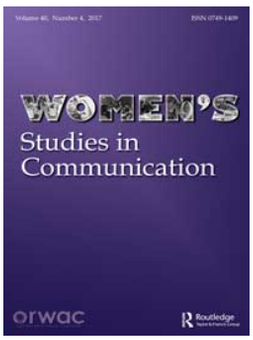

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Rising Against the Third Shift: Reclaiming the Postpartum Body in "A Beautiful Body Project"

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ABSTRACT

Discourses surrounding motherhood function increasingly to police the parameters of women's bodies during pregnancy and postpartum. Rising against this trend is Jade Beall's "A Beautiful Body Project" honoring mothers' bodies in all their diversity. Using feminist rhetorical criticism, we investigate responses to the Facebook post announcing this project to gain an understanding of how commenters respond to Beall's effort to reclaim and redefine postpartum embodiment. We argue that the comments function to further the project of reclaiming and redefining the postpartum body; provide a therapeutic community where participants render visible their struggle with narrowly defined beauty norms; and resist, miss, or ignore the point of the project. Through a discussion of these comments, our article gives insight on feminist rhetorical resistance to postpartum body norms and the third shift of bodywork.

KEYWORDS

Celebrity motherhood; Jade Beall; maternity; postpartum embodiment; third shift

On July 3, 2012, the Jade Beall Photography Facebook page started a photo album titled, "A Beautiful Body Project" with a picture featuring two children happily hugging the supple, sagging, stretch-marked belly of their mother. A message accompanying the picture invited readers to participate in Beall's photographic book project, titled at the time, "A Beautiful Body: A Love Revolution Redefining 'Perfectly Beautiful.'" The following provocative text accompanied Beall's summons:

> Yes, I stretched physically while growing emotionally and spiritually to grow humans inside of my body and fed them from this body too.
>
> Yes, I am sexy.
>
> Yes, I will never be the same.
>
> Yes, I am a Mother.
>
> Oh yes, I am proud.
>
> Yes, I am vulnerable.
>
> Yes, I am as strong as a house.
>
> Yes, I am your sister.

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Yes, I have a story too.

Yes, I am a reflection of you.

By October 2016, this single post—with picture, invitation, and emancipatory commentary—garnered 497 comments, 4,836 shares, and 8,300 likes. Sixty other pictures followed this inaugural post, featuring a diversity of images showcasing the postpartum body, replete with stretch marks, cellulite, sagging breasts, and cesarean section scars. The gallery became the locus of ample discussion, with readers from around the world posting their reactions to these atypical representations. Subsequently, Beall launched a Web site and published the book: *The Bodies of Mothers: A Beautiful Body Project* (2014).

Beall's call to action has come at a pivotal moment when we are seeing a proliferation of discourses cultivating and promoting expectations of a fit pregnant and postpartum body, what O'Brien Hallstein (2015) terms the "bikini-ready mom." From the celebrity baby bump watch (Meyers, 2011, 2013) to the "fit moms of Instagram" (Jones, 2016), who have become celebrities in their own right, cultural discourses surrounding motherhood are increasingly policing women's bodies—even during and after pregnancy, a time when beauty norms typically have been relaxed. O'Brien Hallstein (2015) argues that images of the fit maternal celebrity body suggest that women can have it all, but only if they engage in the "third shift" of energizing bodywork, which becomes another ideological thread of the laborious and regressive intensive mothering regime. Thus, women who wish to be successful must do the first shift of paid work, the second shift of housework/child care, and the third shift of bodywork, which includes the time-consuming labor of sculpting and reworking their bodies to achieve a bikini-ready figure.

However, there is a growing online movement resisting this trend. The 4th Trimester Bodies Project (Jackson & Wilson, 2015), the Honest Body Project (McCain, 2015), and Beall's "A Beautiful Body Project" are similar photography collections that honor diverse postpartum bodies. The copious responses on Beall's Facebook page, and to the inaugural post in particular, indicate this project has struck a crucial chord with the broader public. If, as Bordo (1993) argues, the body acts as both medium and metaphor for culture, "a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed" (p. 165), what does public response to Beall's project tell us? More specifically, how do the public Facebook responses to Beall's project work rhetorically to reclaim or resist the postpartum body in all its diversity while also rising against the third shift?

