

THESIS

THE PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM BODY AS CONSTRUCTED IN *PEOPLE*
MAGAZINE, 2000-2007: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Addie Martindale

Department of Design and Merchandising

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Jennifer Ogle

Katherine Leigh
Donna Rouner

ABSTRACT

THE PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM BODY AS CONSTRUCTED IN *PEOPLE* MAGAZINE, 2000-2007: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

Within the United States, there has been a growing popular cultural interest in pregnant and postpartum bodies, especially those of celebrity women. Despite this growing popular cultural interest and the acknowledgement that body-related media messages may shape women's feelings about and behaviors towards their bodies, very little research has explored media messages related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies. Thus, the purpose of this interpretive work was to examine the written editorial content of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for meaning related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies. Analyses were informed by varied sociological and feminist perspectives on the female body as well as by symbolic convergence theory, which suggests that rhetorical discourses such as media texts contain repeated stories or themes – or “rhetorical visions” – that converge to inform individuals' beliefs about social reality (Bormann, 1981).

The study invoked a qualitative content analysis approach to analyze the data. Of the 416 issues of *People* magazine included in the initial sample, 142 were identified as comprising content focused upon the pregnant and/or postpartum body, including 98 full length articles and 106 feature articles. Constant comparison processes were used to identify and interpret key concepts and themes within the text.

This study's aim was to answer to three original research questions proposed. The first research question asked how pregnant and postpartum bodies were framed within *People* magazine and analyzed the varied meanings attached to these embodied statuses. Findings

indicated that pregnant and postpartum bodies were in framed in diverse ways, including as physically attractive, as stylish, and/or as miraculous/amazing. It also was revealed that the pregnant and postpartum bodies were presented by *People* contributors as objects in need of bodily control and were framed as “spectacles” to be viewed, surveyed, or scrutinized by readers.

The second research question asked what body-related attitudes and behaviors were presented as normative or desirable for pregnant and postpartum women and how these meanings were constructed within *People*. Findings indicated that pregnant and postpartum bodies were frequently framed as needing to be controlled through varied behaviors. The need to invoke control through body-related behaviors was presented in relation to achieving pregnancy (e.g., in instances of infertility), birthing the child, and undertaking diet and exercise projects during pregnancy and postpartum.

Lastly, the third research question considered whether existing theoretical work be invoked to interpret the rhetorical visions identified within *People* magazine and related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies. Theory related to mind/body dualism and surveillance as well as the generalized tenets of symbolic convergence theory -- such as the notion that rhetorical visions reflect dominant cultural values -- proved useful in understanding the rhetorical visions that emerged. Additionally, findings suggested the relevance of theory related to spectacle, which was useful in interpreting *People's* treatment of the pregnant body as an object or a spectacle.

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DEDICATION

To Rylee and Finn: May this be an example for you that it is never too late to finish what you started.

To my Father Dan Martindale: You may not be here to see me finish graduate school but I know my completion would have made you proud. Thank you for all the support, love, and editing assistance that you were able to provide. No one else seems to understand what I meant to write as well as you did. I miss you.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

There is plentiful evidence to suggest that contemporary popular culture – and in particular, the mass media – constructs the thin and toned female body as that which is most socially desirable (Bordo, 2003; Brumberg, 1997; Faludi, 1991; Hendricks, 2002; Ko, 2001; Posavac & Posavac, 2001; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986; Wolf, 1991). Research suggests that the media present thinness as readily achievable through the purchase and disciplined use of varied bodywork products and regimens (Hendricks, 2002; Ko, 2001; Posavac & Posavac, 2001; Silverstein, et al., 1986). For many women, however, the thin bodily standard promoted by the media is biologically unobtainable (Novitt-Moreno, 1998); many of the female bodies presented within the media are 20 to 30 pounds lighter than a weight that would constitute a medically healthy body (Garner, Garfinkel, & Thompson, 1980; Ko, 2001; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that media messages promoting the thin female ideal can have a deleterious effect upon women's degree of satisfaction with their own bodies (e.g. King, Touyz, & Charles, 2000; Posavac & Posavac, 2002).

This cultural idealization of female thinness creates a somewhat problematic canvas upon which the embodied experiences of pregnancy and postpartum are superimposed. With its swollen abdomen, the pregnant body clearly violates contemporary ideal body standards. Although some women may enjoy the bodily changes of pregnancy, viewing them as a license to consider themselves temporarily exempt from the cultural ideals of slenderness (Bailey, 2001; Davies & Wardle, 1994; Genevie & Margolies, 1987; Johnson, Burrows, & Williamson, 2004), many women experience at least some feelings of dissatisfaction with the size and shape of the body during pregnancy (Clark & Ogden, 1999; Johnson et al., 2004; McCarthy, 1998). In some

cases, this dissatisfaction can lead to participation in restrictive diets and/or intense exercise regimens during pregnancy, which may be harmful to the pregnant woman and unborn child (Abraham, King, & Llewellyn-Jones, 1994; Fairburn & Welch, 1990). Further, upon the birth of the child, most women's bodies do not immediately return to their pre-pregnancy weight, size, or shape (Baker, Carter, Cohen, & Brownell, 1999; Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997), and many women may be unprepared for the extent of their physical changes (Stein & Fairburn, 1996). In turn, this may prompt women to feel disappointed in their postpartum bodies (Baker et al. 1999; Walker, 1998) and to try to change their postpartum bodies through diet or exercise (McCarthy, 1998; Walker, 1998).

Within the United States, the past two decades have been marked by an increased popular culture focus upon the pregnant and postpartum bodies, and in particular, the pregnant and postpartum bodies of celebrities. Seemingly, this heightened cultural interest in and comfort with the pregnant and postpartum body can be traced to 1991, when an image of an unclothed and pregnant Demi Moore was featured on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine (Earle, 2003). Certainly, a casual perusal of popular press magazines suggests that in more recent years, this cultural curiosity in the topic of pregnancy and the pregnant bodies has not waned. In June 1999, a pregnant Cindy Crawford appeared unclothed on the cover of *W* in a pose strikingly similar to that assumed by Demi Moore eight years prior. Further, popular press magazines regularly feature articles documenting the pregnancies of celebrities, highlighting the strategies invoked by these high-profile women to lose their "baby weight." Such popular press features also frequently provide advice to readers on how to "look great" during pregnancy and postpartum.

Despite the recent popular culture interest in the pregnant and postpartum body and the growing acknowledgement that body-related media messages may shape women's feelings about

and behaviors toward their own bodies, very little empirical work has explored media messages related to the pregnant and postpartum body; an exhaustive search identified only two such studies. In one study, Dworkin and Wachs (2004) analyzed issues of the magazine, *Shape Fit Pregnancy*, for themes related to exercise during pregnancy. In the second study, Wall (1997) examined selected media representations (e.g., newspaper and film) of post-menopausal pregnancy.

Purpose

Although work by Dworkin and Wach (2004) and Wall (1997) certainly provides some key insights about the ways in which media have framed pregnant and postpartum bodies, there is a need for continued work in this area. More specifically, researchers have not yet conducted a systematic and theoretically informed analysis of the meanings that popular, general interest magazines (i.e., magazines that do not focus specifically upon pregnancy or exercise/fitness) construct about pregnant and postpartum bodies. Thus, the purpose of this interpretive work was to examine the written editorial content or non-advertising portions of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for meaning related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies.

People magazine was selected for analysis because it is one of the most-widely circulated general interest magazines read by women of child-bearing age (*Time Inc*, 2005). *People* magazine is an entertainment magazine that is focused on the events in celebrity lives and the lives of people who go through extraordinary experiences. Given this focus, *People* magazine frequently highlights celebrities' pregnancies, including the bodily changes that accompany and follow their pregnancies, and also occasionally provides accounts of unique embodied experiences of "everyday" people.

Analyses will be informed by varied sociological and feminist perspectives on the female body as well as by symbolic convergence theory. Symbolic convergence theory suggests that the rhetorical discourses such as media texts contain repeated stories or themes – or “rhetorical visions” – that converge to inform individuals’ beliefs about social reality (Bormann, 1981). Thus, based upon this theoretical perspective, the content of *People* magazine could in some ways construct impressions for regular readers about the embodied experiences of pregnancy and postpartum.

Findings from the present analysis have the potential to reveal insights about cultural expectations for pregnant and postpartum bodies, and thus, to provide a clearer understanding regarding the meanings that pregnant and postpartum women may use to filter or to frame their body-related thoughts and behaviors. Findings may be of particular interest to medical professionals who work with pregnant and postpartum women. Certainly, gaining a better understanding of the meanings that popular culture assigns to pregnant and postpartum bodies could help these professionals to be sensitive to the emotional and physical needs of pregnant and postpartum clients.

Research Questions

The present work was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the written, editorial content of *People* magazine frame pregnant and postpartum bodies? That is, what meanings are attached to these embodied statuses? Are pregnant and postpartum bodies celebrated? Problematized? In what ways?
2. Within the written, editorial content of *People* magazine, what body-related attitudes and behaviors are presented as normative or desirable for pregnant and postpartum women? How are these meanings constructed?

3. How can existing theoretical work be invoked to interpret the rhetorical visions identified within *People* magazine and related to the pregnant and postpartum body?

To address these questions, a qualitative content analysis approach was invoked to examine the written editorial content of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for meanings related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies.

Researcher's Perspective

I am a thirty-two year old married female and the mother of a four year old girl and a one year old boy. For me, the embodied experiences of pregnancy and postpartum included both positively and negatively charged experiences. At times, I felt positive about the bodily changes of pregnancy, which were in many ways rewarding. At other times, however, I felt as though I had lost control over the physicality of my body.

As a researcher, I have attempted to learn as much as I can about the pregnant and postpartum bodies, pregnancy and body image, the effects of media on body image, feminist perspectives on pregnancy, and pregnancy in the media. I feel that the media coverage of the pregnant and postpartum bodies may have serious impacts on the body image of pregnant and postpartum women. By exploring media themes related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies, I can provide understanding about societal expectations for the pregnant and postpartum bodies.

Delimitations/Limitations

1. The analysis will be limited to the nonfiction editorial content included within a single popular press, general interest magazine (i.e., *People*). As such, findings from the present analysis cannot be used to make generalizations about the content of other popular press publications.

2. Although I will acknowledge and attempt to “bracket” my biases during the analysis process, findings will necessarily reflect my readings of the data.
3. Analyses cannot provide an understanding of the ways in which varied media users may interpret the content analyzed.

Definitions

Body image: the beliefs and feeling that a person holds about his/her body (Kaiser, 1997).

Body image is both perceptual (i.e., what individuals see and think) and affective (i.e., individual’s feelings about perceptual attributes and how those feeling motivate behaviors).

Coding: the processes through which data are broken down, compared, categorized, and put back together in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Constant comparison: “taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories” (Creswell, 1998, p. 57).

Editorial content: the non-advertising portion of a publication (Weiner, 1990).

Fantasy theme: the basic story lines of rhetorical communications (Borman, 1981).

General interest magazine: magazine that publishes stories or news that are applicable to a variety of people who have varying backgrounds and interests.

Mass media: a medium of communication (e.g., magazines, newspapers, radio, and television) that is designed to reach a large number of people.

Popular press: a commonly viewed form of published or broadcasted information or news.

Postpartum: the period immediately following childbirth.

Pregnancy: nine month term of human gestation that takes place inside of a woman’s uterus.

Rhetorical vision: a story or theme that is constructed to advance a given view about social reality (Bormann, 1981).

Thin ideal: the portrayal of thinness as a desirable trait in and of itself or at least a trait that accompanies other desirable traits, as when the most beautiful, desirable, and successful protagonists are also thin (Harrison, 1997).

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As noted, the purpose of the present interpretive study was to examine the written editorial content of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for meanings related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies. To set a context for such an analysis, the following literature review synthesizes work related to body image, contemporary popular culture discourses about the body, the power of cultural discourses to shape body-related feelings and behavior, the pregnant and postpartum bodies, feminist perspectives on the body and the pregnant and postpartum bodies, and symbolic convergence theory.

Body Image

The term “body image” refers to the beliefs and feelings that a person has about his/her own body (Schilder, 1935). Body image is both perceptual (i.e., what individuals see and think) and affective (i.e., individuals’ feelings about perceptual attributes of the body and how those feeling motivate behaviors). Prior work suggests that body image represents a core aspect of self that affect one’s mood, thoughts, and behavior (Pruinsky & Cash, 1990). In contemporary Western cultures where women experience pervasive social pressures to be thin, body weight is a central component of body image (Garner et al, 1980).

Research has shown that women’s body dissatisfaction has increased in recent years (Thompson & Heinberg, 1993), and that affect about the body may play a significant role in prompting engagement in activities that can affect health and well being (Pruinsky & Cash, 1990). That is, when individuals experience body image dissatisfaction, they may participate in bodywork routines (e.g., dieting, exercising, ingesting drugs, or seeking surgery) as a means by

which to alter the appearance of their bodies (Rudd & Lennon, 1994). An intense preoccupation with changing the appearance of the body creates a body image disturbance (Cash, 1990). Body image disturbance has been linked to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia (Garner, 1997).

Contemporary Popular Culture Discourses About the Body

The Female Body Ideal: Thin Is In

Contemporary Western culture places an enormous value on the physical attractiveness of its people (Morrison & O'Conner, 1999). In the past 80 years, Americans have become obsessed with weight (Rothblum, 1992). The current cultural female beauty ideal mandates a lean and toned body, with slim hips, full breasts, and readily visible hip and rib bones (Ko, 2001). The current idealized bodies of fashion models are 20 to 30 pounds below their healthy body weight (Ko, 2001).

Certainly, ideals of female beauty have undergone much change over time. In most societies, plumpness and even obesity have been viewed as desirable and attractive at some point in history (Ford & Beach, 1952). To better understand the contemporary idealization of thinness, it is instructive to reference change in conceptions of the ideal female body over the course of the 20th century.

Historians trace the contemporary Western idealization of thinness to the 1920s, when the female beauty ideal changed from a curvy, s-shaped silhouette to a more tubular, slender shape (Brumberg, 1997). The linear, almost "boyish," ideal of the 1920s was particularly striking in its veritable lack of female secondary sexual characteristics, such as breasts and hips (Fallon, 1990; Seid, 1989). Although the curves of the female body were embraced as attractive at various points over the next 30 years, the thin, linear female body was again celebrated during the 1960s,

when the ultra-thin British model, Twiggy, became a fashion icon. Since Twiggy's arrival on the fashion scene, the notion of thinness as central to female attractiveness has persisted within Western culture (Kaiser, 1997). However, the fitness craze of the 1970s and 1980s ushered in an additional requirement for the attractive female body; in addition to being thin, the ideal female body of the late 20th and early 21st centuries must also be toned and fit (Kaiser, 1997; Ko, 2001).

