



***“YOUR KIDS SAY ‘MOM.’ YOUR CLOTHES SAY OTHERWISE”:
PREGNANT FASHION DOLLS AND VISUAL CULTURE***

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Abstract

In this paper, an art educator and art historian introduce a visual culture analysis of representations of the pregnant body, inspired by nine pregnant fashion dolls produced by Page Boy Maternity in the 1950s. The dolls raise questions about how and what the pregnant body signifies and what the maternal means in representation and practice. We offer our analysis of representations of pregnancy in art, advertising, and dolls as catalysts for intersections of art education and art history as visual culture discourse in the representations of the maternal.

As an art educator and an art historian in a combined division of Art Education and Art History at the University of North Texas, we bring our distinct disciplinary perspectives to our analysis of visual culture. Learning of the presence of pregnant fashion dolls in the university’s Texas Fashion Collection, and having both recently lived the pregnant body, we decided to work collaboratively to explore questions the dolls raise about representations of the maternal and the feminine.

My (Denise Amy Baxter) introduction to the Page Boy Maternity® dolls in the Texas Fashion Collection came in the Spring of 2005, near the end of my first year at the University of North Texas (UNT). My research addresses issues of fashion and self-fashioning in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. Until now this had meant archival work in Paris, but the combination of a year of teaching and the birth of my daughter made me anxious to find projects closer to home. Given the prominence of the collection—which had drawn me to UNT in the first place—research on campus suited me just fine. I was hoping for garments or fashion plates, but instead I found dolls based on Marie-Antoinette and Empress Eugenie, not just any dolls, but *pregnant* dolls. This was not quite what I had anticipated, nor did I know what to do with the 1950s commercial display doll collection. Issues surrounding the representation of the maternal body, particularly in eighteenth-century France, were particularly interesting to me, especially given the vogue for representations of so-called “happy mothers” that coincided with concerted attempts to evacuate actual women from the public sphere (Duncan, 1993).

Dialogue with a new art education colleague, whose daughter is close in age to my own, allowed me to think about the dolls differently and to question the larger stakes of the representation and lived experience of the maternal body. In short, what can the Page Boy Marie-Antoinette dolls teach me about the possibilities and problematics of the public woman, more specifically, the tensions between the maternal and the professional? The question became increasingly fraught as I tried to get my eight-month pregnant body comfortable and as our collaboration time combined with her daughters’ snack time and my incessant bathroom breaks.

I (Sara Wilson McKay) was still lugging a breast pump to and from my office when I learned of pregnant dolls in the university’s extensive Fashion Collection. I imagined children’s playthings akin to my

older daughter's half-dressed dolls, but with bulging bellies. Somehow the thought of the dolls, given that I had recently lived the pregnant body, was more than strange and intriguing. Why were there pregnant dolls in UNT's Fashion Collection? What did they have to do with fashion? Why were they pregnant?

My first semester as a new faculty member at the University of North Texas was marked by learning to navigate a new work environment and directly related to my identity as both a faculty member and a mother: Is UNT child-friendly? Who has children? Who doesn't? How revealing can I be about my family in this space? How are professionals with children regarded? Professionally, can I be female and maternal? And of course, the realistic question; will I have time to pump between the Academic Task Force Meeting and my 5:00 p.m. class? The presence of pregnant dolls haunted me in the abstract. Although I had not yet seen the dolls, the possibility of them lurked in my subconscious, bouncing off the realities of my predominantly female art education students as I worked to develop their feminist consciousness and attend to other social issues confronting art educators.

Working to explore feminist issues in conjunction with an art historian, largely dealing with a similar female population of students, added multiple dimensions to research possibilities. The pregnant dolls became our anchor point and we raised two central questions: How and what does the pregnant body signify? And what does the maternal mean in representation and in practice? In bringing the dolls and our experiences as mothers into an academic context, we are denying the split between the personal and the academic, and forcing both ourselves and our students to confront this traditional bifurcation.