Engaging feminist rhetorical criticism, we investigate the Facebook audience response to Beall's inaugural post to identify the rhetorical resources commenters employ to make sense of postpartum embodiment and to resist the third shift in a culture centered on the slender/fit postpartum body. We argue that responses to the inaugural post function rhetorically in three dominant ways: (1) to further the project of reclaiming and redefining the postpartum body by viewing the body as an active instrument, passive gift, and sacred temple; (2) to provide a therapeutic community where participants render visible their struggle to move beyond narrowly defined beauty norms that contribute to varying forms of self-loathing; and (3) to resist, miss, or ignore the point of the project by stubbornly viewing the body as sexual, existing for the male gaze, and in need of improvement. Before we turn to our methodology and analysis, we provide an overview of research on women's embodiment as a site of cultural power and struggle.

The body as cultural text: Inscriptions of power

Norms of beauty shift over time and space and across a woman's life span. Despite their variability, these norms serve a strong regulating function over women of all ages, potentially influencing a woman's socioeconomic status and her sense of self. As Gill (2007) argues, women's bodies are represented "simultaneously as women's source of power and as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, [and] discipline … in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness" (p. 255). Girls and women have long been compelled, Brumberg (1997) states, to "strictly police their bodies" (p. xxiii), with women in previous eras donning corsets and today's women removing pubic hair and opting for "designer vagina" surgeries. While Brumberg focuses on how adolescent girls over the past century have treated their bodies as their primary project—as enemies that must be contained—it is clear that the era of celebrity pregnancy and motherhood has extended this "body project" into maturity.

Although second-wave feminists assailed norms of beauty and laid bare their ideological underpinnings, numerous benefits continue to accrue to those deemed attractive, underscoring the stakes involved in who gets to define what counts as beautiful. Attractive persons are viewed as smarter, less guilty, more likable, more hirable, and more deserving of a higher salary than their unattractive counterparts (Wong, 2016). In her research on attractiveness in the workplace, Wong (2016) found that attractive persons earn 20% more than average-looking individuals. Perhaps the most interesting finding is that women who are considered less attractive but engage in considerable grooming efforts enjoy higher incomes than women considered naturally attractive or very attractive. Wong concludes that "*Being* attractive is not enough; it is *doing* attractiveness appropriately that gets rewarded in the workplace" (para. 12; emphasis in original). That the performance of laboring over one's looks conferred the most benefits underscores society's continued efforts to control the behaviors, practices, and status of women through a complex system of rewards and censures. Wong's study obliges us to consider the ways in which "grooming—a social activity that requires effort, time, resources, and conforming to desired social identities—is imperative for women in a way that it is not for men" (para. 12).

Today, the omnipresence of social media and digital connectivity requires an even more strenuous performance of beauty labor. Wissinger (2015b) argues that our live-streaming, Instagramming, selfie-centered culture has created a context in which achieving norms of physical attractiveness and maintaining a trendy, virtual posture have become a form of "biopower" that "organizes the population into those who are willing to seek to enliven and optimize themselves by engaging with technologies and those who do not have access to this chance" (Wissinger, 2015b, p. 58). Our digital age facilitates a new beauty imperative that Wissinger calls glamour labor, or strictly monitoring and modulating one's embodiment through "diet, exercise, and medical intervention" (p. 6), while also engaging in self-surveillance and the "image work [required] to create and maintain one's 'cool' quotient'—how hooked up, tuned in, and 'in the know' one is" (p. 3). Sold as a form of self-optimizing empowerment, glamour labor joins corporeal and cyber bodywork "in pursuit of the fashionable ideal" (p. 3). Although modeling used to be the domain of the elite, the digital age promotes the idea that all women should "be ready for their close-up, while marshaling their energy to project the right image at all times" (Wissinger, 2015a, p. 13). Although glamour labor sells these beauty practices as fun, Wissinger (2015b)

cautions that "when beauty is a biopower, the management of life according to its terms requires that those who do not subscribe to its techniques for maximizing life will not be valued within the system that values beauty" (p. 57).