The Cultural Value Assigned to Female Thinness

The body in and of itself has no inherent meaning. Through cultural processes, however, the appearances of different bodies do come to have shared meaning. In order to understand the significance of the thin female body ideal, it is helpful to consider the meanings Western cultures attach to female bodies of various sizes and shapes, and in particular, the cultural stereotypes assigned to slender and overweight bodies.

Stereotypes regarding thinness in women are very positive; female thinness is associated with characteristics such as beauty, health, sexual appeal, frequent dating, frequent exercise, and knowledge about nutrition (Downs & Harrison, 1985; Ogden, 1992; Spillman & Everington, 1989). Additionally, thinness has become somewhat of a Western, especially an American, cultural symbol of competency (Sternhell, 1992). Thinness in Western cultures is associated not only with attractiveness, but also with financial and educational success as well as with self-control (Ogden, 1992). Perhaps for this reason, it is not surprising that women often associate being thin with being successful and think that if they are thin, then they will achieve success (Evans, 2003).

In contrast to stereotypes regarding thinness, Western cultural attitudes about overweight individuals are predominantly negative (Morrison & O'Conner, 1999). Research suggests that thin Americans tend to view overweight individuals as disorganized, sloppy, lazy, weak, and

sexless. Additionally, overweight females are seen as less feminine than are those who are not overweight (Tiggeman & Rothblum, 1988). Further, there is an aesthetic bias against overweight; research suggests that on-lookers of normal weights view overweight and obese individuals as aesthetically displeasing (Crandall & Biernat, 1990).

The cultural prejudice against overweight individuals may be due in part to the fact that there is little censorship of anti-fat attitudes (Crandall & Biernat, 1990), despite the knowledge that anti-fat attitudes contribute to a stigmatizing and hostile environment for overweight and obese individuals. In fact, research has suggested that cultural stereotypes about fatness contribute to an environment that makes it difficult for overweight or obese individuals to function normally and to gain social acceptance (Morrison & O'Conner, 1990). In this vein, studies have shown that overweight adolescents are more likely to be victimized in school and are less likely to be accepted into elite colleges (Rothblum, Brand, Miller, & Oetjen, 1990).

Discourses of Control and Ideologies of Malleability

As noted, in recent years cultural discourses about the body have promoted the importance and value of very thin and taut bodies, specifically for women and girls (Bordo, 2003; Brownwell, 1991; Brumberg, 1997). These discourses have been underpinned by the assumption that the human body can be easily transformed into an ideal body through disciplined adherence to body management routines (Bordo, 2003; Brumberg 1997; Shilling, 1993). In turn, the construction of the body as readily malleable draws upon ideas associated with high modernity (Bordo 2003; Shilling 1993). During the high modern era (i.e., the late 20th and early 21st centuries), cultural ideologies of the modern era have become intensified (Giddens, 1990). One such ideology is the Western intellectual tradition of dualism, which suggests that people use socially constructed dichotomies to make sense of the world around them (Derrida, 1982;

Romanyshyn, 1989). Of particular relevance to the present work is the construction of the self as including two parts: (a) the mind, which often is assumed to encompass a person's true identity or essence, and (b) the body, which is the physical part of the self, often assumed to be governed by nature (Foucault 1980; Thompson & Hirschman 1995). Implicit within Western cultural discourses about the dual self is the ideology of "mind over body," or the assumption that through hard work and self-discipline, both of which are valued within US culture, one can overcome the physical self and assert control over the body (Featherstone 1991; Spitzack 1990; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

The mind over body ideology is reflected in media content that idealizes and normalizes thin bodies as desirable by linking thinness to positive social characteristics and overweight bodies to negative social characteristics (Downs & Harrison, 1985; Spillman & Everington, 1989; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Such media content has been said to encourage a type of body monitoring similar to that addressed by Foucault (1977) in his work on the Panopticon. Implicit here is the notion that with the disciplined use of varied consumer products, one can and should observe, evaluate, and "fix" the body so that it mirrors the thin and toned ideal, thereby freeing one's "inner self" from its entrapment in a body governed by nature (Berman, 1989; Bordo, 1993; Scott, 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). This sort of relationship with the body is reflective of the "disciplined body" described by Frank (1991). By focusing one's energies on the self and its regimen, the disciplined body is able to deny its own desires (e.g., a desire for nourishment), and the mind is able to assume willful control over the body.

The Power of Cultural Discourses to Shape Body-Related Feelings and Behavior:

Media Effects

Media's Communication of the Thin Ideal

The mass media play a significant role in constructing meanings about which bodies and appearances are socially acceptable, desirable, right, or fashionable (Kaiser, 1997). As previously noted, both scholars and popular culture authors have suggested that the mass media promote a standard of female beauty that is unrealistically thin (e.g., Hendricks, 2002; Ko, 2001; Posavac & Posavac, 2001; Silverstein et al., 1986; Wolf, 1991). The thin female body ideal is disseminated and promoted in both print (e.g., magazines) and broadcast media (e.g., television) and often is thought to be exemplified in the body of the runway model, whose weight is on average 20 to 30 pounds below what the medical profession would recognize as healthy (Ko, 2001). That the media industry relies upon technologies such as airbrushing to modify the appearances of already slender models also provides further evidence to suggest that the ideal featured within the media is likely inconsistent with real women's bodies (Posavac & Posavac, 2002).

Findings from several different studies suggest that at various points during the late 20th century, the sizes of women depicted in the media (e.g., Miss America contestants, Playboy centerfolds, women featured in magazine advertisements and television situation comedies) were slimmer than were their real life counterparts (Fout & Burggraff, 1999; Garner, Garfinkel, Swartz, & Thompson, 1980; Katzmarz & Davis, 2001; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1990). In one such study Garner et al. (1980) compared the weights and heights of Miss America contestants from 1959 to 1978. The results of the study showed that the weights of these women were below the average mean weights of "real" women during this period. Additionally, findings indicated that Miss America contestants were significantly thinner in 1978

than they were in 1959. In an update of the Garner et al. study (1980), Wiseman et al. (1990) examined the weights of Miss America contestants for the years spanning from 1979 through 1988. Results from this update indicated that the weights of the contestants continued to decrease during this time period, with the contestants weighing between 13% and 18% less than the expected weight for their height.

In another study, Silverstein et al. (1986) analyzed four different aspects of the media's promotion of the thin ideal, examining (a) the difference in body sizes of male television characters versus female characters, (b) the difference in the amount of body-related content in women's versus men's magazines, (c) the change in the bust to waist ratio of women featured in magazines (1901 to 1981), and (d) the change in the body shape of movie stars (1940 to 1979). Findings revealed a double standard with respect to the media's portrayal of thinness; the women but not the men featured within the media analyzed consistently mirrored the thin cultural ideal. Apparently, then, the media have differing standards of thinness for men and for women. Further, in the 48 women's magazines analyzed, 63 advertisements were found for diet foods as compared to the 1 advertisement in the 48 men's magazines. Findings also revealed that articles focusing upon body shape or size were much more frequently featured in women's magazines, outnumbering those featured in men's 96 to 8. Finally, findings indicated that since the 1950s, the female bodies promoted in the media have become significantly less curvaceous. The researchers concluded that the change in shape and size of women's bodies promoted by media could have an influence on the growing number of women developing eating disorders (Silverstein et al., 1986).

In another study, Anderson and DiDomenico (1987) analyzed the 10 most popular women's and men's magazines for advertising and editorial content related to diet and body

shape. Results indicated that the women's magazines contained 10 times more content related to issues of diet and body shape than did the men's magazines. Additionally, the researchers found that content in the women's magazines was more likely to address issues of dieting or body size reduction, whereas content in the men's magazines more frequently addressed issues related to body shape. As such, findings suggest significant differences in the body-related messages magazines send to women and men about the body.

Fout and Burggraf (1999) analyzed 28 prime-time television situation comedies for content related to body weight, body shape, and dieting. Specifically, Fout and Burggraf analyzed the body weights of the main female characters, the main characters' own verbal comments about their bodies (e.g., weight, shape, dieting), and the verbal feedback that the main characters received from other characters about their body weight. They found that 33% of the central female characters were underweight or below what would be considered an average weight for their height. Sixty percent of the characters were judged to be of an average weight, and only 7% were judged to be above average weight. Twelve percent of the central female characters analyzed indicated participation in dieting or food restriction by verbal comments made or behaviors enacted as part of the storyline. Findings also revealed that the more the character indicated participation in dieting, the more negative the comments she made about her own body and the more likely she was to make negative comments about other female characters' bodies. As such, this study provides evidence that television situation comedies contribute to the propagation of the thin ideal. Further, the researchers suggest that this modeling and verbal reinforcement of the thin ideal may contribute to viewers' internalization of the thin ideal and encourage males to expect and pressure thinness in females.

Effects of Exposure to Media Promoting the Thin Ideal

Findings from several studies suggest that exposure to media images of the thin ideal can increase body image disturbance (Garner, 1997; Posavac & Posavac, 1998; Richins, 1991; Thornton & Maurice, 1997, 1999; Silverstein et al., 1986; Stice & Shaw, 1994). The effect of such media images upon body image and satisfaction has been explained in several different ways. For example, several researchers have invoked social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) to explain the potential of images in the mass media to shape feelings about the self. This theory suggests that individuals have a drive to evaluate themselves and one way that they may do so is through comparisons of the self with others. Appearance is a visible and significant part of one's self (1954), and it is often the basis of social comparisons with others. There are two types of social comparison that can occur. An upward comparison takes place when one compares himself or herself to someone who is perceived to be better off in one particular area, such as appearance. Conversely, a downward comparison is when an individual compares himself or herself to someone who is perceived as less well off in a particular area (Festinger, 1954).

Several studies suggest that many North American women evaluate their own bodies by making upward social comparisons with idealized (i.e., thin) images of women depicted within the media (e.g., images of women in advertisements, images of celebrities or television stars) and that such comparisons can result in the conclusion that one does not "measure up" to the standards embodied by women depicted within the media. In turn, such an evaluation can lead to negative feelings about the body (Garner, 1997; Posavac & Posavac, 1998; Richins, 1991; Silverstein et al., 1986; Thornton & Maurice, 1997, 1999). Some work has focused upon personal characteristics that may make some individuals more susceptible to social comparisons with media imagery. For example, Wilcox and Laird (2000) found that a woman's tendency to

compare the self to the thin ideal depicted within the media was positively related to her responsiveness to personal or situational cues. And, based upon their meta-analysis of 25 previous studies on the media and body image in women, Groesz, Levine, and Muriën (2002) concluded that the participants with significant body image concerns were more adversely affected by thin media stimuli than were participants without body dissatisfaction issues.

Stice and Shaw (1994) theorized two possible reasons why exposure to the thin ideal in the media may cause dieting-related disorders. First, the thin ideal in the media may produce negative moods or a negative state in women. In turn, negative feelings such as depression, shame, guilt, stress, and lack of confidence are associated with symptoms of bulimia and other eating disorders. Second, exposure to the thin ideal media images may lead to eating pathology by producing an over-internalization of the thin ideal stereotype. The repeated exposure to the thin ideal serves as a mechanism of action for bulimia and other eating disorders.

The Pregnant and Postpartum Body

Historical Overview of Attitudes toward the Pregnant and Postpartum Body

Social acceptance of the pregnant and postpartum body. In Western cultures, pregnancy was viewed as an illness and was framed by attitudes of shame and negativity until the turn of the 20th century. Women often hid their pregnancies for as long as it was feasible, and once their pregnancies became known, they secluded themselves from society (Poli, 1998), seemingly out of shame. Similarly, diaries from the 18th century suggest that women did not greet pregnancy with happiness, but rather, were fearful of dying during childbirth or worried about providing for unborn children (Baumgarten, 1996).

In the 18th century and 19th centuries, women adapted their everyday clothing for pregnancy, letting out seams and adding panels to accommodate their expanding bodies

(Baumgarten, 1996). By the turn of the 20th century, dress developed specifically for pregnancy became available on the ready-to-wear market through retailers such as Lane Bryant (Poli, 1998). At that time women adopted somewhat of a pregnancy uniform. Typically, clothing for pregnant women was dark in color and came in a limited number of styles, most of which were designed to conceal the pregnancy.

It was not until the 1970s that social attitudes and mores about the pregnant body relaxed. At this time, the stigma of the pregnant body was undermined, in part because of the women's revolution and growth of women in professional positions (Bailey, 1981). During the next two decades, the pregnant body became increasingly visible within society. In fact, in 1991, Demi Moore appeared pregnant and nude on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine. Since that point in time, the coverage of the pregnant body in the popular media has increased (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Currently, it is hard to pick up any popular magazine without reading about or seeing coverage of a celebrity's pregnancy.

Institutionalization of pregnancy and childbirth. Social norms related to the conceptualization of childbirth have undergone much change over the last 150 years. Childbirth was once thought to be a cultural and biological event, but is now socially understood largely in medical or institutional terms (Dye, 1986). Wertz and Wertz(1989) have identified three periods of thought about childbirth in America (1989). In the first period, which spanned from the early 17th to the mid-eighteenth century, childbirth was viewed a social event in which the women of the community came together to support one another in the birthing process. During the second period, which lasted from the mid-18th to the late 19th century, physicians began to become involved in the birthing process and started staking claim on childbirth as a medical event. However, it was not until the third period, which Wertz and Wertz identified as occurring during

the late 18th century through the mid-20th century, that the medical profession took authority over childbirth. From this point forward, childbirth has been framed primarily as a medical experience within mainstream American culture (Wertz & Wertz, 1989), and the medical community has taken authority over the pregnant woman's body.

The medicalization of the birthing process has drawn much criticism from scholars in disciplines such as nursing and women's studies. Nursing scholars (e.g., Rudolfstottir, 2002) have argued that framing birth in terms of medicine has produced a situation in which women's individual needs often are superseded by institutionalized protocols that are broadly invoked to address all women's circumstances. Feminist scholars also have suggested that the medicalization of the birthing process has shifted the focus of attention away from the needs of the mother, prioritizing the needs of the fetus over those of the mother and diminishing the mother's agency by treating her as a machine in the production process of a child (Bordo, 2003; Dye, 1986; Earl, 2003). In other cases, feminists have critiqued the medical profession for imposing unrealistic labor deadlines upon women and encouraging them to have Caesarian sections and episiotomies when other options may exist (Wolf, 2001). Central to this critique is the assumption that these practices have stemmed in part from pressure exerted upon doctors and hospitals to make labor a fast and profitable business (Earle, 2003; Bordo, 2003; Dye, 1986; Wolf 2001).

