.) This discipline is often translated into a "program" that new mothers can follow in pursuit of their pre-pregnancy bodies. Both Jane Fonda and Cindy Crawford produced successful pregnancy and postpartum exercise videos designed to help women keep their bodies "on track" during pregnancy and to "bounce back" after birth. Several popular magazines have also devoted considerable space to the erasure of the postpartum body and offer women detailed exercise and diet regimes.

A Fitness magazine article, for example, under the title "I've Got My Body Back," recounted the story of a Gina B., who lost sixty-six pregnancy pounds. With before and after pictures of Gina, the article outlined her postpartum routine:

The workout: Gina does a fifty-five-minute step-aerobics tape four days a week. She runs five miles at an eleven-minute-mile pace two days a week, and she does distance training with her marathon group once a week. Seven days a week, she does thirty minutes of free-weight training.

The diet: Gina lives by the three-meals-a-day rule. "I used to go all day without eating, then feast on a huge dinner," she says. "Now I never skip breakfast or lunch. And I'll snack on low-fat granola bars ... if I get hungry in between meals." Since she's started training for a marathon, Gina makes sure she gets carbohydrates, fats and protein in every meal. "I need all three to give me endurance," she says.

A read of Gina's body regime inspires awe for her extraordinary commitment, stamina, and sheer will-power--but also perhaps feelings of shame about one's own comparatively feeble exercise regime. Like the Hollywood version, Gina's postpartum workout focuses on will-power as the secret ingredient of getting your body back, and completely overlooks the "infrastructure of erasure" required here--i.e., the class-based resources which make the miracle happen. (Does Gina have to work? Who takes care of the baby while she's running those five miles and training for a marathon?) The postpartum body ethic, however, ignores issues of class privilege and allows no whining: women who get their bodies back are strong, determined, and, most important, self-disciplined. (Gina gets up at 5 a.m. to do her weights.) In contrast, those women who do not regain their pre-pregnancy figures seem to suffer from

character flaws--such as lack of will-power or self-respect or, as the letter to People above suggests, a chronic inability to "get off their butts."

This ethic of self-respect and self-discipline suggests that the postpartum body itself has become a kind of moral universe, an outward reflection of a woman's inner mettle. (Gina B., Fitness underscores, does this for herself, not for her husband or baby.) A pregnant Cindy Crawford summed up this view when she stated in an interview for W that she doesn't hate her pregnant body, but that it's not her "best look." She continued, "I don't feel disgusting or unsexy.... I don't want this to sound bad, but for some women who may not feel comfortable with their bodies, pregnancy can be an excuse to be Earth mother. For the most part, I am comfortable with my body. I work hard at keeping it."

And so should all women, seems the implication--or at least those women with any modicum of self-respect. In the world of pop culture, the postpartum body has become a "loaded body," a high-stakes game which ultimately divides the successful women from washout moms. And it appears that how one plays this game, how one stacks the odds against becoming a postpartum "loser," is now a significant aspect of the reproductive experience.

#### MANAGING PREGNANCY

"I loooove being pregnant," Kelly Preston is saying, as she dons a clingy black dress with jeweled sandals and adds a zebra-print bag. "I feel sexy. Johnny thinks I'm sexy too."

"Johnny," of course, is John Travolta, Preston's husband of eight and a half years, and as she slinks around the Beverly Hills Hotel, the actress somehow manages to look sensuous, despite carrying an extra 30 pounds on her 5-foot-7-inch frame. She's the pregnant woman who makes other expectant moms turn green--and not with morning sickness. She truly does glow, and she's slender everywhere except her belly.

From In Style, "Hollywood Moms and Their Babies,"

July 2000

The "post" of postpartum, however, is a somewhat misleading term because the production of the body-back doesn't necessarily begin in the rigorous exercise and diet regimes after birth. Increasingly, the celebrity moms are depicted as women who anticipate and even preempt the challenges of the postpartum period in the management of their pregnant bodies. Hence, it has become almost impossible to separate the desire to get your body back from how you manage your pregnant body.

Pregnant bodies, like postpartum ones, also entered public spaces largely via Hollywood. It was Demi Moore, who, in posing naked and pregnant (with her second child) for Vanity Fair in 1991, gave the pregnant body a different public image. Although her pregnant form provoked considerable controversy (several stores refused to carry the magazine and in New York City the magazine was encased in a special plastic wrapper), Moore was praised for defying conservative social attitudes by celebrating pregnant women as glamorous and sexualized.