Historically, the maternal body has been able to function somewhat outside of the beauty norms typically imposed on women, as society honored the fact that women were engaged in important life-creating work. However, there has been a shift in the representation of the maternal body, precipitated in part by the rise of the celebrity mom. In their treatise on contemporary idealizations of motherhood, Douglas and Michaels (2004) argue that we live in an era of the "new momism," which they define as "a highly romanticized and yet demanding view of motherhood in which the standards for success are impossible to meet" (p. 4). Focusing on celebrity mom profiles of the 1980s and 1990s, Douglas and Michaels found that such profiles reinforce and amplify the new momism by showcasing sexy, typically White and heterosexual celebrity moms ensconced in the bliss of joyous motherhood, having and doing it all. The profiles infer that if a mother cannot have and do it all, the blame is appropriately located in the failed mother. Emphasizing competition between women, the profiles showcase the idea that the average mom could in fact achieve these lofty goals if she would "just get up earlier, laugh more,… [be] more self-sacrificing, and buy the right products" (Douglas and Michaels, 2004. p. 139).

The image of the celebrity supermom has become even more intensified in the 21st century as the commodification of celebrity motherhood and the production and consumption of celebrity maternal discourses in gossip and entertainment magazines have expanded (Bedor & Tajima, 2012; Chatman, 2015; Meyers, 2011, 2013; O'Brien Hallstein, 2015). Whereas previously there was a focus on the celebrity's mothering experiences a couple of years after birth, we are now seeing an expansion of coverage to include super-fit pregnant and postpartum bodies and an increased emphasis on, and policing of, the maternal body itself, with less focus on mothering practices (O'Brien Hallstein, 2015). Even the prospect of a maternal body—in the form of a potential baby bump—has become imbued with cultural meaning and attention. Tellingly, Meyers (2011) observes that the contemporary phenomenon of the celebrity baby-bump watch has fixated mostly on women who are *not* pregnant. In other words, the process of scrutinizing celebrity bodies for signs of pregnancy via inappropriate weight gain or ill-fitting clothing has become yet another modality of regulating women's behaviors and practices, rendering highly visible through critique those "appetites that mark feminine failure" (p. 59). Thus the celebrity baby-bump watch "uses the potential of a bump" to regulate women's embodiment and to "recuperat[e] wayward female subjects through ridicule and shame" (p. 59).

This new emphasis on the celebrity maternal body represents a concerning response to what O'Brien Hallstein (2015) calls the "crisis in femininity" that is occurring in our post–second wave era. O'Brien Hallstein examines the bifurcation that exists between enjoying success in the public sphere before children and the turn life takes postpartum, when women must grapple with the regressive roles they are expected to play at home. Having to assume the dominant role for caregiving at home while also performing in the public sphere creates challenges and contradictions that result in what O'Brien Hallstein (2015) has termed a "post–second wave split subjectivity" (p. 15). Situated in a neoliberal age that positions the body as a route to self-actualization and identity and a cultural context that promotes a discourse of health and fitness, the "third shift of body work" becomes "the energizing solution to [the] post–second wave crisis in femininity" (p. 15). Celebrity

mom profiles articulate this trend by first presenting slender-pregnant celebrity moms followed by quickly slender, super-fit postpartum moms. This becomes, O'Brien Hallstein (2015) asserts, the first and second steps "in training post–second wave women to embrace further their split subjectivity and the even-more intensified new momism that has integrated … a third shift of energizing body work" (p. 16). In those instances where celebrity maternal bodies do not meet this standard, they are policed through public vilification and fat shaming. This rhetorical scaffolding casts motherhood as a small element in women's lives, and women are encouraged to use "body work" as the "best … solution to managing the post–second wave crisis in femininity, while also energizing them so that they can be even more intensive good mothers" (p. 23).