What is the maternal? I remember my first experience viewing Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* in 1994, which was well before any thoughts of becoming a mother were realistic. After engaging with and carefully reading the attentive records of fecal patterns, feeding schedules, utterance analysis, and so on that Kelly chronicled in her six-part installation based on her son's first four years, I was forever changed. I was especially moved when I arrived at a dangling question mark at the end of a long row of framed juxtaposed "evidence" of her son's experience, or more accurately of Kelly and her son's experiences, and I wanted to

share this work of art with every woman I knew. I wanted to tell them that this could be our future, or at the very least this could have been our own mother's experience. Kelly's art awakens critical attention to female experience, particularly with the overwhelmingly female student population in the School of Visual Arts.

The collection of pregnant dolls is the catalyst for this type of experience with my students. Applying a visual culture lens to the pregnant dolls and other representations of pregnant embodiment and the maternal, facilitates a critical understanding of such imagery and a means to talk about feminist issues in visual culture that shape current cultural spaces including academic institutions (pre K-universities), museums, the home, and mass media.

Overview of Page Boy Fashion Dolls

We scheduled an appointment to visit the doll collection in May 2006. This collection includes two sets of nine twelve-inch representations of historical figures, such as an ancient Egyptian queen, the French queen Marie-Antoinette, and Napoleon's wife Empress Josephine, that originally traveled from store to store to attract customers. They are described in Page Boy Maternity promotional literature as "individual mannequins" depicting "maternity dresses through the ages" (Page Boy Maternity, n.d.). Additional promotional materials read, "Ready, after extensive research, is the PAGE BOY collection of exquisite, doll-size mannequins, authentic in every detail, each wearing a complete maternity costume from an historical era, 1490 BC to 1951 AD" (Page Boy Maternity, n.d.). The dolls also have intricate undergarments including cushioning in the belly area to suggest the pregnant status of the women depicted.

What purpose did these dolls serve? Why did this company undertake this historical project? Why were these particular figures chosen to be represented in this way? These dolls and the corresponding questions led us to investigate Page Boy Maternity and its marketing strategies that included producing these historical dolls wearing maternity fashions. We will look further in depth at one of the dolls in a later

section, but here we focus on the origins and purposes of the dolls as our impetus for considering the visuality of the maternal form.

A Dallas-based company, Page Boy Maternity was begun by Elsie Frankfurt and her two sisters in 1941 with \$250. By 1955, the company had made its first million (Gross, 1961). The upscale maternity line was revolutionary in its development of “THAT hole in maternity skirts to keep the drape straight” (Texas Fashion Collection, 1961), a patented cut away from skirts that resulted in the skirt having a waist-band with a large hole cut out below it to accommodate a growing belly. (See Figure 1.) The now commonplace maternity panel, a gusset sewn into garments to cover and stretch with the pregnant belly, clearly has its origins in the concept put forth by Page Boy.



Figure 1: Scan of Page Boy Maternity catalogue page, Spring 1953.

This was a risky move. What if the belly were exposed by the wearer’s movement? The cutting away of fabric to allow for the pregnant belly room to expand and yet still be hidden under long box jackets may have been legitimated through the traveling display of the history of maternity fashion worn by doll replicas of renowned women throughout the ages. Page Boy took a profit risk by challenging the social norm of ignoring the reality of the pregnant body, replacing fashions such as the tent dress, by cutting away fabric to accommodate the growing pregnant belly, while camouflaging it. By creating the dolls, Page Boy demonstrated that this innovation had precedence as evidenced by the nine accurately fashioned doll replicas of historical women. How better to manage the risk than to historicize it? We suggest that Page Boy Maternity created the dolls as a way to rethink maternity fashions and the public relationship to the pregnant body.

The 1950s miniature mannequins, as the dolls are described by Page Boy, invoke post-World War II popular stereotypes of women in the United States; women who abandoned their wartime jobs and happily retreated to the home. These mythical women were like the 1950s TV character June Cleaver—White, middle-class, suburban housewives (Meyerowitz, 1994). The promotional materials developed and circulated by Page Boy Maternity reflect this happy, affluent homemaker (giving an occasional nod to the “career girl” as well), and extend this stereotypical image of the 1950s woman by ignoring altogether any visual representation of pregnancy. For a company selling clothing for pregnant women, visibly pregnant women are absent from the promotional literature (see Figure 2). Instead of bulging bellies, we see tiny waists and gleaming smiles and are encouraged through text to buy Page Boy Maternity wear because “it’s magic” and “it camouflages” so “put it on please and be pretty!” With no camouflage, the ad implies that “pretty” cannot exist.