Body Image during Pregnancy and Postpartum

Body-related attitudes and behaviors during pregnancy. As noted, within contemporary Western societies, ideals of female beauty mandate a very thin and toned body (Bordo, 2003; Shilling, 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Certainly, the pregnant female body is very different in shape and size than that prescribed for women by this culture's thin

ideal. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that for some women, pregnancy does not abate the pressure to be the thin (Davies & Wardle, 1994). In fact, research suggests that although Americans recognize pregnancy as a normal body function, many women view pregnancy as an encumbrance on body image (Garner, 1997). This is particularly disconcerting when interpreted in light of the fact that a woman's body image during pregnancy can have significant impacts on not only her own health, but also that of her fetus (Pruzinsky & Cash, 1990).

Research exploring women's body image during pregnancy has produced conflicting findings, with some work suggesting that women may experience positive feelings toward their pregnant bodies and other work indicating that pregnancy most often induces negative body-related feelings. For example, some women perceive the weight and shape changes of pregnancy as confirmation of their womanhood and/or liberation from the cultural imperative for thinness and eating restraint (Bailey, 2001; Davies & Wardle, 1994; Johnson, Burrows, & Williams, 2004). In one study, researchers found that two thirds of the 50 women surveyed felt positively about their bodies during pregnancy (Fairburn & Welch, 1990). In studies comparing pregnant women to non-pregnant women, the pregnant women were found to be more accepting of their bodies, to be less concerned with weight, and to have improved body satisfaction as compared to non-pregnant women (Clark & Ogden, 1999; Davies & Wardle, 1994). Finally, research suggests that a woman's weight prior to pregnancy may influence her degree of body satisfaction during pregnancy; women who were overweight prior to pregnancy have been found to report higher levels of body satisfaction during pregnancy than do those who were not overweight (Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997).

In most cases, however, even women who report positive feelings about their pregnant bodies also experience some amount about body dissatisfaction during pregnancy (Clark &

Ogden, 1999; Johnson et al, 2004; McCarthy, 1998). In their study of first-time mothers, Fox and Yamaguchi (1997) found that women who were of normal weight prior to pregnancy were more likely to experience a negative body image during pregnancy as compared to their overweight peers. In particular, the normal weight women were found to be more self-conscious and to report more concern for weight gain as compared to the women who were overweight prior to pregnancy (Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997). In a more recent qualitative study, Johnson, Burrows, and Williamson (2004) found that pregnant women felt more negatively about their bodies as the pregnancy progressed. The women described their changing bodies in negative ways, using words such as “frumpy,” “weird,” and “fat” (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 370).

In other work, researchers have examined the body-related behaviors of pregnant women. Although some of this work suggests that women do not restrict their diets during pregnancy (Clark & Ogden, 1999), other research indicates that pregnant women are very sensitive to the sociocultural messages promoting thinness (Johnson et al., 2004; Sumner, Willer, Killick, & Elstein, 1993). This sensitivity, in turn, can lead to participation in weight management behavior such as dieting or smoking, both of which could potentially be harmful to a pregnant woman and her unborn child (Abraham et al., 1994; Fairburn & Welch, 1990).

Body-related attitudes and behaviors during postpartum. Research suggests that many women are less satisfied with their bodies after giving birth than they were prior to pregnancy (Jenkin & Tiggmann, 1997). Typically, this decrease in satisfaction is linked to weight gain and shifts in fat distribution (Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997; Walker, 1998). Thus, it is not surprising that, after they give birth, many women attempt to lose weight gained during pregnancy. In a study by Baker, Carter, Cohen, and Brownell (1999), 70% of the postpartum

women surveyed were trying to lose weight, including the women who had not dieted prior to becoming pregnant.

Several factors contribute to the body-related distress that women may experience during postpartum. First, women often hold unrealistic expectations regarding their capacity to quickly or easily lose the weight gained during pregnancy (Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997). For many women, however, it can take up to one year to lose weight gained during pregnancy (Walker, 1998). Second, that many women's attempts to lose weight gained during pregnancy are unsuccessful also may add to the frustration that postpartum women experience. Finally, for some women, the weight gained as a result of pregnancy is viewed as a personal flaw; these women do not attribute postpartum weight gain to the development of their child during pregnancy, but instead perceive it as evidence of their inability to exert control over the body (Jenkin & Tiggeman, 1997; Walker, 1998).

Certainly, the gain of weight during pregnancy is a normative experience and a biological necessity. In the current cultural context, however, this shift in the size of the body may be experienced negatively, particularly after the birth of the baby. In fact, research suggests that the amount of weight retained after giving birth is positively correlated to a woman's risk for the development of postpartum depression (Jenkin & Tiggmann, 1997; Walker, 1998). As such, women's feelings about the weight they gain as a result of pregnancy may impact their broader sense of self.

Media Representations of the Pregnant and Postpartum Body

Research exploring media representations of the pregnant and postpartum bodies is quite limited; only two such studies were identified. In the first study, Dworkin and Wachs (2004) examined issues of the magazine, *Fit Pregnancy*, for themes related to exercise and the body.

Analyses included all issues of the magazine published from 1997 through 2003 (inclusive). Findings suggested that *Fit Pregnancy* content constructed pregnancy as maternally successful yet aesthetically problematic experience. In particular, content suggested that in addition to being responsible for traditional female role behaviors associated with wifehood and motherhood (e.g., household labor and childcare), new mothers also should be responsible for the engagement in fitness practices that can be used to re-make the body into a likeness of the cultural thin ideal, or at least, its pre-pregnant state. Findings further suggested that *Fit Pregnancy* content did not address varied obstacles (e.g., work and childcare demands, fatigue) that may make engagement in the prescribed exercise activities challenging for some women. Finally, an analysis of the visual imagery in the magazine indicated that very few women of color were represented within the magazine's pages.

In the second study, Wall (1997) examined media representations of post-menopausal pregnancy. In particular, Wall analyzed two different media formats – film and news coverage – for meanings about post-menopausal pregnancy. Wall selected the movie, *Father of The Bride II*, as her case study for the film analysis. In this movie, the menopausal mother, Nina, finds out that she is pregnant shortly after finding out that her daughter is pregnant. Although, ultimately, the film framed Nina's pregnancy in a positive light, it also highlighted Nina's anxieties about giving birth at an older age (e.g., being old when the child graduates from high school).

With her exploration of news coverage, Wall examined meanings attached by the news media to two “real life” cases of post-menopausal pregnancy: (a) a British businesswoman who sought medical assistance to become pregnant at the age of 59 and who eventually gave birth to twins and (b) a 53-year-old South African woman who carried her daughter's fertilized egg to term, giving birth to her grandchild. Each of these news stories received a lot of media attention,

but the meanings associated with each case represented very different perspectives. Whereas media coverage about the post-menopausal woman who gave birth to twins to start her own family was negative and condemning, that concerning the woman who gave birth to her grandchild was favorable. Thus, findings suggested that pregnancy in older women was only accepted within the media only if it occurred through natural occurrences or if it were a sacrifice to assist a younger woman who could not carry her own children.

The Influence of Media upon Body Image during Pregnancy and Postpartum

Very little research has explored the impact of media messages upon body image during pregnancy and postpartum. This single published example of research in this area included the report of findings from a small pilot study exploring the effects of media images on body image distortion during pregnancy (Sumner et al., 1993). The study used an experimental design and followed ten women through their pregnancies. Data were collected twice, at 16 and 32 weeks gestation, and the pregnant women's responses were compared with a non-pregnant control group. Stimuli for the study included two sets of photographs: affective and neutral. The affective photographs featured models from fashion magazines. The neutral photographs featured rooms and home furnishings. Participants were randomly exposed to one set of photographs and then asked to estimate their body measurements (bust, waist, and hips) and body depth (abdomen). Then, they were exposed to the second set of photographs and asked to repeat the estimates. As a distraction task, participants were asked to rate each set of photographs for attractiveness. Responsiveness to the images was measured using the change index.

Results suggested that exposure to images of fashion models may impact pregnant women's body image distortion and that the pattern of this distortion changes over the course of the pregnancy. At 16 weeks gestation, viewing the fashion models had no effect on the pregnant

women's overall body image (i.e., their estimates of bust, waist, and hip size). However, viewing such images did lead pregnant women to overestimate the size of their abdomen. At 32 weeks, viewing the images of the fashion models led the pregnant women to overestimate their general body width. Interestingly, exposure to the images of the fashion models led the control group to underestimate their body size, with no change across the data collection dates. As such, findings suggest that pregnant women may be especially vulnerable to images of the thin ideal.

Guiding Theoretical Frameworks

A theoretical framework integrating feminist perspectives on the female body as well as symbolic convergence theory informed the present work. As discussed in a previous section of this review, varied sociologies of the body (e.g., the conception of the mind and body as dualistic, the body malleable ideology) also were invoked to guide the development of this study.

Feminist Perspectives on the Pregnant and Postpartum Body

Feminist work on the pregnant and postpartum bodies has addressed multiple issues, including the medical rights of pregnant women, cultural constructions or meanings associated with the experience of pregnancy and postpartum, and sexuality.

Feminist writing about the medical rights has proposed that obstetricians often (a) diminish the agency of pregnant women by imposing medical decisions upon them, with little regard for their feelings or wishes and (b) prioritize the needs of the fetus over those of the mother (Bordo, 1993; Jaggar, 1996; Wolf, 2001). Specifically, feminist scholars have critiqued the medical profession for imposing unrealistic labor deadlines upon women and encouraging them to have Caesarian sections and episiotomies when other options may exist (Wolf, 2001). In some cases, Jaggar (1996) suggests, Caesarian sections may be performed against the mother's will (Jaggar, 1996). Central to these critiques is the assumption that these practices have

stemmed in part from pressure exerted upon doctors and hospitals to make labor a fast and profitable business. As a result, feminists argue, the mother is treated a machine in the production process of a child (Bordo, 2003; Earle, 2003; Dye, 1986; Wolf, 2001). Women are robbed of their greatest empowerment when pregnancy is treated as a condition or disease and women are forced to submit to constant monitoring. Feminists want women to be presented with options and have control and choice in the birthing process (Derr, 1995).

In other cases, feminist scholarship has called into question cultural constructions concerning the experience of pregnancy and postpartum. For instance, Wolf (2001) argues that neither the medical profession nor contemporary culture adequately prepares or supports first-time mothers for the body and lifestyles changes that pregnancy and motherhood entail. Rather, she suggests that cultural themes about pregnancy and motherhood often are misleading, focusing primarily upon sentimental stories and “lovely” experiences rather than the reality of these experiences. She addresses the need for the dissemination of more truthful accounts of the experiences of pregnancy and motherhood and also for increased support for women as they face the transition to parenthood. She, along with others such as Derr (1995), argues that, for many women, the lack of proper preparation and social support adds to the stress of being a new mother.

The sexuality of pregnant and postpartum women also has been a concern of feminist researchers. This topic is important to feminists because pregnancy and motherhood are layered with cultural constructions about proper sex roles and the appropriateness of sexual expression (Hyde & Delamater, 1996). As a result, pregnant women are exposed to mixed cultural messages about gendered norms for role behavior during pregnancy. For instance, within American culture, social discourses often construct dichotomous and stereotypical meanings about a

women's character: in popular culture formats, women are often portrayed as chaste Madonnas or as promiscuous whores. In this cultural context, motherhood, which is viewed as a virtuous undertaking, is constructed as being conceptually incompatible with sexuality, in spite of the necessary and obvious link between engagement in sexual intercourse and the conception of a child. Feminist researchers have suggested that these cultural ideologies can cause pregnant and postpartum women to feel confused about the appropriateness of their expression of sexuality (Hyde & Delamater, 1996).

Symbolic Convergence Theory

Like prior analyses of magazines (e.g., Ballentine & Ogle, 2005; Duffy & Gotcher, 1996; Garner, Sterk, & Adams, 1998; Ogle & Thornburg, 2003), the present study was informed by symbolic convergence theory. This theory and its method of theme analysis afford understanding about how people and groups arrive at shared "rhetorical visions" (Bormann, 1981), or understandings about the social world around them. Implicit here is the assumption that individuals jointly "construct social reality through rhetoric," that is, that the exchange of rhetorical symbols produces reality (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1985, p. 253).

Symbolic convergence theory involves the analysis of rhetorical texts for fantasy themes. Fantasy themes are the basic story lines of rhetorical communications and can be organized into more abstract categories called "fantasy types," or recurring scenarios with a common rhetorical theme (Borman, 1981). Taken together, the fantasy types within a message form a composite drama called a "rhetorical vision" (Ball, 2001). Rhetorical visions are stories or themes that are constructed within a specific text to advance a given view about social reality. Rhetorical visions can be communicated in varied media formats, including print and broadcast media. Prior work

suggests that rhetorical visions contribute to how audiences define social reality and draw individuals who participate into a shared symbolic reality (Bormann, 1981).

As noted, symbolic convergence theory is used for the analysis of rhetorical discourse. The mass media represent one form of rhetoric; media format and content reflect certain interests, values, and motives (Altheide, 1985; Altheide & Snow, 1979; Duffy & Gotcher, 1996; Wolf, 2002). Magazine editors create stories or themes to attract a target audience and advertisers. After recurring exposure to these themes, the repeat audience of a given magazine arrives at shared understandings about the content of these themes; that is, their views about social reality may converge to reflect rhetorical visions constructed within the magazine content (Duffy & Gotcher, 1996; Peirce, 1990, 1993). In the present analysis, I examined the rhetorical visions related to issues of the pregnant and postpartum bodies and included within the written editorial content of *People magazine*. Such an analysis provides a platform for understanding popular cultural meanings associated with the pregnant and postpartum bodies.

Conclusions about Existing Work

A large body of research has examined the impact of the media upon women's body-related feelings and behaviors. This work has invoked both qualitative and quantitative methods and has provided ample evidence that the media messages about the social value of thinness may serve as a filter for women's feelings about their own bodies, normalizing thinness and cultivating the impression that women can and should reshape their bodies into a likeness of the thin ideal.

Another body of literature has examined body image among pregnant and postpartum women. This research suggests that women may experience the bodily changes of pregnancy in both positive and negative ways, sometimes viewing pregnancy as a license to free themselves

from the constraining cultural expectation of female thinness and sometimes viewing the pregnant body as in conflict with the cultural ideal. Conversely, research suggests that most women experience some dissatisfaction with the postpartum body, often attempting to change the body through participation in dieting regimens.