It is important to note that the new momism and celebrity maternal imagery historically have circulated around privileged women (Meyers, 2011; O'Brien Hallstein, 2015). As O'Brien Hallstein (2015) states, "[I]t is indisputable that celebrity mom profiles promote and reinforce privileged motherhood, primarily by reinforcing white, at-least-middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual privilege" (p. 6). Yet there is evidence that the focus on bodywork is now finding articulation through the bodies of women of color, as Chatman (2015) aptly demonstrates in her analysis of Beyoncé Knowles-Carter's high-profile, slender/fit appearance in the media shortly after giving birth to her first child.

However pervasive the images of postpartum celebrities, meaningful opposition has emerged. In addition to the collections of photographs that feature mothers flaunting diverse postpartum bodies, parodies from the newly forming genre of "motherhood comedians" have sprung up on social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram's #imomsohard (Hensley & Smedley, 2016) and YouTube sensation Anita Renfroe (2016). Other avenues of resistance have been more artistic. O'Brien Hallstein (2015) draws attention to the video documentary *Embrace,* which shows women who are fit but who have declared their slightly heavier postpartum bodies make them happier and freer than they were before. As O'Brien argues, "'[R]eal' mothers can employ critical awareness to resist the maternal beauty ideals embedded in contemporary motherhood today, while also talking back to the profiles that cultivate those ideals" (p. 193). This study is situated squarely in these oppositional discourses. Extending O'Brien Hallstein's ideas, we seek to demonstrate the ways in which Beall and the commenters she inspired work rhetorically to resist the slender postpartum body ideal and thus productively refuse and "rise against" the third shift of bodywork.

Feminist redefinition

We engage feminist rhetorical criticism to critically analyze comments responding to Beall's Facebook page. Feminist rhetorical criticism synthesizes rhetorical analysis with feminist philosophy to "foreground how gender is operating or being sculpted in particular ways by language choices," particularly language that is "anchored" in "everyday speech acts" (Nudd and Shriver, 2005, pp. 276–278). There are myriad approaches to feminist rhetorical criticism; our approach involves redefining. Nudd and Shriver (2005) state that critics use redefinition to analyze the regulatory function of language in gender construction and to cultivate rhetorical forms "that expan[d] the possibilities of gender" (p. 280). As a critical approach, redefinition generally involves one of three modalities. The first is the identification and analysis of how "language is used to describe gendered

ideals in stereotypical ways"; the second is the effort to "create new language that will give nonpatriarchal dimension to people's lives or a language to effectively demystify patriarchy"; and the third is the reclamation of "words used to straightjacket masculinity and femininity and thereby infuse them with new meaning" (pp. 278–279). We extend Nudd and Shriver's (2005) approach to include not just the reclamation of language but also the reclamation of embodiment and its representation in culture.

We came to this particular approach after first scrutinizing the data and considering theoretical treatments of maternal and postpartum embodiment. After analyzing the 497 comments provided in response to Beall's inaugural post, we discovered commenters' assorted, inventive efforts to struggle against and reconceptualize postpartum embodiment, as well as varying modes of resistance to this effort. After studying the data and grounding it in existing research, we came to our central question: How do the public Facebook responses to Beall's project work rhetorically to reclaim or resist the postpartum body in all its diversity, while also rising against the third shift? Subsequently, we sought to render our analysis more precise by identifying the discursive patterns that emerged as Facebook commenters described postpartum embodiment in both stereotypical and nonstereotypical ways. In addition, we sought to identify the rhetorical patterns and approaches commenters employed as they worked to reconceptualize and reclaim nonpatriarchal dimensions of postpartum embodiment.

Facebook is a compelling location to study situated acts of public persuasion because it is a popular site possessing more members than the most populous nation on earth, with 1.9 billion people logging in each month (Taylor, 2016). However, as a nontraditional rhetorical site, a brief discussion of rhetor/authorship, audience, and message helps clarify the nuance of this particular rhetorical situation (see Warnick, 1998, p. 74). Most, but not all, of the commenters appear to be women. In analyzing the data, we recognize that people may not represent themselves accurately online; indeed, there is no way to verify the author's gender identity with any certainty. If a Facebook user presents herself as a female who has given birth and interacts as such, we take that at face value in our analysis, knowing that individuals' online identities are selective presentations of self. Wilson, Gosling, and Graham's (2012) analysis of more than 400 scholarly articles on Facebook found that "although some self-enhancement may occur, profile owners are generally portraying a fairly accurate representation of their offline identity" (p. 210), probably due to the fact that friendship on Facebook tends to occur offline first.