Figure 2: Scan of Page Boy Maternity catalogue page, Spring 1951.

A content analysis of four promotional catalogues for this company suggests that the pregnant belly should be hidden and streamlined beneath elegant clothing that belies the pregnant state of the body. It is within and against this kind of rhetoric and visual displacement of the unbounded aspects of the pregnant body that Page Boy produced the pregnant dolls. The so-called “monstrous”² quality of the pregnant body is effaced in the Page Boy materials and historicized in the dolls. Why did they go to such lengths to historicize pregnancy visually in the dolls, and yet deny its visual representation in their advertising materials? The social status of the pregnant woman and her functions within a gendered

2 The “monstrous” maternal is an argument of hybridity and otherness that can be traced through Haraway (1992), Braidotti (1996, 2002), and Betterton (2002, 2006). The idea of the maternal body as mutant and grotesque is further played out through Bakhtin’s (1968) “pregnant senile hags,” which mirror Braidotti’s monstrous maternal as a way of investigating difference and the materiality of becoming (Betterton, 2006).

economy presumably motivated such a move by Page Boy. The 1950s message is that women will not buy maternity wear that visually acknowledges the growing, mutant, pregnant body.

The visual culture codes of the visibly pregnant body have changed in the decades since the 1950s. Today’s maternity fashions accentuate the curvy form and enlarged breasts of the pregnant woman, often in ads with rhetoric about loving (and showing off) this sexy body while you can, including tag lines such as “Crazy, Sexy, Cool Maternity: Always Hot ... Always You!” (Babies ‘n’ Bellies, n.d.). Many contemporary maternity styles purposefully reveal a bare bulging belly and through their purchases, contemporary women participate in the sexualizing of their own pregnant body. Designers have realized that sexualizing the pregnant body is a sound economic move and that women, and possibly their partners, will spend money to maintain an active sense of sexuality even during pregnancy.

This leads us to question how the pregnancy-related economy has changed from the 1950s to 2006. Is pursuing a sexualized pregnant persona an economic and/or emotional investment in the pregnant woman’s own pleasure and self-concept? Is it motivated by fear of losing the attraction of the partner and his or her economic contribution to the burgeoning household? Other economic dimensions of the pregnant woman raise additional gendered realities in the United States including the necessity of taking (many times) unpaid leave from employment and the infamous root of the highly politicized “mommy wars,” that privileges the seemingly benign question: are you going back to work?

Visual Representation History of the Pregnant Body

Judy Chicago argued in *The Birth Project* (1985) that there had been relatively few representations of childbirth in the history of Western art, but they do exist. The chronologically disparate Apocalyptic woman in labor of manuscript illuminations and Frida Kahlo’s *My Birth* (1932, currently owned by pop-singer Madonna) come to mind. Demand (1994) and Mussacchio (1995) respectively illuminate Ancient and Renaissance examples. When widening the net to include representations of pregnan-

cy, the actual subject of the Page Boy Maternity dolls, further examples come to mind. There are, of course, Paleolithic and Neolithic fertility figures, among which the so-called *Venus of Willendorf* (24,000-20,000 BCE) is the best-known example, and which have been most thoroughly excavated by the feminist archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (1989, 1982).

The most historically celebrated pregnancy, that of Mary the mother of Jesus, is relatively rarely portrayed in the history of Western art. Neff (1998) points out that “Mary’s body, after all, has been perceived ... as a paragon of purity and virginity, seemingly sexless and untouched by the biological facts that affect the lives of real women” (p. 254). Indeed while the most miraculous aspect of Mary’s pregnancy, notably her conception, is depicted in innumerable scenes of Annunciation and *Visitation*, there is no denying that hers was a less than typical pregnancy experience. Its largely disembodied aspects are perhaps most notable in the absence of a corpus of imagery depicting the Holy Family’s physically arduous journey to the manger in Bethlehem, during which Mary’s pregnant state would have been necessarily visually obvious, to parallel frequent depictions of the maternal Mary, such as those of the Virgin and child.