Although, as noted, a large body of work substantiates the role of the media in shaping women's body-related feelings and behaviors, the literature reviewed herein gives very little attention to media portrayals of the pregnant and postpartum body; only two such studies were identified, and neither study invoked a theoretical framework. Thus, the purpose of the present research was to examine the rhetorical visions that popular press media construct about the pregnant and postpartum body. More specifically, this interpretive work will examine the written editorial content of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for meanings about the pregnant and postpartum body. Of particular interest will be the following questions:

1. How does the written, editorial content of *People* magazine frame pregnant and postpartum bodies? That is, what meanings are attached to these embodied statuses? Are pregnant and postpartum bodies celebrated? Problematized? In what ways?
2. Within the written, editorial content of *People* magazine, what body-related attitudes and behaviors are presented as normative or desirable for pregnant and postpartum women? How are these meanings constructed?
3. How can existing theoretical work be invoked to interpret the rhetorical visions identified within *People* magazine and related to the pregnant and postpartum body?

Although such an analysis does not address about the varied ways in which readers may interpret the media content examined, it can provide understanding about the meanings that contemporary

cultural discourses produce and the ways in which these meanings may set a context for women's interpretation of the bodily changes of pregnancy and postpartum.

CHAPTER III METHOD

The present study invoked a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the written editorial content of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for meanings related to the pregnant and postpartum body. This chapter provides an overview of the sample, data collection, and data analysis approaches used.

Sample and Data Collection

People magazine was selected for the present study because it is one of the most-widely circulated general interest magazines read by women of childbearing age. *People* magazine is part of the Time Corporation and was first published in 1974 in response to reader interest in the “people” department of *Time* magazine. *People* was founded on the concept that nothing intrigues people more than other people. The mission of *People* is to “satisfy the curiosity of its readers with candid, compassionate, insightful, and entertaining coverage of the most intriguing people in our culture whether famous or infamous” (S. Khachane, personal communication April 20, 2005).

Thus, *People* is an entertainment magazine that is focused on the events in celebrity lives and the lives of people who go through extraordinary experiences. *People* is published on a weekly basis and provides its readers with stories that are almost “fantasy like” compared to normal individuals’ everyday lives. The magazine uses a unique mixture of images and text to grasp readers’ attention. Frequently, the magazine covers focus on women’s bodies, with cover stories written around dieting-related behaviors, clothing selection, or plastic surgery. Over 36 million readers read *People* magazine weekly, 68% of whom are women (Time Inc., 2005).

Although *People* claims not to have one specific target audience, the majority of its paid subscribers are women between the ages of 18 and 49 (Time Inc., 2005).

People magazine includes varied types of editorial content. For the purposes of the study, features were distinguished from full-length articles on the basis of content scope and length. Features ranged in length from a few words to one page and included photo captions as well as brief, reoccurring columns that could address a single topic or include short summaries of multiple topics. Examples of reoccurring columns classified as features included “Star Tracks,” “Body Watch”, “Scoop”, “Passages”, and “Style Watch.” In contrast, full-length articles were not reoccurring columns, were more than one page, and were identified by a unique title in the table of contents of the given issue. Frequently, the full-length articles were referenced – either through text or imagery or both – on the front cover of the magazine.

The present analysis focused upon the written editorial content of *People* magazine that was related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies and that was included in issues published between 2000 and 2007 (inclusive); advertisements and images were not included in the analysis. Of particular interest was content addressing topics such as pregnancy, childbirth, pregnancy weight-related topics, pregnancy style, postpartum and postpartum weight-related topics. To identify *People* content that focused primarily upon the topics of the pregnant and postpartum bodies, the researcher manually searched the entire issue of each magazine in the data set. To this end, she first examined the table of contents for each issue, noting potentially relevant features/articles and then skimming these features/articles to determine whether their content addressed issues of the pregnant and/or postpartum body. To ensure that no relevant features/articles were overlooked, the researcher also skimmed every page of each magazine issue, first looking at the feature/article headlines and the accompanying photos for potential

cues that the given feature/article may be related to the pregnant and/or postpartum body. In cases where the relevance of the feature/article to the study was not clear from the headlines and/or photos, the researcher skimmed the entire feature/article to ascertain whether its content was a fit with the study purpose.

A total of 416 issues of *People* magazine were published between 2000 and 2007 (inclusive). Using the approach described above, 142 issues were identified as including content relevant to the present study, including 106 features and 98 full-length articles.

Data Analysis

Constant comparison processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were used to analyze key rhetorical visions related to the pregnant and/or postpartum body and included within the written editorial content of *People* magazine. With this interpretive and inductive approach, a number of coding processes were used to identify and interpret key concepts and themes within the data set. Meanings in the data were identified using a coding process in which data were “broken down, conceptualized and put back together in new ways” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57). There were no pre-existing hypotheses for the study; analytic ideas emerged from the data that were collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Themes that emerged from the data were conceptualized by grouping excerpts of text with similar meanings and developing label that were representative of those meanings.

Prior to beginning the constant comparison process, the researcher identified “chunks” of meaning within the data. This process is referred to as “unitizing” and allows researchers to determine the amount of text that will constitute the separate units of analysis during the coding process (Guetzkow, 1950). For the present study, the researcher attempted not to separate units

from the context that could lend meaning to them. As such, units varied in length and could comprise a single sentence, several sentences, or an entire paragraph.

The first two steps in constant comparison process are concept identification and categorization (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During these initial stages, the researcher made notes about key ideas or concepts in the margins of photocopied articles. A list of all key concepts was generated. Next, the concepts included within the list were compared with each other and combined into more abstract concepts called “categories” and “sub-categories.” These categories and sub-categories were then developed into a coding guide (see Appendix A) that was applied to the data during the open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Throughout the open coding process, the researcher continuously compared concepts and categories to meanings discovered within the data so as to ensure that the coding guide accurately reflected the entire data set.

Next, the researcher used axial and selective coding processes to search the data set for deeper meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In particular, axial coding was used to identify relationships between categories or themes. Selective coding, or the process of integrating and refining meanings and relationships within the data, allowed the researcher to inductively identify the overarching meanings grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It was through this process that the researcher was able to identify the rhetorical visions used to construct understandings about the pregnant and postpartum body within the content of the magazines analyzed.

Although analyses focused upon issues germane to the research questions developed prior to my immersion in the data, the researcher also searched the data for themes that emerged as salient but that were not addressed by the *a priori* research questions. Similarly, although a

number of relevant theoretical conceptions were identified prior to data analysis, the researcher remained open to new theoretical perspectives, using the emergent themes to guide the eventual selection of a theoretical framework to inform the analyses. In fact, throughout the latter stages of the data analysis process, the researcher engaged in dialectical tacking (Geertz, 1973), considering the interplay among the data, existing theory, and the researcher's interpretations.

Measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and dependability of the data analysis process. The researcher met with her advisor throughout the sampling, data collection, and analysis processes. At these meetings, the researcher and advisor discussed key meanings identified within the data set as well as questions regarding the coding processes. In addition, an audit coder (a fellow graduate student in Apparel and Merchandising) worked with the primary researcher to check (a) the selection of articles for inclusion in the sample and (b) check the researcher's application of the coding guide to a random sampling of the data. Interrater reliability was calculated by dividing the number of agreements regarding coding decisions by the total number of coding decisions. Interrater reliability coefficients for the selection of articles and the application of the coding guide were 88.7% and 93.4%, respectively.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the written editorial content of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for meaning related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies. This chapter includes a discussion of findings from the present study. The rhetorical visions (i.e., themes and subthemes) that emerged from the qualitative analysis are discussed in relation to the research questions posed. The section begins with a descriptive overview of the findings.

Overview

A total of 416 issues of *People* magazine were published between 2000 and 2007 (inclusive). One hundred forty-two issues were identified as including content relevant to the present study, including 106 features and 98 full-length articles. As the data in Table 1 suggest, the number of features containing content related to the pregnant and postpartum body increased over eight years analyzed, with the most dramatic increases in features published observed from 2003 to 2004 and 2006 to 2007. From 2000 to 2007, the number of issues that contained content related to the pregnant and postpartum body increased from 5% of the issues published to 67% of issues published. In 2000, only three issues of the magazine contained content about the pregnant or postpartum body, and in all cases, the content was included in the form of a full-length article. By 2007, however, *People* magazine content relating to the pregnant and postpartum body was observed in 35 issues, 5 of which contained 3 or more features regarding the pregnant or postpartum body. The majority of the content identified in 2007 was not identified within full-length articles, but rather, was observed within reoccurring features such as “Star Tracks”, “Body Watch”, “Scoop”, “Passages”, and “Style Watch,” which are described below.

Although *People* magazine content addressing the pregnant and postpartum body occasionally highlighted the experiences of a noncelebrity woman or family, it primarily featured the experiences of celebrities. Further, and as noted, the content analyzed represented diverse formats, including full-length articles as well as features (i.e., brief reoccurring columns and brief captions included with images). A few of these features regularly contained content germane to the pregnant and postpartum bodies, and thus, warrant mention here. One such feature was the “StarTrack” column, which contained photographs of celebrities taken at events and in everyday life settings (e.g., at a retail shopping).

Table 1

Frequency Counts of *People* Magazine Issue, Features, and Full-Length Articles Addressing the Pregnant and Postpartum Body: 2000 - 2007

Year	Issues	Features	Full length articles	Total
2000	3	0	3	3
2001	5	2	4	6
2002	15	8	10	18
2003	13	6	10	16
2004	25	23	12	34
2005	21	12	21	33
2006	25	12	20	38
2007	35	37	18	56
Total	142	106	98	204

store, at a park, on the street). The photographs were accompanied by brief captions that included information about the identity of celebrity, where he/she was cited, what he/she was doing in the photograph, and frequently, what the he/she was wearing in the image. The “Scoop” column featured the latest information on celebrities’ lives and events in Hollywood. The column was framed as though it was providing the reader with “breaking news” information. This column sometimes addressed more than one celebrity or event. For example, a given “Scoop” column might “cover” the progress of a celebrity pregnancy, the guest list or the account of a celebrity party, and the life of celebrity who had not been in the spotlight lately. The “Passages” column was a short reoccurring column that featured brief announcements of marriages, pregnancies, births, and deaths. This format was similar to the wedding, birth, and obituary announcements found in newspapers. This column usually featured information on less prominent celebrities who did not warrant coverage within full-length articles. The “Body Watch” column was solely dedicated to tracking changes in the appearance of celebrities’ bodies. For example, the column presented photographs of celebrities to highlight changes in a given individual’s body size, shape or weight (e.g., associated with dieting or weight gain); to offer speculative remarks about the possibility of a female celebrity’s “baby bump;” and/or to comment on or speculate about a celebrity’s cosmetic surgery history. Finally, in the “Style Watch” column, *People* contributors tracked the latest trends of the stars, for example, what styles or designers they were wearing. The column could feature several celebrities or could focus on the style of one specific celebrity.

Lastly, the pregnant and postpartum content analyzed was presented from varied perspectives or through diverse viewpoints or “voices.” The voice of the media writer was the predominant voice that was represented within the data set. For the purposes of this study,

“media writer” was conceptualized so as to include the named or unnamed individuals who authored content for presentation in *People* magazine (i.e., journalists, columnists, editors). The second most commonly represented voice was that of the celebrity. Here, celebrities’ first-hand perspectives were presented in *People* magazine through their quoted comments. Other first-person perspectives represented included those of non-celebrities, significant others, and “body experts.” The “voice” of a noncelebrity individual was rarely presented within *People* magazine. When this voice was “heard,” it was typically in the presentation of a feature about an “unusual circumstance,” such as a feature about a cancer patient who was pregnant or a woman who was giving birth in a Starbucks (Heyman, Fields-Meyer, & Rogers, 2003, p. 86; Jerome, Lang, Headerle, & Achilles, 2005, p. 66). The “voice” of the significant others included the perspectives of spouses, family members, and friends of the individuals whose experiences were highlighted. Finally, body experts included individuals who exerted some sort of impact or influence on an individual’s body. Examples of body experts included doctors, personal trainers, and nutritionists. These individuals typically commented on a given celebrity’s body and often worked with that celebrity to change her body in some way.

Research Question 1

How does the written, editorial content of *People* magazine frame the pregnant and postpartum bodies? That is, what meanings are attached to these embodied statuses? Are pregnant and postpartum bodies celebrated? Problematized? In what ways?

The written, editorial content of *People* attached varied meanings to the embodied statuses of the pregnant and postpartum bodies. As is discussed in this section, in some instances, these bodies were framed in a positive manner and were held up as physically attractive, stylish, and/or miraculous/amazing. In other instances, however, the pregnant and/or postpartum bodies

were presented as objects in need of bodily control or were framed as a “spectacles,” to be viewed, surveyed, or closely scrutinized by observers. Table 2 summarizes the frequency with which each of these meanings was observed within the data set.

Table 2

Meanings Attached to the Pregnant and Postpartum Bodies

Meanings	Frequency
Body as physically attractive	92
Pregnancy as stylish	13
Pregnancy as miraculous/amazing	8
Body as object of control	57
Body as spectacle	124

Note: Frequency refers to the number of times a specific theme occurred within the data set. In some cases, a single theme occurred more than one time within a given full-length article.

Pregnant and Postpartum Bodies as Physically Attractive or Beautiful

As noted, *People* magazine content sometimes framed pregnancy as physically attractive. Here, words like “glowing,” “radiant,” “pretty,” and “beautiful” were used to describe pregnant women (“MOMMY from the BLOCK”, 2007, p. 102; Schneider et al., 2004, p. 69; Smolowe, 2002, p. 130; Sophronia & Seaman, 2002, p. 130; “Star Tracks”, 2006a, p. 25; “Star Tracks”, 2004a, p. 16; “Star Tracks”, 2007a, p. 11; “Star Tracks”, 2007b, p.12; “Suddenly Thrilled”, 2003, p. 58). Interestingly, however, comments made about pregnant women being beautiful or attractive were sometimes not made in reference to a particular body part or specifically attached to the body, per se. Rather, it was more as though contributors to the magazine framed pregnancy, itself, as a beautiful embodied status, or in some instances, even the disposition of

pregnant women as being beautiful or pleasing. The latter notion is reflected in comments such as, “Carnie Wilson glows at Showtime Television Critics’ Association party” (“Star Tracks”, 2005b, p.12) and “She [Jennifer Lopez] was glowing so bright” (“MOMMY from the BLOCK”, 2007, p. 104).