The image of Moore's pregnant body, however, was followed by a perhaps equally significant rendering of her motherhood: the slim, toned postpartum body that appeared on Vanity Fair's August 1992 cover (Figs. 2 & 3). In this photograph, Moore displayed a shapely, non-pregnant body through the illusion of a man's business suit. In the second image, there are again hints of a deliberate masculinization of Moore's body--here she counters her feminine pregnant body in a postpartum body-back, thereby making pregnancy a temporary condition. With no child in the picture and no lingering physical evidence of her pregnancy, Moore's motherhood has been privatized--she is once again a free agent in a free body.

Moore's pregnant body also pointed its viewers to an interesting interplay between male/female bodies and male/female sexualities that has recently emerged in pop culture. Moore's pregnant pose was almost immediately followed by a picture of her then husband, Bruce Willis, as a pregnant father-to-be on the cover of *Spy* magazine (September 1991). Willis's lab-generated pregnant body playfully satirized notions about equality between the sexes (and incidentally two working parents), but it also referenced a rather peculiar kind of androgyny and bisexuality. Both Moore's and Willis's pictures challenged the typical distinctions made between male and female reproductive roles by suggesting "who's having the baby here?". On the one hand, this could be taken as a message about the maternalization of paternity, i.e., the creation of a Mr. Mom. But on the other, the pictures are also about a masculinized maternity. In some respects, Willis's pregnant body releases Moore's from an all-defining reproductive biology--the pregnant body, like parenting, is no longer the female domain. Does this free up Moore to have other kinds of bodies?--a body, for example (modeled really after the male body), that is sexually active outside of reproductive cycles and tied to work?

Supermodel Cindy Crawford re-enacted the Demi Moore script. After stating that she would not be photographed pregnant, Crawford appeared on the cover of the June 1999 issue of *W* magazine under the banner of "Naked Angel." Her pregnant body was by prodigal standards stunning. Except for her protruding abdomen, she did not really look "that pregnant," even though, at seven months, she was at the biological zenith of her pregnancy weight gain. Close inspection of the picture reveals that there is virtually no added weight on her face, neck, upper thighs, or shoulders. Except for her pregnant midsection, Crawford looks prepartum. Several months later, Crawford also reappeared with her body back--fit and slim, and also in a suit. Her masculinization/adrognization in this postpartum pose also suggests that pregnancy has been a fleeting, temporary moment for her (Figs. 4 & 5). In these striking before and after narratives, both Moore and Crawford seem to have evaded bodies defined by children--Moore's body shows no evidence of giving birth and although Crawford has a baby in her arm that references her as a mother, the way she is holding it suggests that it is weightless, something that she can pick up or set aside at will. Crawford's motherhood, too, seems a private affair.

The managed-pregnancy to the body-back continuum that both Crawford and Moore represent has recently become a significant niche market in the world of motherhood. It is the *raison d'être* of a magazine called *Fit Pregnancy* (an affiliate of *Shape*). The magazine features photographs of pregnant models and actresses on its cover and offers a variety of exercise and eating routines while selling maternity wear. In the June/July 2000 edition, for example, Victoria's Secret model Frederique van der Wal told her interviewer that, despite "loving her new curves," she is confident that her body "will go back." Like most of the models and movie stars featured in the magazine, van der Wal's pregnancy is referenced visually by a swelling abdomen--"she's slender everywhere except her belly."

While many women find *Fit Pregnancy* "body positive" and applaud the "long way" that maternity clothing has come, the bodies the magazine features are nevertheless noticeably uniform. Here, pregnancy has become something that these women wear--it is attached to or added on to their still-slender bodies. And then, if the regime is followed properly, "the belly" is removed or birthed. It seems that the swelling bellies are acceptable because they principally reference a separate body, that of a newborn and not the mother's. But the postpartum flab, fluids, and weight of afterbirth are clearly adherents of the mother and so

these are the things that are managed, minimized, and ultimately eradicated. (This whole process, incidentally, of confining pregnancy to a swelling belly, has become known as "pregnancy chic.") In *Fit Pregnancy*, pregnancy has been reduced to a enlarged belly, something that appears more like a decorative accessory than anything connected to lifelong changes.