Pointed visual engagements with the corporeality of pregnancy do, however, exist. As part of her overall artistic project to force visual confrontation and subsequent engagement with the struggles and beauty of the world, particularly the working classes, Käthe Kollwitz depicted several pregnant women. Alice Neel’s no less than eight paintings of pregnant nudes from the 1960s-1970s forthrightly address the discomfort and physicality of the pregnant condition while depicting the humanity of the subjects of her paintings. In *Untitled (Film Still #205)* from the history portrait series (1989, see Figure 3), Cindy Sherman uses the concept of pregnancy as part of a reconfiguration of the relationship between the male artist and his female muse. In this costumed photographic self-portrait Sherman reconceptualizes Raphael’s *La Fornarina* (c1518-1519), a famous portrait of Raphael’s mistress, to suggest that more than a product of artistic genius might result from this coupling of muse and artist. Yet, as Rosemary Betterton points out (2006), the exaggerated prosthetic quality of the visualized pregnancy in Sherman’s work along with the intentional absence of the lovingly finished surfaces of the Renaissance

precedent, deny the fetishistic quality of the sexualized female subject/object of the original.



Figure 3: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #205*, 1989, color photograph, 53 ½ x 40 ½ inches, The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica, courtesy of the Artist and Metro Pictures.

More recent artistic takes on the pregnant female form, however, do not share Sherman’s concern to avoid fetishizing the female form. Instead they may be interpreted as taking as their point of engagement the potential radicality of fetishizing a form that has been for so long occluded from public view. In *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (2005, see Figure 4), Marc Quinn has created a monumental nude portrait of the 8½ month pregnant disabled artist. Insofar as the marble sculpture (3.55 meters high) was intended for a plinth in Trafalgar Square, it is truly monumental in a traditional sense. Yet Quinn’s own comparisons between the work

and the *Venus de Milo* (Quinn, 2006), point to the fact that the transgressive nature of the work is not in its creation of a powerful, positive, and capable model of a person with disabilities. Instead it is in the possibility that the permanently disabled and contingently pregnant woman could be positioned as a fetishized feminine.



Figure 4: Marc Quinn, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2004-2005, marble, 185 inches x 90 inches x 146 inches, Installation Trafalgar Square, London, September 2005, Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

While from one feminist position it could be claimed that this fetishistic quality is inherent in any depiction of the female form nude, or at least in those portrayed as such by male artists, Alice Neel's pregnant nudes do not read in the same way (Allara, 1994; Bauer, 1994-1995, 2002). Nor do Lois Conner's recent series *To Be* (1999-2003), comprised of 35 photographic works of women, mostly nude, in the late stages of pregnancy. These works seem to rival if not surpass Quinn's sculpture in terms of the delectation of the pregnant form. Connor's representation of an inward glance of *Lauren, New York* (2003) seems less a product of agency than a willingness to be consumed by a male gaze. The works of Quinn and Conner alike point to a new presence of the pregnant form within contemporary visual culture in which the pregnant body is celebrated—particularly that of the pregnant celebrity—and simultaneously fetishized as an object of sexualized consumption.

Probably the most notorious contemporary photograph of the pregnant body is the *Vanity Fair* cover from August 1991 featuring actress Demi Moore discreetly nude and eight-months pregnant.³ Renowned celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz's cover caused quite a controversy. *Vanity Fair* wrapped each magazine in brown paper for distribution, and some venues refused to sell it due to its proclaimed sexual/erotic overtones. As if performing an homage to the infamous cover image fifteen years ago, musical performer Britney Spears appears nude and six months pregnant on the cover of *Harper's Bazaar* (August 2006).⁴ The Spears cover, however, now reflects the global nature of U.S. pop culture. Japanese officials originally proposed to alter the image from the waist down for display in the Tokyo subway: "They now say they understand the intention is to portray a happy mother, rather than to be sexually explicit" and are allowing the original image to be posted ("Tokyo," 2006, p. 3). Debates about censorship of the pregnant image raise further issues of how the visual maternal circulates transnationally.