People magazine content also frequently constructed pregnant women as being proud of their bodies. Implicit here were two assumptions. First, this content suggested that the pregnant body was, indeed, worthy of pride, self-satisfaction, value, and respect. Second, media writers often presented the assumption that a pregnant celebrity’s public appearance was an indication of her pride in her changing shape: “Luciana [Damon] shows off her baby bump while strolling through a local garden” (“Star Tracks”, 2006c, p. 11) or “An eight-month-pregnant Brooke Shields proudly showed off her expanding shape while strolling with her husband” (“Star Tracks”, 2003a p.10).

Contributors to *People* also sometimes presented the postpartum body as physically attractive. Perhaps not surprisingly, the construction of the postpartum body as attractive was most often connected to the loss of weight gained during pregnancy or to the return of the body to its pre-pregnancy shape and size. Such comments were typically launched by media writers and frequently appeared in reoccurring features such as “Star Tracks” and “Body Watch.” Words used by media writers to describe celebrities’ postpartum bodily transformations included “svelte”, “trim”, and “slimmer already” (Chu, A., McGee, Tan, M., 2007, p. 118; “Star Tracks”, 2004a, p. 11; “Star Tracks”, 2005c, p. 15; “Star Tracks”, 2006d, p. 16; “Star Tracks”, 2007d, p. 11). In some cases, media writers even alluded to the possibility of the postpartum body as sexy, referencing it as “hot” (“Star Tracks”, 2004b, p. 15) and “Fabulous” (“Star Tracks”, 2007e, p. 16). In full-length articles, such as “Bye-Bye Baby Weight” (2006, p. 94), the contributors

praised the “reformed” postpartum body as sexy and celebrated the quick weight loss of celebrity women (Souter, E. et al., 2006, p. 94).

Finally, and as was the case with the framing of the pregnant body, *People* magazine content also presented the postpartum body as beautiful in ways that transcended the physical. This theme often reflected the perspective of significant others, who were quoted in the magazine as viewing their loved one’s postpartum bodies as “peaceful,” “energetic,” “even more beautiful,” and “glowing” (Chiu, McGee, & Tan, 2007, p. 118; “Island Girl”, 2004, p. 21; Souter et al., 2005, p. 104).

Pregnancy as Stylish

Within *People* magazine, maintaining style while being pregnant was presented as an important issue for pregnant celebrities. The significance of this issue was especially apparent in the year 2007, when a number of articles focused on the topic ($n = 5$). Comments about the style of the pregnant celebrities appeared in reoccurring columns such as “Star Tracks” and “Style Watch” as well as in photo captions and several full-length articles. Additionally, this content represented the voices of both media writers and celebrities.

In a variety of ways, the contributors to *People* magazine – as well as the celebrities featured therein – simultaneously constructed the potential of the pregnant body as an object of style and delineated specific “looks” or ways of being stylish versus unstylish during this embodied state. This was accomplished by highlighting the appearances – including the clothing and dress – of expectant celebrities. In some instances, entire full-length articles were dedicated to the pregnancy style of a given actress or celebrity. Such was the case in the article, “Her first trimester: Expecting in Style” (2007, p. 68), which was dedicated to the pregnancy style of actress Halle Berry. In this piece, the contributor discussed Berry’s maternity style, making

comments suggestive of pride in her appearance: “Proudly showing her bump, Berry rocked a printed mini on August 17” (Schneider, Garcia, Keith, Margaret, Carter, et al., 2007, p. 68).

Similarly, in the November 19, 2007 issue, an article was published that covered not only the pregnancy style of Berry, but that reported the pregnancy styles of other pregnant celebrities, as well (“Style Watch”, 2007, p. 144). In one portion of this column, the contributor highlighted several signature pieces that the featured celebrities were wearing, including “curve-hugging dresses,” “chunky knits”, “thigh high boots”, and “bold colors.” The columnist also coined catch phrases for different pregnancy looks or styles, dubbing Jennifer Lopez as “The Glamazon”, Cate Blachette as “The Fashionista”, Christina Aguilera as “The Retro Kitten”, and Halle Berry as “The Hottie” (“Style Watch,” 2007, p. 144). This presentation of diverse styles may have constructed the impression of “choice” in maternity fashion, suggesting that there is not just one way to look or to appear during pregnancy. Interesting to note, however, is that common to many of these comments is the suggestion that pregnant women can and perhaps should draw attention to themselves and their shapes by wearing bold colors and prints and body-hugging or revealing shapes. Further, inasmuch as these looks and garments were adopted by celebrities and highlighted within the popular press, they also were seemingly presented as positive ways of being or appearing during pregnancy. Whether readers interpreted them as such is, of course, a matter beyond the scope of this work.

Pregnancy as Miraculous/Amazing

In most instances, *People* magazine content framed pregnancy as a natural, everyday occurrence rather than a miraculous or amazing event. In some instances, however, such as when “odds were beaten” or difficult circumstances overcome, pregnancy was framed as a miraculous.

The most common instance in which pregnancy was framed as miraculous or amazing was when couples had overcome infertility to become pregnant. In some cases, this content addressed the experiences of “real” people, or noncelebrities. For example, in the article, “She’s a first-time mom at 56-and it’s twins,” Aleta St. James refers to the medical assisted conception and birth of her twins as “amazing,” referring to her twins as a “miracle” (Smith, Seaman, Macfarlane, & Trabattoni, 2004, p. 72). Similarly, the journey of Celine Dion to become pregnant through in vitro fertilization was celebrated in a cover story, “Love, Luck and the Latest Science Help Singer Celine Dion Achieve a Little Miracle: Becoming Pregnant”, (Smolowe, Weinstein, Side, Roza, Caruso, & Kramer, 2000, p. 48). She was quoted in the article saying “I waited forever for this moment” (Smolowe et al., 2000, p. 48). In June 2001, the birth of Dion’s son also was featured in a cover story “Bringing Home Baby.”. In the article Dion described her pregnancy as a “dream” (“Bring Home Baby”, 2001, p. 52). She also is quoted as having said “It is a privilege to give a baby its first home inside your body,” and “I miss him being in my body” (“Bringing Home Baby”, 2001, p. 58). Similarly, in the article, “The Next Generation of Miracle Babies” (2004, p. 113), the contributors highlighted the stories of several women and couples who achieved pregnancy through reproductive technologies. Within the article, the technologies were constructed as “fulfilling their dream” (“The Next Generation of Miracle Babies”, 2004, p. 113), and the advances in technology were presented, in some ways, as miraculous as the pregnancy itself. For instance, the assistive reproductive technologies were referred to “cutting edge” and were presented as providing “hope” for the would-be parents (“The Next Generation of Miracle Babies”, 2004, p. 113). That the success of these procedures was conceptualized by the featured women and couples as “miraculous” is evident in quoted comments reflecting the

individuals' joy and disbelief at becoming pregnant: "I wanted everyone to know I was pregnant" and "I couldn't believe it" ("The Next Generation of Miracle Babies", 2004, p. 114).

Although they were few in number, there were some examples of birth stories that were framed as miraculous or amazing when no medical intervention was needed to conceive. For instance, the story of Jessica Lynch's pregnancy was constructed as a miracle due to the injuries that she incurred as a prisoner of war ("Private First Class Mom", 2007, p. 66). Tori Spelling described to *People* the amazement and pride that she had in the accomplishment of her body to produce and give birth to her son. She stated "It's amazing, I look at him and I'm like, I baked you in my belly! I love it" (Triggs, Wilhborg, Hunter, & Williams, 2007, p. 98). Here, then, the emphasis was placed upon the "miracle" of human reproduction, and in particular, the capacity of the female body to nurture new human life within.

Pregnant and Postpartum Body as Objects of Control

People magazine content also framed pregnant and postpartum bodies as objects in need of control and discipline. In these instances, the focus of bodily discipline was weight gained during and as a result of pregnancy. To this extent, *People* magazine content echoed the pervasive cultural motif imploring women to put their minds on the projects of their bodies and to discipline them through participation in bodily regimens (e.g., diet, exercise) intended to align them with the thin cultural ideal. Although content presenting the pregnant or postpartum body as an object in need of control often featured the first-hand perspectives of the women whose experiences were being highlighted in the given *People* magazine article, the voices of body experts and media writers also promoted this idea.

The postpartum body more often than the pregnant body was constructed as an object in need of control. Typically, this content addressed the topic of losing the weight gained during

pregnancy, and frequently, this project of bodily control was framed as an urgent and important one, particularly for celebrities, whose professions depend upon the appearance of their bodies. For instance, in the article “Mother Figures” (Espinoza et al., 2003, p. 120), postpartum weight loss was discussed. Here, the contributors considered the experiences of celebrity mothers such as Elizabeth Hurley and Uma Thurman, noting that Hollywood expects postpartum celebrities to regain their pre-baby size and shape quickly. The following comments, made by a media writer, Thurman’s nutritionist, and Elizabeth Hurley, (respectively) reflect this ideology: “snapping back into red carpet shape is imperative in this business”, “Five months after giving birth to Roan, Thurman needed to get camera ready”, and “Being able to fit myself in tiny clothing, is how I earn my living” (Espinoza et al., 2003, p. 120). In another cover story, the postpartum weight loss of Kate Hudson was analyzed. Here, the contributor referred to Hudson’s postpartum weight noting, “In Hollywood what goes up must come down” (“Kate Loses it”, 2004, p.60). In yet another cover story on celebrity postpartum weight loss, “Bye-Bye Baby Weight” (Souter et al., 2006, p.97), the contributors emphasized the need to control the postpartum body in order “to get camera-ready” (Souter et al., 2006, p. 99). Finally, in the article “New Moms, New Lives” the contributor proposed that controlling the postpartum body and losing weight was “the real labor” and remarked that a milestone for new moms was “getting back into skinny jeans” (Adato et al., 2004, p. 106).

Pregnant and Postpartum Body as Spectacle

Throughout the period analyzed and in an almost voyeuristic manner, *People* magazine contributors constructed the pregnant and postpartum bodies as “spectacles,” or as objects to be gazed upon due (in large part) to their changing appearances and seemingly for purposes of intrigue or entertainment. Content relative to the pregnant and postpartum bodies as spectacles

focused upon four topics: (a) speculating about celebrity pregnancy, (b) monitoring of the pregnant body for changes in shape and size, (c) monitoring of the age of pregnant women, and (d) monitoring of the postpartum body for changes in shape and size.

The speculation of pregnancy – that is, whether or not a given celebrity was, indeed, expecting – was particularly evident in 2007, with several articles monitoring Jennifer Lopez and Katie Holmes for bodily clues indicative of pregnancy (e.g., Dyball, Jessen, Rodriguez, & Marx, 2007, p. 66; Chu et al., 2007, p. 19; “Star Tracks”, 2007c, p. 16; “Baby Shopping”, 2007, p. 26). Here – as well as in other instances – initial speculation about these celebrity pregnancies was based upon changes in the stars’ typical style or apparel fit practices as well as the observation of a “baby bump.” The use of such cues was evident in a full-length article that prompted speculation about Katie Holmes’s pregnancy in November 2007 (“Katie Holmes Baby Bump Rumors”, 2007, p. 19). According to the article, Holmes was seen wearing a “tight-fitting skirt” and a “loose dress” that may have revealed a “baby bump” (“Katie Holmes Baby Bump Rumors”, 2007, p. 19). In a similar article about Jennifer Lopez, the contributor based pregnancy speculations upon the observation that the star had replaced her typical tight fitting tour costumes with a tour wardrobe that consisted of “flowing outfits” (Dyball, Jessen, Rodriguez, & Marx, 2007 p. 66). The loose fit of her clothing off stage also was the topic of one article and one feature (“Baby Shopping”, 2007, p. 26 “Star Tracks”, 2007e, p. 16). An earlier example of pregnancy speculation that was given much attention by *People* magazine concerned Britney Spears’s first pregnancy. In March 2005, contributors wrote a full-length article documenting the changes in Britney Spears’s appearance. The article – which was entitled “Britney’s Baby Buzz” – included photographs that charted bodily changes thought to indicate pregnancy (“Britney’s Baby Buzz”, 2005, p. 75).

As noted, *People* magazine contributors also presented the pregnant body as something that should be monitored for changes in physical appearance. This brand of monitoring was particularly evident in the reoccurring columns, “Star Tracks” and “Body Watch.” Here, photographs of pregnant celebrities often were accompanied by brief editorial comments on celebrities’ actions and appearances. An example of this type of monitoring is evident in the following “Star Tracks” editorial caption, “Gwyneth and bear it in London, Feb. 4, Gwyneth Paltrow leaves her West End Flat-as well as her flat stomach days behind in a trendy cowl neck sweater.” (“Star Tracks”, 2004a p.11). Similarly, in the following “Body Watch” feature, the physical signs of Nicole Richie’s pregnancy are noted: “Body Watch” feature, “Celebrating her 26th birthday in Maui, Nicole Richie, also celebrated her new shape, donning a bikini to hit the beach.” (“Nicole’s Baby Bump”, 2007). Monitoring of the pregnant body also was promoted in full-length articles such as the December 2007 article, “Watch J. Lo grow” (Tan et al., 2007, p. 102). Here, readers were invited to peruse a collection of photos documenting changes in Jennifer Lopez’s body size and shape, and thus, to literally engage in surveillance of her pregnancy (Tan et al., 2007, p. 103).

The age of pregnant women was another issue that the contributors of *People* framed as something that needed to be acknowledged or monitored, even more so when older mothers were concerned. In the 2002 cover story, “Late Arrivals,” the contributors highlighted the experiences of a group of celebrity women – which included Emma Thompson, Christie Brinkley, Iman, Madonna, Arianne Barbeau, Tracy Pollan, and Kim Basinger – who gave birth over the age of forty. The authors discussed the age of these women as outside of the ordinary and focused the editorial content on the need for women experiencing “delayed motherhood” to take extra care during their pregnancies (“Late Arrivals”, 2002, p. 90). The age of a noncelebrity was the focus

of cover story, “She’s a First Time Mom at 56-and It’s Twins.” Here, the age of the expectant mother was emphasized throughout the article with reference to her current age as well as to the age that she would be when her twins were grown. The contributors further promoted the notion of “age as spectacle” by stating in the article that she “is one of the oldest women on record to give birth” (Smith et al., 2004, p. 71).