In addition to gender, the commenters' profiles appeared to be largely (though not exclusively) of varied European descent. It is more challenging to identify the class status of the responders. Given that all a person needs in order to be a Facebook member is an e-mail address and an Internet connection, commenters could represent a range of class backgrounds. As of 2016, 86% of Americans have Internet access (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016), and one out of five people on earth has a Facebook account (Halleck, 2015). At the same time, we recognize that one must have a degree of leisure time, money, and space to spend time commenting on Facebook pages, inferring some amount of economic privilege. While we surmise that the typical commenter appears to be a heterosexual, middle- or upper-middle-class White cis female from the United States or a European country, it appears that some individuals presenting as male, women of color, or from countries other than the dominant ones also participated, though to a lesser extent.

This audience may already be favorably predisposed to considering alternative ways of conceptualizing postpartum embodiment because they have brought themselves, through need, circumstance, or interest, to this public Facebook site; thus the discussion has the potential be, to some extent, "self-fulfilling" (Warnick, 1998, p. 78). Yet because the participants are reconceptualizing the postpartum body, which is a radical act, it is meaningful to identify the rhetorical resources the commenters employ to enable this departure from normative thought. In the social media environment, the distinction between rhetor and audience is less rigid. As Warnick (1998) states, "[E]veryone is a rhetor and everyone an audience" (p. 77). This intensely dialogical dimension of Facebook engagement offers an array of informal perspectives that may shed scholarly insight on feminist rhetorical resistance to postpartum body norms and the third shift of bodywork. Given the format of Facebook, these varying blocks of text are not necessarily meant to be sophisticated, linear, theoretical expositions of perspectives. Rather, the format requires brief, casual, often nonlinear, and dialogic commentary that has its own logic. It is within this casual commentary that we are able to retrieve perspectives on postpartum embodiment as they are anchored in everyday discourse.

Rising against the third shift: The voices of "a beautiful body project"

We take as the centerpiece of our analysis the commentary written in response to the origin photo in "A Beautiful Body Project," which was used to recruit mothers to participate in the project by being photographed. The photo appears as the very first picture on the left-hand side of the "A Beautiful Body Project" Facebook page and has the largest response with 497 comments. We center our analysis not on the image itself but on these comments. Though this forum is publicly available on Beall's business page, out of concern for the privacy of commenters we have provided only first names (or in some cases, no names) throughout our analysis. As rhetorical critics, we had no interaction with the commenters. The last of the 497 comments was made in 2015, before our project began.

While many other images are displayed and discussed on Beall's page, the photo with the next highest comment count has only 147. Thus, the origin photo has attained a degree of public response that sets it apart from the others. This black-and-white photo depicts the midsection of a mother from the bottom of her breasts to her waist, with a child embracing her from each side and placing their hands on her sagging and wrinkled belly (see Figure 1). Regarding the strategic cropping of the mother's breasts, it is worth noting that Beall has had to censor all of her photos for Facebook, except for those involving breastfeeding, where one breast can be exposed (J. Beall, personal communication, March 22, 2017). The smooth, small hands and blissfully content faces of the children contrast with what would typically be seen as the part of this woman's body that should be covered. This woman's willingness to allow Beall to display her postpartum body is somewhat shocking in a culture that pressures women to engage in the third shift of bodywork to achieve the slender/fit postpartum body. The picture urges viewers to affirm women's bodies in light of their functions beyond serving as vessels of normative, idealized attractiveness, while it also compels viewers to embrace the idea of postpartum bodies in all their beautiful shapes and conditions.