³ See the cover of *Vanity Fair* by clicking on this link: <http://www.magazine.org/Editorial/40-40-covers/2.jpg>.

⁴ See the cover of *Harper's Bazaar* by clicking on this link: http://www.smh.com.au/ffximage/2006/06/29/harpers_narrowweb_300x415,0.jpg.

As Carr (1995) argues, “the reproductive (pregnant) body exists as spectacle” (p. 5). Beyond magazine covers, pregnancy blogs and Web sites like “Pregnant and Proud” or “Positive Pregnancy” (the ubiquitous private in everyone’s public via the World Wide Web), explore pregnant imagery and the stories of pregnancy in a seemingly more mainstream, more commonplace way. Yet, psychoanalytical theorist Kristeva (1977) considered the pregnant mother as the site where nature problematically meets culture, and these popular culture sites enact this clash. Researchers analyzing editions of *Shape Fit Pregnancy* magazine argue that the pregnant form is presented as maternally successful [nature] yet aesthetically problematic [culture] (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004). Further, they argue that the text of the magazine reinscribes the female body into domesticity by paradoxically using feminist empowerment discourse. The tensions in these contemporary sites of the maternal raise important layers to be explored about the (un)natural pregnant body and its cultural inscriptions.

Beyond the cultural aspects perpetuated in cyberspace about the pregnant body, recent trends of depicting lived experiences involving the pregnant mother, including belly castings and belly painting, suggest that the corporeality of pregnancy is also a site of struggle. Women are choosing to participate in activities that seemingly claim the pregnant body, perhaps in reaction to the way pregnant bodies are available for public consumption not only visually, but also as manifested by the sheer number of people who effectively disembodied the pregnant woman by touching her belly in spontaneous and uninvited ways. However, attempts to reclaim the body in such physical ways (including circulating photographs on a post-pregnancy blog entitled “The Shape of a Mother” through which women share the physical effects of pregnancy on their bodies) operate in unclear ways.

On the one hand, a *Wall Street Journal* article detailing the popularity of belly casting suggests that while many women hang the resulting cast, depicting belly and breasts for context, in the baby’s nursery, some use them in the garden, or as a serving dish (Tam, 2001). This celebration and memorializing of the pregnant body, supposedly rooted in Ancient African tradition (Tam, 2001), leaves the pregnant woman with a shell—literally—of her pregnant experience. Should we consider this

representation of the pregnant body as a way to engage the monstrous maternal by way of capturing the alien belly, forever commemorating the otherness of the body’s experience—becoming what Betterton (2006) refers to as a promising monster? Or, on the other hand, does all of this, including pregnancy photography, operate at the level of shared experience and agency, providing a phenomenological experience that becomes outwardly sharable and possibly a means of memorializing the lived body in a necessarily transitory state?

While the intent of visually/materially memorializing pregnancy may affirm female experience and the maternal body, images do not always circulate with this intent. Particularly, pregnancy photography and copying sexualized celebrity maternity imagery, often returns the pregnant body to the realm of sexual fetishistic object. Exhortations from Web site *Baby-gaga* to “come be a calendar girl” and “come share your beautiful body” request photographs in which the pregnant woman feels her “best/hottest/most attractive” (“Pregnant Moms,” 2006).

In what ways do these pregnant calendar girls function like the sexualized calendar pin-ups from the 1940s and 50s? The correlation of calendar girls to the pin-up girl phenomenon leads us to consider the ultimate three-dimensional pin-up doll, Barbie, introduced in 1959 (four years after *Page Boy Maternity* made its first million and eight years after they created the pregnant fashion dolls). Barbie was created as a miniature mannequin, with only five moveable parts, for dressing and undressing using fashionable clothing and accessories (Lord, 1994). Her popularity continues in the current contemporary context, and she is often used by girls to play out rituals of consumerism and dating (Wagner-Ott, 2002). Participating in the nature versus nurture debates of the early 1950s, Simone de Beauvoir (1957/1949) emphatically claimed that dolls were industry’s way of perpetuating limiting gender roles of wife- and mother-hood.