Finally, and most consistently, the contributors of *People* magazine framed the postpartum celebrity body as an object that should be watched and carefully tracked with particular regard to weight loss. The contributors devoted significant attention to monitoring the changing shape and weight of postpartum celebrity women. The authors completed this monitoring through the tracking of celebrity women’s progress toward “reclaiming” their pre-pregnancy bodies and celebrated their postpartum weight losses. The contributors tracked bodily changes of the postpartum celebrities in content that appeared in both “Star Tracks” and “Body Watch” columns as well as in full-length feature articles. “Star Tracks” columns featured photographs of postpartum women paired with captions containing remarks such as, “Return to Slender! Just one month after giving birth to son August, Mariska Hargitay looks “svelte” and “Just six weeks after giving birth to daughter Lola, Denise shows she is a very fit mom” (“Star Tracks”, 2005b, p. 15; “Star Tracks”, 2006e, p. 16). As is evident in these comments and many others, the contributors constructed postpartum weight loss more positively if the weight was lost quickly, and often, praise for an expeditious return to one’s pre-pregnancy body was offered by a media writer. Full length articles concerning postpartum weight loss also were observed within *People*, for example, “Mother Figures” (Espinoza et al., 2003, p. 120) and “Body After” (Souter et al., 2005, p. 63). The contributors of these articles highlighted the successful weight loss stories of postpartum celebrity women. As is discussed in the following section, these features

often included content addressing specific body projects invoked for the purposes of remaking the body into a likeness of its “pre-baby” self.

Research Question 2

Within the written, editorial content of *People* magazine, what body-related attitudes and behaviors are presented as normative or desirable for pregnant and postpartum women?

How are these meanings constructed?

The written, editorial content of *People* presented varied attitudes and behaviors as normative or desirable for pregnant and postpartum women. More specifically, pregnant and postpartum bodies were frequently framed as needing to be controlled through varied behavior. The need to invoke control through body-related behaviors was presented in relation to achieving pregnancy (e.g., in instances of infertility), birthing the child, and undertaking diet and exercise projects during pregnancy and postpartum.

Table 3

Body-related Attitudes and Behaviors of the Pregnant and Postpartum Bodies

Theme	Frequency
Achieving Pregnancy	23
Birthing the Child	17
Diet and Exercise Projects	52

Note: Frequency refers to the number of times a specific theme occurred within the data set. In some cases, a single theme occurred more than one time within a given full-length article.

Behaviors and Attitudes Related to Achieving Pregnancy

The achievement of pregnancy, particularly in relation to instances of infertility, was frequently addressed within the content of *People* magazine. Specifically, *People* content often framed infertility as a condition that could readily be overcome through an attitude of determination and adherence to prescribed medical interventions such as daily hormone injections and *in vitro* fertilization. Voices represented within content addressing this theme included those of media writers, real people, celebrities, and body experts. The dominant voices were those of media writers and celebrities.

In many instances, media writers provided detailed accounts of the fertility treatments celebrity and/or noncelebrity women had employed in their efforts to conceive. Although these features often detailed the frustrations that these women had faced in their journeys toward pregnancy, they typically highlighted stories of “successful” treatments, or those that resulted in full-term pregnancies and the births of healthy children, normalizing the assumption that infertility treatments are typically (or eventually) effective, if the “correct” procedures were followed with perseverance and patience. Often, emphasis was placed upon joyfulness experienced upon overcoming the obstacle of infertility and becoming pregnant (i.e., asserting control over the body). Only occasionally did content allude to failed infertility treatments or miscarriages. Even these references, however, were sometimes made in relation to another birth, as is true in the following example: “After years of miscarriages and failed attempts at *in vitro* fertilization, Cox, 40, welcomed Coco Riley Arquette” (“The First Photos”, 2004).

Sometimes, these features were told in the voice of the media writers, exclusively, but in many cases, they also included the voice of the highlighted woman or her associates (Jerome, 2003; Smolowe et al., 2000; “The First Photos”, 2004). Such was the case in a full-length article

detailing the experiences of Celine Dion, who achieved pregnancy through the use of hormone injections and *in vitro* fertilization (Smolowe et al., 2000). In this article, Dion is quoted saying “It’s like our little miracle has finally happened,” thereby casting assistive reproductive technologies, or at least the outcome of them, in a positive light (Smolowe et al., 2000, p. 49). Another full length article featured the experiences of singer Marty Robinson – as told by a personal friend -- and provided a more vivid and more ambivalent account of infertility, detailing not only the assistive reproductive technologies sought, but also the emotional roller-coaster Robinson experienced during her treatment: “[her] frustration level was high. Over the course of two years, she underwent laparoscopic surgery to rule out physical problems, endured several failed attempts at inseminations, then finally received daily injections and had eggs harvested for in vitro fertilization” (Jerome, 2003, p. 94).

The most commonly cited reason for needing to seek assistance in achieving pregnancy was the age of the mother-to-be; within the pages of *People* magazine, age was openly discussed by several women who had sought infertility treatments. In the cover story “Better Than Ever”, the author describes the measures actress Marcia Cross took to achieve pregnancy at age 44. “We did in vitro a week after we got married,” Cross is quoted as saying in the article, thereby emphasizing the seeming urgency to try to create a pregnancy (“Better Than Ever”, 2006, p. 166). Indeed, the author’s comment that “Cross beat the odds to become a mom even with the help of *in vitro* fertilization” also underscores the notion that her pregnancy was, indeed, atypical at Cross’s age of 44 (“Better Than Ever”, 2006 p.166). The point is further underscored by an accompanying sidebar listing “facts” about fertility over age 40. In another article highlighting similar themes, Maureen Regan is quoted as saying “Check your biological clock: You may look great for your age but your eggs don’t. Fertility drops steeply after 35, so start planning young”

(Jeffrey, 2005, p. 93). Finally, in a more extreme example of age related infertility behaviors, the story of the pregnant 56-year-old Aleta St. James was featured on the cover of *People* magazine in November 2004. The birth of St. James's twins was four years in the making and was the product of *in vitro* fertilization performed with a donated egg and sperm. She endured three miscarriages and spent the majority of her pregnancy on bed rest (Smith, Seaman, Benet, Macfarlane, & Trabattoni, 2004). Like the coverage of Marcia Cross's pregnancy, that focusing on St. James's pregnancy emphasized that this pregnancy was not a typical one – that is, that she had overcome the odds to achieve it through the use of technological intervention.

As noted, *People* magazine's coverage of unsuccessful attempts to achieve pregnancy through technological means was quite limited. Features that did address unsuccessful attempts at achieving pregnancy through infertility treatments, however, often addressed the issue of advanced maternal age. In these cases, emphasis was placed upon the need to maintain focus upon the goal of pregnancy, to persevere, and to engage in repeated infertility treatments. One such feature outlined the experiences of Alexis Stewart, whose dedication to repeated infertility-combating behaviors and advice to other women to take control (over the body, through persistence in the infertility treatments) are best reflected in this quote "I'm not even close to stopping, I'm trying to build up a supply of healthy embryos because, ideally I'd love to have two kids. I tell people if you are 40 or even 35, if you have money, freeze your eggs, or better yet, embryos" (Dagostino, 2007, p. 79).

Behaviors and Attitudes Related to Birthing the Child

In addition to addressing the process of creating a pregnancy, *People* magazine content also attended to the experience of birthing a child, detailing issues such as pain management and planned Caesarian births.

The use of an epidural as a way to control pain during childbirth was framed as a normative and reasonable decision within *People* magazine by media writers, celebrities, and real people. In this vein, epidural-aided deliveries were presented as relaxed and comfortable, with the births being described as “easy” and “a breeze” (Miller, Hannah, Jordan, Leonard, & Warrick, 2001; “Over the Moon”, 2005, p. 95; “Mother Witt”, 2004). That epidurals supported virtually effortless and unproblematic birthing experiences also is reflected in the following comments from Cheryl Hines and Catherine Mannheim (respectively), who were quoted as stating, “[I] totally had the epidural...pushed for 15 minutes” (“Mother Witt”, 2004, p.110) and “I can’t believe how easy that was!” (Miller, Hannah, Jordan, Leonard, & Warrick, 2001 p. 160). Interestingly, only one article – which described the home (natural) birth of Jolie Fisher’s daughter – celebrated foregoing an epidural. Fisher’s decision was framed as out of the ordinary and also as synonymous with a demanding birthing experience. In particular, Fisher was quoted as saying, “There was a lot of pain” and that giving birth made her feel “like a superhero” (“Tickled Pink”, 2006, p. 73).

Planned Caesarian sections also were discussed within the content of *People* magazine, primarily as a way for mothers to exert control over the experience of the birth. Although medical professionals featured in the magazine sometimes discouraged planned Caesarian sections – on the grounds that incur potentially unnecessary risks for mother and baby – the mothers who were featured in the magazine often framed the decision to have a planned Caesarian section in a positive light. For instance, Shosana Lombardi was quoted saying “I was scared of all the things that could go wrong with delivery....A C-section seemed more controlled” (Jeffrey & Simmons, 2005, p. 156). Thus, in contrast to the members of the medical

profession, the mothers whose perspectives were highlighted seemed to view planned Caesarian sections as a means by which to avert risk or to exert control.

Diet- and Exercise-Related Attitudes and Behaviors toward the Pregnant and Postpartum Body

The contributors to *People* magazine constructed pregnancy weight gain as a concern of pregnant women. The varied meanings attached to pregnancy weight gain were represented mainly through the voices of the pregnant women. Consistent with prior work (Baker, Carter, Cohen, & Brownell, 1999; Jenkin & Tiggemann, 1997; McCarthy, 1998; Walker, 1998), previous weight- related feelings had an impact on the meanings attached to pregnancy weight gain. Negative attitudes about weight gain were constructed through comments made by women who had previously lost a significant amount of weight prior to becoming pregnant. This is evident in quotes such as “gaining the weight was really hard” (“Where Are They Now?”, 2007, p.158), and “it completely freaked me out,” (Adato & Wilborg, 2005, p.104). One woman stated “I felt a lot of shame” [about gaining the weight] (“The Real Skinny”, 2002, p. 90). As is reflected in these comments, these women did not view their pregnancy weight gain as positive, but felt that it was a setback in their weight loss achievements. Many of the articles highlighted these women’s future plans for pregnancy weight loss, even though the birth had not yet occurred. In this vein, celebrity Carnie Wilson stated “I have a trainer who will come four days a week. I’m going to take this very seriously” (Adato & Wilborg, 2005, p.104).

Negative attitudes about pregnancy weight gain by women who had previously been thin did not seem to occur until late in the pregnancy. These meanings were presented through the voices of celebrities, themselves. At the end of her pregnancy Soliel Moon-Fry was quoted saying “How am I going to make it? I have gotten so big” (“Over the Moon”, 2005, p. 95).

Another celebrity, Jodie Fisher, commented on her 45 pound pregnancy weight gain by comparing it to that of other celebrity women, “For Hollywood standards, that’s probably more than I should have [gained],” (“Bye-Bye Baby Weight”, 2006, p. 100).

There were also examples of attitudes related to pregnancy weight gain that changed from the first pregnancy to the second. The negative feelings of these women started at the beginning of the second pregnancies before all weight was gained. In a “Body Watch” article on pregnancy food cravings, Kim Raver was quoted saying “Every once in a while I’ll be like, Oh my son is having a cupcake. Sure! I’ll have some of that chocolate frosting. But I’m definitely more aware the second time around to not go crazy” (Triggs, Arnold, Rizzo, Sundel, & Tapper, 2007, p. 234). Britney Spears also expressed these feelings, telling contributors that “40 lbs” was what she had gained with baby number two as compared to “50-60 lbs” with baby number one (Tauber & Jordan, 2006, p. 92).

In some cases pregnancy weight gain was validated. This validation occurred mainly from the perspective of celebrities, themselves. Kate Hudson was quoted in 2004, saying “There’s nothing to be ashamed of when you blow up. I gained 60 lbs... It was great!” (“Kate Loses It”, 2004, p. 60). In the September 2007 issue, a “Body Watch” article that focused on pregnancy eating habits asked pregnant celebrities, “What are you craving?” (Triggs, Arnold, Rizzo, Sundel, & Tapper, 2007, p. 234). Other features included comments on changes in eating while pregnant such as Julia Roberts remarking that, during her pregnancy, [she] “took pleasure in eating” (Schneider, Fleeman, Singh Gee, Baker, & Russell, 2004, p. 68).

A number of features addressed exercise during pregnancy. In most cases, such content – which was primarily presented through the voices of media writers and body experts – encouraged physical activity during pregnancy as positive and health-promoting. For example,

prenatal yoga was framed as a solution to staying calm during Brooke Shields's pregnancy ("Pretty Baby", 2003, p. 56). In the case of Naomi Watts' Pilates participation, the media writer questioned whether one should "Tone your core with baby aboard?" Watts' person trainer, body expert Daniel Loigerot, confirmed that doing Pilates while expecting was safe, but advised taking precautions such as "avoid[ing] exercising on your back" and "overstretch[ing]" (Lye, Margaret, Triggs, & Boucher, 2007, p. 104)

Within the pages of *People* magazine, postpartum weight loss was framed as an imperative business for celebrity women. To accomplish postpartum weight loss goals, a number of behaviors and strategies were suggested, including exercise, breastfeeding, use of body products, and in some cases, even surgery. Several articles were written regarding the postpartum weight loss behaviors of celebrities. These articles included the voices of media writers, celebrities, and body experts.

The content within *People* on postpartum weight loss implied the requirement of these celebrity women to lose their postpartum weight immediately. Contributors continually reinforced the notion that celebrity weight retention after pregnancy was unacceptable (Adato, Schneider; Biermann, Bonawitz, Harrington et. al., 2004, p. 106; "Mother Figures", 2003, p. 120; Triggs, Jessen, Rizzo, & Williams, 2007, p. 167), referring to the process of postpartum weight loss as "a business imperative" and "the real labor" of childbirth ("Mother Figures", 2003; Adato, Schneider, Biermann, Bonawitz, Harrington, et. al., 2004, p. 106).

Many *People* features detailed the specific diet and exercise behaviors of postpartum celebrity women. Examples of specific behaviors highlighted included, "three hour daily workouts," abstention from "eating bread" ("Mother Figures", 2003, p. 120), "doing squats with

an 18 lb. kettlebell to her chest,” and “hit[ting] pilates classes” (Trigg, Jessen, Rizzo, & Rubin, 2007, p. 136; Souter, Wong, Williams, Green, & Lye, 2006, p. 94).

Breastfeeding was condoned by celebrity women as a means by which to lose postpartum weight more quickly. Several celebrities, such as Debra Messing, credited breastfeeding for their rapidly returning pre-pregnancy figures (Adato, Schneider, Biermann, Bonawitz, Harrington, et al., 2004, p. 106). Other celebrities, including Jenna Elfman, Angelina Jolie, and Sarah Jessica Parker, remarked that breastfeeding helped support their other postpartum weight-loss efforts (“Bodies After Babies”, 2007; “Mother Figures”, 2003). “Breast-feeding is the best diet [plan]” commented Nancy O’Dell on her post pregnancy weight loss (Wihlborg, 2007, p. 88). Media writers also framed breastfeeding as a means to lose weight, rendering comments such as “500 [is] the number of calories the average new mom burns daily by breastfeeding” (“Bodies After Babies”, 2007, p. 118). In other cases, the contributors referred to breastfeeding as “Nature’s Diet” (Espinoza et al., 2003).