When Moore's pregnant body first appeared on *Vanity Fair*, many feminist commentators rushed to the scene to declare that she had done something very "liberating" for women. Moore had not only broken the social taboo forcing women to hide their swelling, pregnant bodies, but she had liberated the female body by representing motherhood as a social choice, not a biological destiny. Moore's ability to get her body back seemed to round out this claim. Her fit, slim, and postpartum body appeared unencumbered and unmarked by a child, something that underscored her re-appearance as still herself--still working and still successful. Similar claims have been made for the other supermoms who are often glorified in popular culture as having demonstrated that a woman can be self-defining and socially empowered even as a mother. These are body-positive women--so the argument goes--who have refused to accept the social and cultural stigmas that have traditionally accompanied reproduction.

But nevertheless, one wonders what might have happened to the gender politics of the pregnant body had Moore and Crawford become "matronly" after their pregnancies. Presumably Moore and Crawford could still have been liberated women with stretch marks and cellulite. Or was it the production of a perfect postpartum body-back that made their pregnant body somehow more acceptable or more liberated?

#### THE NEW SEXY MOMS

"I don't want to sound immodest ... but I don't think having a child has made me unsexy. There's nothing sexier than a mother. Susan Sarandon, Michelle Pfeiffer--I mean those women are sexy. If you're sexy, you're sexy, whether you have no children or five." Madonna in *People*, December 2000 For most women, even those who lived highly memorable love lives before delivery, doubts that any kind of sexual relationship with their husband will ever resume, at least on a regular basis, are nagging and numerous. Though a very few women do find themselves amorous in the immediate postpartum period ... because of genital engorgement, most women find the postpartum period (and sometimes a several-month stretch following it) a sexual wasteland.

#### What to Expect The First Year

If there is a single thread, a kind of recurring mantra that joins many of these postpartum celebrity bodies together, it is the claim that both as pregnant women and as new mothers, these celebrities are "still sexy." Pop culture makes a great deal of this, sometimes even positioning the sleek, scantily-clad postpartum body of the stars next to their newborns to underscore this point. "Finally," a *People* article claims, "Hollywood discovers that a woman can be a mother and a hot number."

There are, of course, unique reasons why celebrity women might embrace these postpartum scripts. For women in Hollywood, "sexiness" means more than just one's own sexuality and capacity to enjoy sex--it is, in the final instance, the source of their employment and the "capital" which makes or breaks them as a marketable commodity. (Madonna's postpartum sprint to the Golden Globe awards, for example, was largely dictated by Evita's promotional plans which required her presence.) The pregnant and the postpartum form can therefore interrupt the career of a female body-entrepreneur.



Yet, beyond these industry-specific concerns regarding the merchandising of good looks, the sexy postpartum body is the product of a kind of pop feminism, one which claims that women, in all their roles, are rightfully sexual and sexy creatures. Sex (and sexiness) have taken on profound ontological and political connotations for women. In the universe of western pop culture, to be not-sexy signifies an incomplete being, a repressed self in a society seemingly defined by an ever-active sexuality. Given the current inclination to esteem sexual expressiveness for its own sake, women who retain sexiness in the midst and aftermath of biological reproduction can appear particularly valorous. Women who get their bodies back seem to platform "sexual self-identity" over the confines of a repressed "body"--their own human agency over the old orthodoxy about immutable biological laws and a chaste motherhood. The body-back concept resonates with contemporary societal beliefs about a liberated sexual expressiveness by proclaiming that sexuality can and should persist through what has traditionally been a culturally loaded obstacle. These bodies, pop culture intimates, bravely traverse the canyon separating maternity and sexuality. To become a mother is no longer to become an asexual creature.

But here also, the body-back belies a deeper contradiction. For one thing, the sexual characteristics of both the pregnant and postpartum bodies are strikingly homogeneous. Kelly Preston and Cindy Crawford aren't sexy because they are pregnant, but rather because they are pregnant in a particular way--slender everywhere else except their bellies.(FN4) Similarly, bodies that come back after pregnancy aren't sexy because they are now the bodies of mothers, but because they are bodies which have returned to their pre-pregnant measurements--measurements which can still command the male gaze and still land the contract. The nagging question here is: what if you never had a body even remotely like Pamela Anderson Lee, Demi Moore, or Madonna? What if your prepartum self is also physically problematic next to the ideal body-back? If this is the case, as it must be for so many women, the journey to the postpartum body-back is indeed a hopelessly befuddling one. Which is perhaps why the postpartum body, while it is supposed to be just like the pre-pregnancy one, is often called a "new body." The mystification here is extraordinary. In getting her body back after pregnancy, a woman will get a make-over into her new self ... like she used to be. (Or should have been?)