Barbie (and more specifically Barbie’s married Mattel® friend Midge in the Barbie storyline) became tremendously problematic when wedding-ring wearing pregnant Midge (married to Alan with a 3 year old son) hit store shelves in 2002. (See Figure 5.) That year, Wal-Mart® shoppers had the toy pulled from the shelves claiming that it promoted teenage pregnancy. Many bloggers on a forum called “America’s De-

bate” (2002) suggested that there is a healthy aspect to having a doll that reflects pregnancy. They particularly noted that it could provide parents with entry points for discussing sexuality and reproduction, possibly doing more to reduce rates of teenage pregnancy than shielding the child from developing sexual knowledge. But it is precisely the combination of the threat of sexual knowledge and the role-playing aspect of the doll that Wal-Mart shoppers sought to curtail. Would the reaction have been the same if pregnant Barbie was simply a pregnant woman, without the removable child inside? Could cultural constraints have handled any contemporary representation of the pregnant woman in doll form? Playing with pregnant Barbie essentially becomes playing with sex, we argue, because imagery of the pregnant woman cannot be understood apart from her participation in sexuality (except in the case of the Virgin Mary).



Figure 5: Digital photograph of Pregnant Midge, a Mattel® Barbie doll. MIDGE® and associated trademarks are owned by and used with permission from Mattel, Inc.©2007 Mattel, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Originally created to role-play fashion scenarios, a pregnant Barbie® raises a second area of concern related to the fashion quality of the doll and her lack of moveable parts (as compared to “action figure” GI Joe®’s 21 moveable parts). The pregnant Midge, a Barbie doll, redesigned to accommodate—as receptacle—the baby beneath the removable plastic tummy, still cannot bend at the elbow or knee. Barbie dolls, pregnant or not, are restricted in movement and thus, metaphorically limited to the world of non-functional, non-productive discourse—fashion mannequins indeed. But when brought to life in play, is there resonance of this reality for pregnant women as well—are they, as pregnant receptacle, relegated to the realm of the non-functional and non-productive?

Looking Closely at the Marie-Antoinette Doll for Important Themes: 18th and 21st Century Explorations

Dolls, even fashion dolls such as Barbie, are not a twentieth-century creation. The use of dolls to disseminate fashion trends across great distances date with certainty to the fourteenth century at the latest, and are French in origin. The dolls, known variously as *grande Pandora*, for the doll in court attire, *petite Pandora*, for the doll in fashionable everyday clothes, or more generically as *poupées de la Rue de Saint-Honoré*, after the site of most of Paris’ couture production, ranged from life-sized figures designed to the measurements of an individual client to smaller figures, both male and female, designed for wider distribution (Fraser, 1963; Gaudriault 1983; Ribeiro 2002). They retained their currency well into the eighteenth century, despite the attempts of publications such as *Mercure de France* to displace them with the incorporation of fashion plates. Indeed it was not until the possibility of inexpensively produced color reproductions that came about with the development of the lithographic medium in the nineteenth century that printed fashion plates fully supplanted the fashion doll as the primary medium for fashion’s dissemination.

While these dolls may have served a playful function for their owners—one can well imagine *salonnière* Madame de Sevigné taking a certain pleasure in dressing and undressing her *Pandoras*—fashion dolls.

Dolls more generally, must always be considered as serving a didactic function. In addition to the specificities of fashion, the fashion doll may be understood as representing an ideal self, a model to which to aspire, a possibility to manipulate. In her work on twentieth-century dolls and action figures, Anna Wagner-Ott coined the term “‘descriptor’ dolls” to refer to “contemporary manufactured dolls and their accessories that are specifically designed by toy companies primarily for female consumers,” arguing that what the manufacturers are producing is more than a toy, and that “manufacturers who make toys ‘make gender’” (2002, p. 248). Yet clearly these aspects of the “‘descriptor’ doll” may be attributed to many other dolls besides twentieth-century examples. Dolls, even fashion dolls, are meant to be manipulated, and it is largely through action that their lessons are learned.