Facebook comments on the photo illustrate the ongoing contestation of the definition of what a "real mom" is and what counts as a "beautiful body." The comments also debate

Figure 1. Jade Beall's origin photo in "A Beautiful Body Project."

over and police who has the right to define what counts as beautiful and what is inappropriate. The comments fall into three main categories: reclaiming and redefining the beautiful postpartum body (which is, indeed, the purpose of the photographer's work); providing a therapeutic community; and missing or resisting the point. Save for last names, comments are presented here in their original state so as to maintain the flavor, tone, and intent of the commenter. We turn, first, to the efforts to reappropriate the image of beauty.

Reclaiming and redefining the beautiful postpartum body

The largest number of comments are affirming and empowering, and do the rhetorical work of reclaiming and redefining images of postpartum beauty. Instead of longing for six-pack abs and smooth skin, commenters assert pride in their everyday postpartum bodies by discursively constructing the body as an active instrument, a passive gift, and a sacred temple.

Body as an active instrument

One form of response functions rhetorically to construct the postpartum body as a powerful, active instrument that has labored honorably in the service of motherhood. Kira's representation of her stretch marks is emblematic of this approach: "I worked hard for them." Those who engage this type of response frequently invoke war imagery, conferring on maternity the traditionally masculine status of combat. Numerous women describe loose skin as a sign of "courage" or "sacrifice," label poochy bellies a "badge of honor," and refer to stretch marks as "tiger stripes" or "battle scars." As they do so, they appropriate the patriarchal discourse of war and aggression to summon the grit and strength required of motherhood and to highlight the toll that maternity takes on women's bodies.

Using metaphor and analogy, participants rhetorically equate the act of maternity to a soldier going to combat and transfer to the postpartum body the honor, glory, and praise that soldiers typically receive in response to their battle wounds. Lasharen, for example, invokes a combat metaphor when she states, "I think of my changed body everyday and how I used to love looking at myself sans clothes THEN I had a 10 lb Ladybug … I barely look anymore. Now … I see my reflection in a new way. I am a warrior with battle scars to

prove it!" Kathy says, "I'm proud of my battle scars (reminders) of my strength and courage." Another commenter, Joanne, uses analogical reasoning to justify the combat metaphor taking shape on the site:

> If your husband went away to war for ten months, & came back with battle scars, would you think he looked ugly? Or would you see those scars as signs of his bravery, courage & a marker of a major life event? In the same way, you've gone through a lot to bring life into this world, it's a true miracle. As I saw on someone else's post, they're not stretch marks, they're tiger stripes & you've earned them!

Rather than viewing the female body as a passive vessel meant to be acted upon or adorned for the pleasure of others, these commenters depict the body as a powerful and active instrument performing meaningful action in a challenging context. This instrumental view of the body frames the photo as an empowered and even radical choice to resist societal images of beauty that are rooted in the male gaze. In addition, these comments struggle against the slender/fit ideal, which positions maternity as just a "bump in the road" (O'Brien Hallstein, 2015, p. 2), by instead depicting childbirth as a significant life event. Jessie, for example, refers to her stretch marks as "personal, permanent reminders of what magnificent things my body has accomplished!" For Jessie and other commenters, the changes experienced during pregnancy should not be the source of shame, but honor. As Kati writes, "Growing baby#4 right now and wearing my battle scars with pride." The commenters resist and work against the third shift of bodywork by using combat and war imagery to proudly embrace, rather than hide or erase, the myriad ways that women's bodies, as active instruments, have been changed by the meaningful act of childbirth.