A second troubling aspect of these bodies that "come back" is that while they claim to have crossed over the divide between maternity and sexuality, they end up reproducing and reinforcing the original stereotypes. Women may be sexy mothers--but only sexy vis-a-vis a kind of body orthodoxy. And interestingly, women can be sexy and good mothers--but only mothers of a particular kind. A closer inspection of what kinds of mothers the celebrities are reveals that they often conform to white middle-class notions about what makes a good mother. Madonna is a striking case in point here. From the cover of *People's* March 13, 2000 edition, the public saw Mama Madonna with hair dyed and coiffed to look natural and a face bereft of heavy make-up. According to the interview, Madonna has "grown up." She is now a superstar who has left her sexual rebellion behind to ease gracefully into the source of her transformation: motherhood. Although Madonna's sleek postpartum body proves that she still is "sexy" (and therefore hadn't forsaken her sexuality), her carefully crafted appearance for the *People* cover is also indicative of the kind of mothering she represents. Madonna is described as a doting and devoted mother. Madonna, readers learn, doesn't give Lourdes everything she wants--even if she wants a new dress, that doesn't mean she automatically gets it. (No material girl here.) Madonna also shifted her place of residence to England where she adopted

a slight British accent and purchased a \$23.4 million abode in an elite London neighborhood. In this setting, Madonna sent her daughter to an exclusive, half-day French school, ostensibly because she loves to hear her daughter say "Bonjour Maman." But ironically, Madonna's fantasies about motherly respectability resonate strikingly with images of white upper-class mothers who have traditionally tried to produce the very respectable kind of girl that Madonna has satirized in her music.(FN5)

#### THE MOTHERS WHO HAVE IT ALL

Even the baby has failed to diminish her hungry single-mindedness. Miraculously, although she ballooned to more than 180 pounds during her pregnancy, Zeta-Jones is already looking quite sleek, her dancer's body once again in fighting trim. "I've still got a ways to go," she says, appraising herself with a critical eye... "I'm a complete peasant. Hot bread with lots of butter and cheese--that's what I'd eat for the rest of my life, but I can't eat it. Lots of women look at me and think, You bitch--it's all come off you! But I've been working at it.

Vanity Fair, January 2001

It is perhaps a bit strange to think that although June Cleaver (the archetypal mom of Leave It to Beaver) might raise her eyebrows at Crawford's spreads in Playboy or Madonna's gambols in Sex, and look quizzically at the role of the father(s) in the celebrity scenarios, she might approve of (at least) the "mothering" represented by these women. Maybe what is also being erased here is not just the reproducing body, but a diversity of mothering roles leading to the production of a kind of monoculture of female sexuality and motherhood. June Cleaver, however, represented a solidly white, pearl-necklaced middle class; these supermoms are unmistakably diamond-studded elites. These are the bodies of women who not only handle career and family effectively, but do so with style. The body-back, if achieved, is ultimately the body of a very powerful woman, a woman who is wealthy, self-defining, nurturing, and sexy. In common parlance, it is the body of a woman who has it all.

Take Cindy Crawford again. Crawford's postpartum pose for W magazine is in many respects a visual representation of "having it all." From within the low-cut folds of an outfit that resonates with the imagery of a business suit (echoing Moore's famous postpartum pose), Crawford holds a child in one hand. Following the postpartum script, Crawford is clearly sexualized; she seems to be a "vixen mother" whose identity as a sexual subject/object is unhindered by her new role as mother. In this image, the child's identity and agency are recessed (we see only its backside), and our gaze is focused on the extraordinary body of Cindy Crawford. Her sleek, sexy, postpartum body powerfully draws together the different symbolic realms contained in the frame: the world of work and sexuality presented by the suit, and the world of motherhood and maternalism represented by the child. Again following the script, Crawford's erased postpartum seems to signal a successful resolution of the so-called domestic/public, virgin/whore dichotomy. Her postpartum body seems to make home and work, sexuality and maternity, contiguous rather than jarring realms of experience, and it is through the medium of her manageable body that she creates fluidity between her identities as sexy worker and nurturing mother. But Crawford's postpartum body is also an arrogant body, a body that knows its place in the hierarchy of beauty. It is a body that seems to go so perfectly with her haughty stare--the scornful gaze of a "beautiful" woman who "has it all." Zeta-Jones's postpartum body is an echo of Crawford's--displayed on Vanity Fair's January 2001 cover under the banner of Catherine the Great and followed by the caption Mom Upside Down Spells Wow. In the interview, Zeta-Jones, amidst her "sumptuous apartment, where servants come and go noiselessly," preens over her recent successes--she is another beauty