Although perhaps more accurately termed an anatomical model, the most elucidating historical example of these manipulative and pedagogical possibilities may be an example from the eighteenth century, Madame du Coudray’s *Machine* (see Figure 6). This model, currently on display at the *Musée Flaubert et d’histoire de la médecine* in Rouen, France, is the only extant version of what are presumed to be hundreds of childbirth mannequins produced under the auspices of Madame du Coudray, who was employed by the French monarch Louis XVI to instruct rural midwives (Gelbart, 1998). The figures, made of cloth, leather, and iron, were intended to replicate not only the dimensions of the birthing pelvis and infant, but their respective textures and rigidity in order to provide the novice midwife with as realistic an experience as possible. The doll-like figures signify the clinical aspects of the maternal. There is no upper torso, no head, and incomplete legs, these parts being inessential to the task at hand. Madame du Coudray’s own term for the dolls, her “*Machine*” or “*Machine d’accouchement*” (“childbirthing machine”), further indicates that the maternal body exists to deliver the infant, a future citizen of France, unto the world.



Figure 6: Angélique Marguerite du Coudray, *La machine de Madame du Coudray* (childbirth mannequin), before 1778, cotton, bone, leather, wood, and iron, 28 x 60 x 40 cm., Musée Flaubert et d’histoire de la médecine CHU Rouen.

What then to think of a mid-twentieth-century pregnant fashion doll designed for a maternity store chain, especially one depicting Marie-Antoinette, the wife of du Coudray’s patron? (See Figure 7.) First there is the issue of fashion itself. Clothing is cultural, indicating status in its many forms of class and gender. While it binds the body, keeps it in check, keeps it bounded—important aspects especially for the seemingly unbounded and fluid pregnant form—it simultaneously reveals; while the body shapes clothing it is also shaped by it (Finkelstein, 1991; Hollander, 1993; Entwistle, 2000; Barnard, 2002). Yet the Page Boy Maternity Marie-Antoinette doll is not only clothed, she is presented as fashionable, by late-eighteenth-century Parisian standards, and pregnant at the same time. What, then, does it mean for the pregnant body to be fashionable? The physicality of the pregnant body necessitates a style of clothing that may or may not conform to contemporary standards of fashion, but also may shape its development. The sack dress or *robe à la Watteau*, a loosely fitting garment, is thought to have been first popularized by Madame de Montespan (1641-1707), mistress to Louis XIV, who wore this form of

dress to conceal her illegitimate pregnancies from the French court (Ribeiro, 2002). Yet ironically in its concealment the sack dress was actually revealing. Once Madame de Montespan donned the garment, her condition was revealed to all.



Figure 7: Page Boy Maternity Marie-Antoinette Doll, 24 inches tall, Texas Fashion Collection, photo by Heather Imholt. Left view shows the finished undergarments of the doll.

Fashioning the pregnant body is always socially problematic, even in its disguise, because, the pregnant body—with the exception of the case of the Virgin Mary—is necessarily a sexual body. This quality, now highlighted by many pregnant women in their fashion choices, tend to reveal rather than conceal, and leads us to the question of the relationship between the sexual and the maternal; can the two be consistent with one another? This is a problem that Marie-Antoinette herself faced. Several years into her marriage, and even upon the elevation of her husband from Dauphin to King Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette had produced no heir. While the likely fault was the King's biology, the Queen

was blamed. The fashionable activities into which she threw her energy were critiqued as selfish and wasteful at a time when the nation's coffers were low and new Enlightenment beliefs about the positive and affirming attributes of motherhood were high. Within public consciousness Marie-Antoinette was understood as patently not maternal. Instead she was criticized in popular and pornographic pamphlets such as *La vie privée et scandaleuse de Marie-Antoinette d'Autriche* as partaking in licentious (sex with her husband's brother) and non-productive (lesbian intercourse with ladies-in-waiting, such as the Princesse de Lamballe) sexual behavior. These critiques point to the problem of the public woman (Hunt, 1991). Indeed, in French the term public woman or *fille publique* connotes a prostitute.

Yet despite the problems with the feminine publicity, Marie-Antoinette turned to another public woman and a public forum in order to reshape her public image. Following Vigée-Lebrun's disastrous portrait (1783) of Marie-Antoinette *en chemise*, a fashionable loose muslin dress that critics likened to the Queen's undergarments, artist Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun, herself a mother and a problematically public woman, crafted a new and maternal identity in her portrait of *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children* (1787). Unfortunately, the new image of the queen as a loving mother to three children, with a touching homage in the form of an empty cradle to the recently deceased daughter Sophie-Béatrix failed to appease critics. The image of Marie-Antoinette as mother could not compensate for the vision of *La vie privée et scandaleuse*.