Participation in cosmetic surgery as a solution to postpartum weight loss within *People* magazine was framed as an option when nothing else worked for celebrity women. The tummy tuck of Dana Devon was featured in a “Body Watch” article that focused on postpartum weight loss. Dana Devon insisted that she had no other options to “fix” her body other than surgery. The contributor also included information about “Mommy Makeovers”, which is the phrase used by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons to refer to postpartum cosmetic surgeries such as tummy tucks and breast augmentations (Harrington, 2007, p. 88).

Interestingly, non-celebrities women were rarely featured in content concerning to the re-making of the postpartum body. That is, in editorial content addressing behaviors that could be

used in the reclamation of one's former, pre-pregnancy body, contributors seemed to focus their reporting efforts on celebrities, ignoring the lived experiences of noncelebrity women.

Research Question 3

3. How can existing theoretical work be invoked to interpret the rhetorical visions identified within *People* magazine and related to the pregnant and postpartum body?

The major theoretical framework guiding this research was that of symbolic convergence theory. Drawing upon this theory, several rhetorical visions, or themes, were identified, many of which coalesced around the overarching theme of monitoring and controlling of pregnant and postpartum bodies. In this section, I draw upon sociological and feminist theories of the body, which informed this work from the outset, as well as work on spectacle, which emerged as relevant during the data analysis process, to enrich my interpretations of the rhetorical visions discovered.

Sociological Theory on the Body

Sociological theories exploring Western culture discourses that promote the disciplined control of the body and the notion of the body as readily malleable initially informed this research. As previously noted, these cultural discourses have endorsed the importance and value of very thin and taut bodies, specifically within the media (Bordo, 2003; Brownwell, 1991; Brumberg, 1997). This discourse has constructed the self as having two parts: the mind and the body. Within this discourse lies the ideology of "mind over body", or the assumption that through hard work and self-discipline, the mind can defy nature and overcome the body (Featherstone 1991; Spitzack 1990; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Therefore, science - including consumer products and medical procedures - can be used to "fix", or overcome the body's natural processes.

Key to this project of “fixing the body” is the process of self-monitoring of the body for deviations from cultural ideals. Feminist authors such as Sandra Bartky (1988) have applied Foucault’s (1977) work on the Panopticon – a prison-like structure that is designed to encourage prisoners to become their own guards and monitor their own behavior – to understand the ways in which contemporary discourses about the body (e.g., the thin ideal, the notion of the body as infinitely malleable) prompt women to engage in self-surveillance activities. According to this argument, women serve as both inmate and guard of their bodies, (self)-monitoring their bodies for deviations from cultural ideals for a feminine appearance and invoking disciplinary practices to mold them into likenesses of these ideals.

Theory conceptualizing the body as an object of discipline and control and a project in the “process of becoming” can be applied to understand varied themes identified within *People* magazine features analyzed for the present study. For instance, features addressing issues of infertility often chronicled women’s attempts to exert control over bodies constructed as unruly or uncooperative. In this vein, a 2007 feature described the unsuccessful medical endeavors of Martha Stewart’s daughter, Alexis Stewart, to become pregnant and included her pledge to continue her attempts to become pregnant using whatever means possible. She was quoted saying “I’m not even close to stopping” (Dagostino, 2007, p.80). Implicit here, then, is the imposition of science and technology upon the body as a means by which to attempt to exert control.

Theory examining bodily control also can be applied to understand *People* magazine content related to the postpartum body. As discussed within the previous section, features often problematized the postpartum body by addressing the body-disciplining activities undertaken by women in attempts to “recover” their pre-pregnancy bodies. Here, postpartum weight loss was

framed as the “real labor” of pregnancy and a business imperative for celebrities, with Elizabeth Hurley quoted as saying “Being able to fit myself into tiny clothes is how I make my living” (Espinoza et al., 2003). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that in many cases, the rhetoric invoked in articles about celebrities’ postpartum weight-loss encouraged a type of self-surveillance not unlike that referenced in discussions of Foucault’s optics of power. For instance, in one article, Julianne Moore’s personal trainer was quoted as remarking, “We had to let her body know there was a new sheriff in town.” (Espinoza et al., 2003 p.120). Here, the author invokes the metaphor of a “sheriff” to reference the notion that the postpartum woman ought to assume the role of disciplinarian or “lawkeeper” of her body by taking back the bodily control that the baby possessed during pregnancy. In effect, the sheriff replaces the prison guard in Foucault’s metaphor of the Panopticon, exerting control over and monitoring the postpartum body in order to remake the body into its pre pregnancy form.

Feminist Theory on the Pregnant/Postpartum Body

As noted, many feminist theorists have written about their concern with the medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth. Feminist writings on this topic have focused on medical control that is imposed by doctors and medical institutions and the normalization and acceptance of this control within Western society (Bordo, 1993; Jaggar, 1996; Wolf, 2001). Findings from the present analysis provide some support to suggest that *People* magazine content may contribute to the normalization (and, perhaps, the subsequent social acceptance) of the medicalization of pregnancy. Authors provided repeated coverage of various medical interventions used to achieve pregnancy (e.g. in vitro fertilization, fertility medication, and surrogacy) as well as to mitigate pain and exert control over the birthing process (e.g., epidurals, episiotomies, and Cesarean sections). The use of such interventions was celebrated within the

pages of *People* magazine, particularly in features where pregnancy and childbirth were presented as miraculous and joyful. In fact, only one feature in the sample included content that questioned the use of medical interventions during childbirth. Here, a doctor expressed concern with the growing number of Cesarean sections and episiotomies (Simmons, 2005, p.155), urging women to take control of their healthcare and cautioning that a Cesarean section is major abdominal surgery that should not be considered solely to avoid vaginal tearing or an episiotomy. As such, on the whole, medical interventions during pregnancy were framed as positive and normative.

Feminist writers also have considered the ways in which pregnancy and motherhood are layered with cultural constructions about proper gender and sex roles, reflecting meanings about the appropriateness of sexual expression on the part of expectant or new mothers (Hyde & Delamater, 1996). One way in which sexuality is expressed is through appearance. The appearances of pregnant women in *People* magazine received a significant amount of coverage. In particular, authors advised women, particular celebrities, to maintain their own sense of personal style throughout their pregnancies, reassuring them that pregnancy does not have to affect women's "carefully created styles" ("Style Watch", 2007 p. 144). Content also encouraged women to continue to express their sexuality during pregnancy, suggesting that women could be simultaneously "Stylish, Sexy, and Pregnant" ("Star Tracks", 2006) and even assigning pregnant celebrities styles names such as "The Glamazon" and "The Hottie" ("Style Watch", 2007, p 144). This brand of coverage of the pregnant body can be seen as empowering to pregnant women insomuch as it presents the pregnant body as appealing and connotes acceptance of a shape that is far from the ideal female body. In this way, this coverage could encourage pregnant women to take pride in their liminal, pregnant selves rather than to feel as though their expanded

bodies need to be hidden. It also could encourage women to maintain a sense of self at a time when their lives and roles are dramatically changing.

As discussed, findings from the present study revealed that within the editorial content of *People* magazine, the bodies of postpartum women often were celebrated for their return to their “sexy” pre-pregnancy selves just months, and in some cases, weeks after giving birth. The authors provided no credit to these mothers for the physical accomplishment of childbirth. Only the women’s weight loss efforts were recognized. Although speculative, it is possible that coverage of the postpartum body in this way could impact postpartum women reading *People*, calling them to question their value. Content praising sexy celebrity postpartum bodies also could affect the emotional well-being of new mothers by projecting an unrealistic picture of what being a new mother should look like, with the focus being shifted away from the actual act of mothering to the physical appearance of the mothers.

Surveillance, Spectacle, and the Female Body

Feminist scholars have considered the ways in which cultural scripts of gendered behavior contribute to the objectification of the female body and perpetuate hegemonic gender relations. Much of the work in this area draws upon that of noted film theorist Laura Mulvey (1975/1989), who pioneered the concept of the “male gaze.” Mulvey describes the male gaze as a dominant Western culture tradition – and one that is controlled by men – in which women are represented as objects for “male” consumption. Based upon her analyses of classic Hollywood films, Mulvey argues that Western cinema has historically constructed the male gaze as active and the female gaze as passive. That is, women in film traditionally have been displayed as sexual objects or spectacles, whereas males have been depicted as active subjects or protagonists who make things happen. Although women seldom find themselves as the spectators, Mulvey

contends that female characters serve as the spectacle on two levels: for the male protagonist in the film as well as for the male viewer of the film. Further, Mulvey's analyses suggest that male movie stars may be seen as glamorous without being viewed as erotic objects to be gazed upon. Within popular culture cinema scripts for gendered behaviors, however, female movie stars are constructed as glamorous only when they also are presented as erotic objects.

In recent years, postmodern and feminist theorists (Spitzack, 1990; Bordo, 2003) have applied Foucault's concepts on self-surveillance and the Panopticon (1977) to consider the ways in which the male gaze exerts cultural control over female bodies. With respect to the male gaze, Spitzack and others have suggested that over time, women are socialized to internalize the male gaze, and thus, to regard themselves as objects of men's desire (Spitzack, 1990). In sum, then, women internalize the external gaze of men, and thus, are objects of not only the male gaze, but also of their own disciplinary gaze (Spitzack, 1990).

More recent research related to surveillance has focused on the concept of celebrity spectacle (Kellner, 2004). In contemporary Western cultures, celebrities and their lifestyles are objects of cultural interest – or “spectacles” – and are constructed as societal ideals. The spectacle of celebrity is supported by the media industry, which manages celebrity images and manufactures them such that they become commodities that can be used to sell products, including magazines. This media culture provides material to consumers for purposes of fantasizing, dreaming, and role modeling, all of which are invoked in the construction of identities (Kellner, 2004). Popular press magazines such as *People* provide sensationalized presentations about celebrities. The lives and behaviors of celebrities are under constant surveillance in order to provide consumers with this material. Seemingly, the pregnant and

postpartum bodies are not immune to this media surveillance and commodification; rather, fertility and motherhood have now become commodities for media to sell (Chambers, 2009).

Some of the most vivid examples of spectacle and surveillance of the pregnant and postpartum body within *People* magazine were evident in content tracking the lives and bodily changes of pregnant and postpartum celebrities. Such content was included in both reoccurring features like “Star Tracks” and “Body Watch” as well as in full length articles (e.g. Souter et al., 2005; Espinoza et al., 2003; Adato et al., 2004; Triggs, Arnold, Rizzo, Sundel, & Tapper, 2007). Here, the bodies of the featured women were presented depicting the ideal pregnant and postpartum body to the readers as objects to be surveyed. *People* positively framed fashionable or beautiful celebrity pregnancies and postpartum celebrity women with weight loss success. Accompanying images and text provided evidence of the assorted bodily changes experienced by pregnant and postpartum women and often chronicled the timeframe in which postpartum celebrities reclaimed their pre-pregnancy bodies, praising them for their quick return to their former, pre-pregnant and svelte selves. The pregnant body also was presented as an example of glamour and beauty. Thus, findings provide support for Mulvey’s argument that within popular culture contexts, women’s bodies are most valued when they are in keeping with disciplinary norms and also suggest that such bodies (i.e., those that are presented as desirable) invite surveillance and the gaze even during pregnancy. Findings also extend Mulvey’s work by proposing that her arguments about the gaze and the culture of spectacle and objectification may apply not only to film, but to editorial magazine content about the body, as well.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to examine the written editorial content or non-advertising portions of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for messages that popular press media construct about the pregnant and postpartum bodies. The following chapter concludes this research and includes a brief summary of the research, an explanation of the significance and implications of the work, a discussion of the study's limitations, and ideas for possible future studies.

Summary

Within the United States, there has been growing popular cultural interest in the pregnant and postpartum bodies, particularly those of celebrity personalities. This increased cultural interest has been traced to the early 1990s, when an image of a nude and pregnant Demi Moore was featured on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine (Earle, 2003). Despite the recent popular culture interest in the pregnant and postpartum bodies and the growing acknowledgement that body-related media messages may shape women's feelings about and behaviors toward their own bodies (Bordo, 2003; Brumberg, 1997; Faludi, 1991; Hendricks, 2002; Ko, 2001; Posavac & Posavac, 2001; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986; Wolf, 1991), little empirical work has explored media messages related to the pregnant and postpartum body. More specifically, researchers had not yet conducted a systematic and theoretically informed analysis of the meanings that popular, general interest magazines construct about the pregnant and postpartum bodies. Thus, as noted, this interpretive work was undertaken to examine the written editorial content or non-advertising portions of *People* magazine issues published during the years 2000 through 2007 (inclusive) for meaning related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies.

To achieve the purpose of this study, a qualitative content analysis approach was employed. Although the researcher remained open to diverse theoretical perspectives as she analyzed the data, sociological theories of the body, feminist theories of the body, and symbolic convergence theory were invoked to guide the design of the study and the development of the following research questions:

1. How does the written, editorial content of *People* magazine frame pregnant and postpartum bodies? That is, what meanings are attached to these embodied statuses?
2. Within the written, editorial content of *People* magazine, what body-related attitudes and behaviors are presented as normative or desirable for pregnant and postpartum women? How are these meanings constructed?
3. How can existing theoretical work be invoked to interpret the rhetorical visions identified within *People* magazine and related to the pregnant and postpartum body?

A total of 98 full-length articles and 106 features were identified for inclusion in study sample. Constant comparison processes were used to analyze key rhetorical visions – or understandings people have about the social world around them (Bormann, 1981) – presented within these articles and features and related to the pregnant and/or postpartum bodies. This interpretive and inductive approach included a number of coding processes that were used to identify and interpret key concepts and themes within the data set.

Constant comparison analysis revealed that, within the articles and features analyzed, the pregnant and postpartum bodies were framed by meanings related to two overarching rhetorical visions: surveillance and control. The theme of surveillance emerged through the perpetual framing of the pregnant and postpartum bodies as “spectacles” to be viewed, surveyed, or scrutinized. Subthemes found related to surveillance of the pregnant and postpartum bodies

included (a) watching the pregnant and postpartum body for changes in shape and size, (b) speculating pregnancies, and (c) the spectacle of the older mother. The theme of control emerged through the continued presentation of the pregnant and postpartum bodies by the contributors as objects in need of bodily discipline. Subthemes found related to controlling the pregnant and postpartum bodies were (a) controlling the pregnant and postpartum bodies through exercise and diet, (b) controlling fertility with treatments and procedures, and (c) medical control by both the mother and doctors/hospitals.