who has attained the state of having it all. Both of these body-backs are gendered displays of class--Crawford's body representing the rise of a suburban, middle-class woman to extreme wealth, and Zeta-Jones reflecting a working-class body's ascent to affluence. In this sense, the postpartum body-back is a body that not only sets certain women off from others, but also promises upward class mobility. As Zeta-Jones curbs her "peasant" impulses to eat bread and butter, she becomes a "civilized" body, a body that has been catapulted out of its working-class origins into a world of luxury and wealth. The woman who gets her body back is thus the classic "bitch," as Zeta-Jones remarks. She is the female who can harness male attention and then acquire what seems to follow: affluence. Both Zeta-Jones's and Crawford's bodies seem to say that it isn't enough to be the fairest in the land--elite women are now the ones who have it all.

Ironically, as exemplars of sexy, nurturing, working mothers, they are also models of women who have to do it all.

#### THE SEXY (AND) WORKING MOMS

Although she calls Dylan's birth "probably the best day of my life," Zeta-Jones isn't wasting any time in getting back to work; after a couple of months of breast-feeding, she weaned the baby (you're just a milking machine; you're exhausted!) and started looking toward new challenges.

Vanity Fair interview, January 2001

Another thread connecting many of the bodies of celebrity mothers is work. Significantly, the vast majority of these bodies-back belong to back-to-work moms. In some cases, they are the bodies of moms who never really absent the working world. In 1994, for example, just four months after her third child was born, Demi Moore was performing skin-laden sex scenes with Michael Douglas in *Disclosure* (while breast-feeding between takes). Three months after Lourdes was born, Madonna was in full swing for the promotion of *Evita*, and two months after Dylan's birth, Zeta-Jones began to look for another film role. Others, such as Cindy Crawford, incorporated their pregnant and postpartum bodies into their work routines, taking very little time off for motherhood. Crawford did this by modeling maternity wear, producing a pregnancy diary which she sold to *Good Morning America*, and developing her own line of reproductive products including a pregnancy and post-pregnancy exercise video called *New Dimension*. After the birth of her son, Crawford also sold installments to *Good Morning America* that covered such topics as how to "balance career and motherhood" and "reviving your post-pregnancy wardrobe," and more recently, marketed motherhood in a series of child development segments (again for *Good Morning America*) called "Presley's First Year." These women, therefore, come across as mothers who have not allowed babies to interrupt their careers. Again, pop feminism suggests that they have refused to fall victim to a Donna Reed-like motherhood in which mothers are imprisoned in the domestic sphere.

But even in Hollywood there is perhaps a less sanguine dimension to this alleged escape from the domestic. A celebrity body, for example, that stays looking post-pregnant can mean being overlooked for a role, missing a photo shoot, or worse, falling permanently out of the loop. Although some women like Demi Moore can command extra time to work on their bodies (something Moore requested for *Striptease*, a film she made as a mother of three), or a Zeta-Jones can persuade her director to write her pregnancy into a script (as happened for *Traffic*), not everyone is equally positioned. (Janine Turner, for example, actress for *Northern Exposure*, had to abandon a movie role and take a five-month career hiatus after pregnancy complications. She felt that her career suffered for it). Indeed, there is evidence inside and

outside of Hollywood to suggest that many women experience nervousness about what pregnancy and the postpartum will mean for their jobs.

Prejudices against and consequences for motherhood remain constant problems for women despite the emergence of these liberated bodies and the do-it-yourself philosophy they project. How do the empowering messages of the managed-pregnancy and get-your-body-back fly among working-class women, for example, who find themselves increasingly replaceable or downsizable? Many women also continue to feel that they must completely hide their pregnancies from employers for as long as possible. This happens particularly for women as they negotiate job advancement or new placement opportunities in the workplace. Women often fear that they will be passed over for promotion if it is discovered that they are pregnant. And women in corporate jobs often feel considerable pressure to minimize the appearance of their pregnancies so that they will not gain reputations as deadbeat workers. In these kinds of jobs, women frequently experience pressure to be available as "committed players" in a world of competitive colleagues, high-stakes deals, and long, unpredictable working hours. (This is perhaps one reason why many private health clubs now offer special pregnancy and postpartum exercise classes to their "corporate" clientele.)