“Your Kids Say ‘Mom.’ Your Clothes Say Otherwise.”: The Big Questions

Marie-Antoinette's story and the Page Boy Maternity dolls, inspire us to question contemporary and historical issues related to images of pregnant women. A case in point comes in the form of an advertisement for cotton in the August 2006 edition of *American Baby* magazine. The text of the full-page ad (see Figure 8) reads “Your kids say ‘Mom.’ Your clothes say otherwise.” with a tagline that suggests readers should “Make a statement.” The accompanying photograph frames a blonde

model, clothed in a form-fitting deep V-neck cap-sleeved knit top and a flowing knee-length embroidered cotton skirt, retrieving her daughter from the open door of a Suburban Utility Vehicle (SUV). She holds the child on her hip in a familiar care-taking pose, hip cocked to allow a comfortable space for the smiling child to sit. Returning to the text, I wonder how her clothes resist “mom” as an interpellation. The model’s blue top, which matches the color of the photographed ribbon at the top of the image and the cotton logo at the bottom of the ad, plunges deeply to suggest sexy cleavage. If these clothes, according to the advertisers, resist or contradict qualities of motherhood, what clothes do express the maternal? More importantly, why is maternal visual expression something to be avoided?

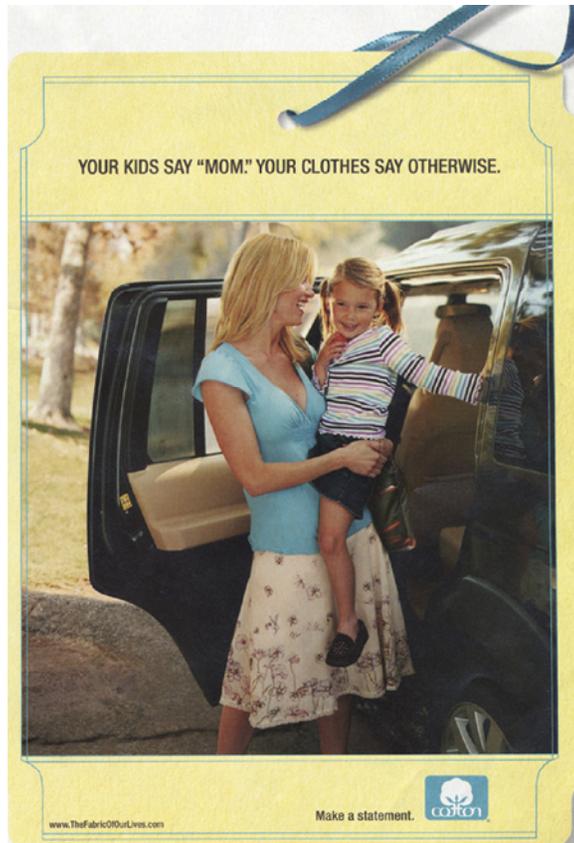


Figure 8: Scanned advertisement for cotton, *American Baby*, August 2006.

Why do the Page Boy Maternity dolls trace maternity fashion from the contemporary to the historical to represent pregnancy? Does Cindy Sherman’s historical deflection work in the same way? What about Barbie and images of the Virgin Mary? Where do those who do not live this role fit into a gendered economy? Must femininity always be associated with the maternal, with all of its positive and negative connotations? Must the maternal always be publicly problematic and perceived as non-professional, and is this because of its concomitant sexuality? Is the feminine itself always already coded as sexual and is it sexuality itself that must be displaced in public discourse? How do transnational explorations of the visual maternal consider the (un)natural pregnant body and its cultural inscriptions?

These questions seem to have particular pertinence given the construction of femininity in education and art professions. We look forward to thinking through these ideas further, and probably unearthing others. The dolls have become for us touchstones for critical feminist work, which Dalton (2001) suggests as “art practice that challenges existing oppressive norms and holds out imaginative possibilities for something different” (p. 122).

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