This study's aim was to answer to three original research questions proposed. The first research question asked how the pregnant and postpartum bodies were framed within *People* magazine and analyzed what meanings were attached to these embodied statuses. Findings indicated that within the pages of *People* magazine, the pregnant and postpartum bodies were in framed in diverse ways, including as physically attractive, as stylish, and/or as miraculous/amazing. It also was revealed that the pregnant and postpartum bodies were presented by contributors as objects in need of bodily control or were framed as "spectacles" to be viewed, surveyed, or scrutinized by readers.

The second research question asked what body-related attitudes and behaviors were presented as normative or desirable for pregnant and postpartum bodies along with how these meanings were constructed within *People*. The written, editorial content of *People* presented varied attitudes and behaviors as normative or desirable for pregnant and postpartum women. More specifically, pregnant and postpartum bodies were frequently framed as needing to be controlled through varied behaviors. The need to invoke control through body-related behaviors was presented in relation to achieving pregnancy (e.g., in instances of infertility), birthing the child, and undertaking diet and exercise projects during pregnancy and postpartum.

Lastly, the third research question considered whether existing theoretical work be invoked to interpret the rhetorical visions identified within *People* magazine and related to the pregnant and postpartum body. Findings suggested that the theoretical perspectives identified *a priori*, to frame the study, -- namely sociological theories of the body, feminist theories of the body, and symbolic convergence theory -- aptly aided in interpreting the meanings identified through the inductive coding processes. Most notably, theory related to the mind/body dualism and surveillance as well as the generalized tenets of symbolic convergence theory -- such as the notion that rhetorical visions reflect dominant cultural values -- proved useful in understanding the rhetorical visions that emerged. Additionally, findings suggested the relevance of theory related to spectacle, which was useful in interpreting *People's* treatment of the pregnant body as an object or a spectacle.

Significance and Implications

This study furthers the understanding of the ways in which popular print media, specifically the written editorial content of *People* magazine, frame the pregnant and postpartum bodies, thereby providing insights about cultural expectations for the appearances of pregnant and postpartum bodies.

Historically, pregnancy was thought of as a time during which women should hide themselves away, out of shame (Poli, 1998). Findings from the present work, however, suggest that pregnancy is no longer culturally perceived as a period requiring a woman's seclusion from society. Rather, to the contrary, findings suggested that across the eight year period analyzed, there was a with a tendency toward increasing coverage of the pregnant and postpartum bodies; in 2000, 5% of the issues analyzed included coverage, but by 2007, 67% of the issues included coverage. Additionally, results indicated that the focus of this coverage changed over the time

period analyzed; in 2000, content focused more on the actual pregnancy and birth itself (e.g., announcements of celebrity pregnancies and births), whereas by 2007, the authors had shifted their focus primarily to the appearance of the pregnant celebrity body. That is, increasingly, within the pages of *People* magazine, the pregnant body was glamorized and pregnant celebrities were praised for their style and physical appearance. This increased attention to the physical appearance of the pregnant celebrity body has become part of a growing culture of “sexy-to-be looked at femininity,” in which the (here expectant) female body is displayed for pleasure and written about in a frequently sexualized context (e.g., as evidenced by the notion that pregnant bodies can and should be “sexy”). The increased coverage or glamorization of pregnancy could be both good and bad. This coverage has the potential to create a more positive and accepting environment for pregnant women. It could help them to feel more positive about the bodily changes or pregnancy – which transgress dominant norms for female bodily attractiveness – and perhaps feel more empowered by the capabilities of their bodies. On the other hand, this coverage may only be prescribing a new pregnant body ideal that women may feel compelled to try to achieve. Whereas pregnancy once provided a break from “the gaze” (i.e., license to escape from the pressures of trying to meet demanding cultural norms of thinness) (Bailey, 2001; Davis & Wardle, 1994; Genevie & Margolies, 1987), it now could represent just a different stage or a different way of being looked at. It is possible that the pregnancy bump is treated like a bodily accessory more than a growing uterus creating a life.

Consistent with Dworkin and Wachs’ (2004) analysis of *Fit Pregnancy*, the present findings suggested that editorial content in *People* magazine constructed the newly postpartum body as an object that needs to be controlled and restored to its original or pre-pregnancy state. That is, the majority of *People’s* editorial content regarding the postpartum body was dedicated

to the various body projects – most notably dieting, exercising, and even breast-feeding – that the featured women were undertaking to restore themselves to their pre-pregnant forms. Great detail was provided about these women’s bodily regimens, often from the first-hand perspective of the featured celebrity. However, of interest is that the emotional state of the postpartum woman was not much of a concern in these features, with very little attention being given to postpartum depression. Although speculative, it is possible that this repeated coverage of the postpartum body being returned to its pre-pregnant state so quickly – and with such a sense of urgency – could affect the ways in which postpartum women readers feel about themselves and their bodies. There is evidence to suggest that postpartum women may feel dissatisfied with their bodies (Clark & Ogden, 1999; Johnson et al., 2004; McCarthy, 1998), and that women, in general, may look to the media as source of information as they make evaluations of their appearances (King, Touyz, & Charles, 2000; Posavac & Posavac, 2002).

Also important to note is what was *not* covered within the written, editorial content of People magazine focused upon issues of pregnancy and postpartum. First, it is interesting – and perhaps disconcerting – to note that the magazine provided very little coverage of noncelebrity pregnancies and postpartum experiences. Coverage of noncelebrities was limited to atypical lived experiences, such as reports about infertility or women giving birth at an advanced age. As such, normative pregnancy and postpartum experiences of noncelebrities were more or less excluded from coverage within the magazine, suggesting that only celebrity or somehow nonconforming noncelebrity experiences warranted attention or reader interest, perhaps constructing unrealistic expectations among readers of the lived experiences of pregnancy and postpartum. Second, coverage of medical decisions and procedures – such as home/natural births and planned C-sections – did not address the serious medical risks inherent in such procedures,

instead taking a rather “breezy” approach to such topics, simply constructing them as matters of personal choice.

Insomuch as findings from this study provide an understanding of the meanings that popular culture assigns to pregnant and postpartum bodies, they may be beneficial to medical professionals and midwives who work with pregnant and postpartum women. For instance, within *People* magazine, there was a significant amount of attention dedicated to successful fertility treatments, but very little attention was given to cases where fertility treatments were sought but pregnancy was not achieved. Although speculative, it is possible that repeated exposure to such coverage may lead readers to have an unrealistic idea of infertility and their ability to conceive. Being aware of these preconceived popular culture ideas of overcoming infertility could help doctors to better prepare women for more typical or negative outcomes.

Findings also may help medical providers to understand the possible cultural pressures that may shape pregnant and postpartum women’s feelings about their bodies and appearances. As noted, research suggests that postpartum women often experience dissatisfaction with their bodies (Clark & Ogden, 1999; Johnson et al, 2004; McCarthy, 1998) and that women, in general, may invoke the media as a standard of comparison as they evaluate their own bodies and personal appearances (Garner, 1997; Posavac & Posavac, 1998; Richins, 1991; Silverstein et al., 1986; Thornton & Maurice, 1997, 1999). Thus, it is possible that repeated exposure to media content praising postpartum celebrity women for reforming their bodies into likenesses of their pre-pregnant “sexy” selves could rouse negative feelings concerning their own bodies. In turn, these negative feelings could prompt postpartum women readers to participate in unhealthy dieting and exercise regimens (Baker, Carter, Cohen, and Brownell, 1999). Previous research has

indicated that unsuccessful attempts to lose weight after birth increases a woman's chances of developing postpartum depression (Jenkins & Tiggerman, 1997; Walker, 1998).

Finally, this study adds to the body of work exploring the portrayal of women in the media by contributing knowledge about the meanings that that popular, general interest magazines construct about the pregnant and postpartum bodies. This research may be of particular interest to feminist researchers interested in the way in which the pregnant and postpartum bodies are presented through the media. In particular, findings provide evidence that the pregnant body is sometimes portrayed within the media as an appealing, even sexual, body shape. This portrayal can be viewed as empowering to pregnant women and may represent evidence of acceptance of the pregnant body shape. The postpartum body was also portrayed as sexual within the data but only when pre-pregnancy body shape had been restored. The data also provide evidence that the focus of *People* magazine content about postpartum women seems to have shifted its attention from coverage pertaining to the actual act of mothering to coverage of the activities required to reclaim the pre-pregnant body.

Limitations and Future Studies

The analysis was limited nonfiction editorial content included within *People* magazine, a general interest magazine. The research only analyzed at the editorial text within the magazine and did not attempt to analyze how the reader interpreted the text. The present findings cannot be used to make generalizations about the content of other popular press publications. Even though the researcher acknowledged and attempted to “bracket” biases during the analysis process, findings reflect the researcher's readings of the data. Further, analyses cannot provide an understanding of the ways in which varied media users may interpret the content analyzed.

This study has focused on data from the editorial content within the pages of *People* magazine regarding the pregnant and postpartum body during the years 2000 to 2007. Thus, in the future, it would be beneficial to conduct a study that analyzed the pictorial content of *People* magazine within that same time frame. Such an analysis could focus upon the dress worn and the gendered behaviors/roles assumed by the pregnant and postpartum women featured in the images accompanying the written text and could explore if and how these images may complement the themes discovered within the written content. It also would be valuable to replicate the present analysis using other types of magazines (e.g., parenting magazines) as a sample and comparing the messages found in regard to the pregnant and postpartum bodies. These type of publications focus on noncelebrity women, and as such, findings may reflect a very different reality. It also would be interesting to explore pregnant and postpartum women's interpretations of varied media presentations (written and visual) related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies. Of interest in such analyses would be how women make sense of these presentations and what, if any influence, these presentations have on how they perceive that their bodies should look during and after pregnancy. For example, it would be interesting to explore how readers respond to messages that the pregnant body – if presented in certain ways – can be attractive and even sexy. Do readers regard these messages as empowering, or do they view them as yet another narrow standard of appearance that is out of reach and unrealistic to achieve? Finally, it would be compelling to examine the advertising content of magazines for meanings related to the pregnant and postpartum bodies. This would provide insight into how the pregnant and postpartum bodies are used to sell products and how the advertising of such products could affect the ways in which pregnant and postpartum women feel about their bodies.

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APPENDIX A

Coding Guide

1. Infertility

1. Treatments (medicalization, medical technologies/interventions)
2. Personal stories of struggle
3. Personal stories of success – end in pg/birth
4. Rewards reaped by overcoming infertility (e.g., enjoying conception even more when medical intervention/infertility treatments are involved)
5. Surrogacy as solution to infertility

2. Bodily Changes of Pregnancy (e.g. fatigue, cravings)

1. Pregnant body as beautiful
2. Pregnant body as source of pride
3. Pregnancy as a license to eat more, to gain weight
4. Need to control the pg body
5. Pregnant body as unattractive, cumbersome, or awkward
6. Weight gain
 1. Positive /O.K.
 2. Negative
7. Pregnant body as an incubator
8. Medical Concerns

3. Pregnant body as a Spectacle

1. Body Watch: Tracking changes in celebrity's body, watching stages of the growing bump
2. Watching for dramatic weight gain or not weight gain
3. Speculation of pregnancy

4. Birth

1. Birth stories: unusual or heroic events
2. Childbirth as miraculous/amazing
3. Medical details of birth
4. Medicalization of birth
 - 4.1 Sought by mother
 - 4.1.1 Planned/scheduled C-section
 - 4.1.2 Pain mitigation
 - 4.1.3 Goal: predictable outcome
 - 4.2 Not sought by mother/perceived as imposed by medical profession
 - 4.2.1 Treatment forced (deadlines)
 - 4.2.2 C-section

5. Dress/Appearance during Pregnancy

1. Don't lose who you are/identity(in terms of appearance)
2. Pregnancy clothing use

6. Dress fit must be changed during pregnancy

- 2.1. Dress used to show off changing body
- 2.2. Dress must be comfortable and move with body

6. Age

- 1. Infertility as obstacle to pregnancy or risk factor during pregnancy
- 2. Defying odds/spectacle of older mom's pregnancy
- 3. Delaying motherhood as new norm

7. Postpartum Body

- 1. Sexuality of /or lack of
- 2. Mourning loss of having baby in body
- 3. Satisfaction with
- 4. Dissatisfaction (e.g., body is not where it should be, out of control)
- 5. Weight loss during
 - 5.1 Urgency/ importance of/ need of
 - 5.2 If she hasn't, she should(implied)
 - 5.3 Not quite there, ½ way there
 - 5.4 Beautiful/beaming, but...need to.....
 - 5.5 Strategies, how to
 - 5.5.1 Diet
 - 5.5.2 Exercise
 - 5.5.3 Breastfeeding
 - 5.5.4 Use of products
 - 5.5.5 Process of/ tips for (advise)
 - 5.5.6 Easy, quick, natural
 - 5.5.7 Hard, difficult
- 6. Meanings associated with
 - 1. Attractive
 - 2. Sexy
 - 3. Inshape/fit
 - 4. Impressive
- 7. Feeling good about what the body has done(i.e.given birth, pregnancy as an accomplishment)
- 8. Postpartum depression

8. Expert Help/Advice managing pregnant/postpartum body

9. Dress during Postpartum

- 1. Don't lose who you are/identity
- 2. Postpartum clothing use
 - 2.1 Undergarments used to control postpartum body
 - 2.2 Clothing used to camouflage postpartum body flaws or weight retained after pregnancy
 - 2.3 Must lose wt to wear revealing clothing worn pre pg, postpartum weight loss gives right to wear revealing clothing

10. Postpartum Body as a Spectacle

1. Watching weight loss (tracking wt loss)

11. Bodily sacrifices mothers make

1. Breastfeeding
 - 1.2 is difficult, exhausting
2. Pg wt gain
3. Food restriction (alcohol)
4. Body changes
5. Pg body as incubator

12. Societal Expectations of Motherhood

13. Disclosure

- 1.Private becomes public
- 2.Dispelling rumors
- 3.Seeking/desiring privacy

14. Spouse Support of

1. Husband support weight loss
 - 1.1.PG
 - 1.2.PP
2. Husband proud of wife's pp body
 - 2.1.PG
 - 2.2.PP
3. During pregnancy
4. During birth

15. Paternity

16. Family Support

17. Article perspective

1. Media writer
2. Noncelebrity
- 3.Significant other
- 4.Celebrity
- 5.Body Expert

18. Miscellaneous