In these kinds of circumstances, then, the body-back is not simply a statement of self-respect, or female empowerment, or liberation from the domestic realm. Rather, it can become an expectation of the workplace, a symbol of a woman who has gotten her priorities straight. Lingering postpartum bodies, then, like pregnant bodies, have also become aberrant in the workplace. While pregnant bodies interrupt work schedules by being occasionally sick or tired, un-recovered postpartum bodies are bothersome to the working world because they link women to the world of family and therefore signal a more long-term disruption of capitalist routines. Maternity leaves, to begin with, are inconvenient and non-productive--they force employers to pay extra-work benefits, put jobs on hold, or find replacement workers who in turn will be interrupted by a returning employee. Equally disruptive are female workers who can't attend meetings owing to sick children and employees who won't do overtime owing to child-care responsibilities. Postpartum bodies are particularly noisome to capitalist economies because they can and do stretch on into more permanent bodies profoundly harnessed to the vicissitudes of parenting. A body that is divested of maternity is more of a working body--a body more capable of and available for work.

The bodies which don't come back after pregnancy, therefore, symbolically undercut the possibility of uninterrupted labor, because they connect women to so-called non-productive, domestic spaces. To survive within capitalist spaces, it seems that postpartum bodies which threaten to privilege motherhood over labor have been reorganized. They have been transformed into "managed" bodies belonging to "managing" women. In today's world, women are expected to produce bodies which move "fluidly" between what they have fought so hard to achieve, a place in both the home and work. And what is more fluid than a body that slips in and out of reproduction without any "visible" aftermaths--a body which seems to regulate movement between the domestic sphere and the workplace with cellulite-free ease? The regulation of pregnancy and the postpartum reflected in the bodies of these pop culture mothers, then, is highly contradictory. In addition to being self-empowered and sexy, this body-back works well in a society which has increasingly defined women in economic terms. Although women are still expected to be "good" homemakers and loving maternal figures to their children, their dominant role within the family has become principally an economic one, i.e., the majority of mothers in North America are now a critical (and increasingly the only)

"breadwinners" for their families. Although this has been the case for much of the world's poor women for decades, the massive entrance and entrenchment of the middle class in the economy has produced new images and expectations around motherhood. A managed pregnancy and a minimized postpartum in a woman's body-spaces is now a significant element of the cultural iconography surrounding contemporary motherhood. And although they seem to mark a liberated, empowered woman, these bodies can also obscure the pressure a new mother might feel to be quickly reabsorbed in the capitalist regime she has already inconvenienced by reproducing.

#### THE GYM REGIME

Fit Pregnancy: Speaking of joggers, how are you staying fit?

Vendela: At first I did my normal workout: weights plus I ran three or four miles in Central Park. In my third trimester, I decided just to swim. So now I swim three times a week. And chasing my daughter at the park is a workout. She's always shouting. "Mommy come on! Come on!"

From a Fit Pregnancy interview, October/November 2000

Five years after my encounter with When was the last time he called you baby, I had another significant encounter with the prodigal body. This time I discovered it in the Chicago O'Hare airport. It was Mother's Day 2000. I had just finished giving a lecture at a university conference and was anxious to be home and "appreciated" by my husband and child.

Unfortunately my plane was delayed, so I curled up in the airport's lounge with a local paper and read its front-page tribute to Moms.

The article was about athlete mothers and featured stories of how female Olympic contenders handled their pregnancies and then hectic child-care routines--all the while keeping up demanding training schedules. I followed the story to the inside where I found--gulp--a photo spread featuring the Olympic mothers. Needless to say, the women all had bodies which were slim and muscular--one even exposed her taut midriff as she lifted her child above her. The final paragraphs of the article discussed each mom's personal and exemplary battle with maternal fat and her struggle to get her body back.

#### TEXT:

Happy Mother's Day.

As I sat there in my contradictory moment--somewhere betwixt and between career and family--it flashed upon me that I was not simply caught up in a home-work dichotomy. Somehow and somewhere along the way, the dichotomy had given way to a strange triangulation. I felt myself being stretched not across two but three fronts--home, work, and now a new sphere, the gym.

For mothers, the gym sphere is a space devoted to the erasure of the postpartum body. For some women it is an expensive health and fitness club that they attend on a regular basis, spending hours on treadmills, stationary bikes, and weight-lifting apparatus. For others it is the domestic exercise routine: the jog home after dropping the kids off at school, stretches completed faithfully on the floor of the dining room, or early morning walks and runs through neighborhood streets. For still others, the gym is a space of unfulfilled desires, a place where exercises don't happen regularly, pounds don't dissolve, and bodies don't come back. I think a lot of us--women and mothers of all ages--are in there, in the gym sphere, spending lots of time and expending a great deal of physical and emotional energy on our bodies. And this is something that makes contemporary motherhood different from that of a previous generation of mothers who simply lost their figures and didn't know where to find them.

How, several decades after the women's movement and its trenchant critique of gender body politics, did women get here--in this, the most invisible of cages?

Perhaps part of the answer rests in the ways in which motherhood has become "privatized."

The managed pregnancy and postpartum body-back both claim to have established motherhood as a personal choice, but at the same time, except for their staged association with children in the photo-ops, these bodies have pushed motherhood, as a lifelong commitment and practice, largely out of sight. Motherhood, like exercising, is now something that women do on their own time, in the context of quality moments, and preferably in ways that don't interfere with work routines.

Or maybe it has something to do with a masculinization of women's reproductive bodies. The controlled pregnancy and body-back seem to guarantee men the constancy of a particular kind of female sexuality--the yummy mummy. But at the same time they also produce women with bodies more like men's bodies, i.e., bodies that are unencumbered by biology and ever-ready for the world of work.

Or perhaps it might have something to do with female desires for power and the way in which women display class through the medium of the body. The managed pregnancy and body-back are connected to a kind of machisma and class elitism, both of which are closely aligned to the consumption of a bodied sexuality. As a result, these bodies not only reproduce female beauty hierarchies, but also create the possibility of novel hierarchies, i.e., new ways of distinguishing elite females from the rest of the unattractive, overweight moms.

Whatever the answer, it appears that in staking out a place for themselves in the workplace and the home, women have inherited a new kind of body--a body that not only promises men a mistress/wife/mother package, but also pledges to give women family-career synchronicity and upward class mobility.

When was the last time he called you baby?

I can't honestly remember. But could we please have our dinner in peace?

Don't you want to get your body back?

Did it ever really leave home?

Call now for your free consultation!

I wrote this essay instead.

Added material

Fig. 1. A pointed message about the postpartum body.

Figs. 2 & 3. The much-discussed photographs of Demi Moore by Annie Leibovitz for the August 1991 and August 1992 covers of *Vanity Fair*.

Figs. 4 & 5. Cindy Crawford re-enacts the Demi Moore scenario for *W* magazine, June 1999 and June 2000. Photos by Michael Thompson.

#### FOOTNOTES

1 Of course not all cultural groups acknowledge this deep structural tension between work and mothering (especially in societies and classes where work and mothering is the norm). See, for example, Patricia Hill Collins (1994) on African American women and Denise Segura's (1991) work among Mexican-American and Latina women. The practicalities of doing both, however, seem to be a ubiquitous challenge (Forno 1998: 203-205).

2 See also Ragone and Twine 2000.

3 I should add here, as a somewhat distinctive genre, the feminist analysis that Sandra Matthews and Laura Wexler have done in their intriguing collection of twentieth-century photographs of pregnant women (2000).

4 Not surprisingly, many pornography websites now include "pregnant babes" whose pregnant forms also conform to this body orthodoxy--this was something I stumbled upon accidentally when, in researching celebrity birthings, I (perhaps naively) put "pregnant + Pamela Anderson Lee" together in a search engine.

5 The monoculture extends far beyond what I have outlined here. Among other things, these images also reproduce mythologies that regard motherhood as an exclusive attachment between a mother and her biological offspring. They also generate a kind of exclusivist mothering which tends to ignore the role other persons may play in parenting arrangements. Many of the photographs showing supremoms with their children, for example, frequently show a female "nanny" alongside. The "nanny" is rarely (never in my experience) identified by name and often seems to simply be one of the "technologies" of the biological mother's parenting--a tool that she, the real mother, is using but not a person with value or identity on her own terms. This imagery acts as a subtle critique of cultures in which mothering might include informal adoption and wardship, i.e., parenting arrangements outside of the exclusive mother-child dyad.

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