We believe that the use of such imagery has liberatory dimensions in this particular context; however, we also recognize that viewing the body from a combat/war perspective has the potential to reinforce the notion that the maternal body is one destined for pain, which has implications for a culture increasingly informed by neoliberal logics. Mack (2016), for example, argues that the idea of enduring hardship in birth can lead to transcendence, self-sufficiency, and empowerment is made possible through a vision of masochistic motherhood. This masochistic motherhood is informed by the U.S. cultural mythos of the "self-made man," an ideology that dovetails together with contemporary discourses of neoliberalism to produce the ideal subject-citizen. The self-made person is grounded in the Puritan work ethic that sees pain and suffering as a route to self-optimization and transformation under capitalism. Extended to motherhood, these discourses enforce the view that "maternal bodies should see self-sacrifice and suffering as healthy and empowering" and "to be a good and healthy mother, citizen, and person" is "to be a masochistic child bearer, mother, and wife" (p. 61). Mothers' self-governance of the labor and pain of birth enables women, Mack argues, to see pain as a route to self-optimization and empowerment, which normalizes individual suffering instead of marking "suffering as symptomatic of conditions under capitalism," which could create "space for reframing individual suffering as collective suffering" (p. 63). We remain suspicious of masochistic motherhood discourses that seek to produce ideal citizen-subjects in part by normalizing and aggrandizing individual suffering and oppression; however, we believe that subversive potential exists in these commenters' remarks to the extent that they collectivize and mobilize a combat posture to assert agency and rise against a culture that enables the denigration of their postpartum bodies. In this sense, we might view these

commenters as appropriating the limited rhetorical resources of war discourses for their own subversive ends.

Body as a passive gift

In addition to the active, progressive "warrior" discourse that some women use to respond to "A Beautiful Body Project," another more conservative response seeks to redefine beauty, but does so in a way that evokes more traditional themes and roles for women. Leaning on a conservative Christian religious discourse, a discourse that historically has rendered women subservient to men, relegated them to the private sphere, and even silenced them, this approach sees babies as a blessing given by God and motherhood as a divine honor for women. For example, Thomas states, "God's finest creation: A woman. Pregnancy and motherhood: The divinest deed in the entire human life. It keeps the world going the right way. Wonderful project." For these participants, the mother's postpartum body should be perceived as beautiful because of the natural and "right" role the woman has played in God's order as traditional childbearer.

Though female voices far outnumbered male voices in the comment section, it is perhaps illuminating that when commenters presenting as male offer support, it is often cloaked in a patriarchal worldview that positions the maternal body as passive and pregnancy as a gift bestowed upon women by a benevolent masculine agent. Steven, for example, gives voice to the diversity of female bodies as he affirms childbirth as a manifestation of God: "As a man I have no problem with women that have stretch marks, some women get them … and some don't but I think its beautiful cause either way a baby was held in there and a baby is a beautiful gift from God." Similarly Jhon also posits a positive view of the postpartum body: "The footprints of life in a mother, express the love, the delivery, the sacrifice and the refusal to themselves … . Rewarded by the love of their children. There is no greater love, tha[n] he who gives. John 3:16." This writer invokes the softer terminology of "footprints"—perhaps invoking the Christian "Footprints in the Sand" poem—to describe the marks left behind on the mother's body as a result of the process of childbearing. Wrapped in a rhetoric of religion, the commenter refers to the New Testament scripture of John 3:16 as he posits mothering as a refusal of the self, providing limited agency to the mother as he valorizes a particular form of conservative Christian womanhood that historically has relegated women to second-class status as it has affirmed men as the natural and right leaders of their homes and the broader social world. In so doing, he pantomimes and reinforces the practice of intensive mothering—that of submitting all of oneself to child-rearing—and extends it to the body. However, in this articulation, the intensive mothering ideology reinforces and affirms the mother's body in its natural, everyday state, as a manifestation of woman's "proper" role in society: that of childbearer and nurturer. These commenters affirm women's postpartum bodies in all their diversity; however, this affirmation is coterminous with a conservative view of womanhood and motherhood in which babies are gifts from God and women's role in the process is somewhat decentered.

It must be noted that some commenters who present as female lean on this patriarchal worldview as well. For example, one commenter writes, "I wear my badges of motherhood proudly. I have 8 children and have badges from each to remind me of the beautiful honour of carrying and nurturing each of them." Another states, "This is amazing and more woman should be proud of their bodies like this—especially after the gift of life!" Women

invoking this view use words like *honor, gift,* and *blessing* to describe pregnancy and motherhood. Although there are differences between these various commenters, what draws them together is that they see the body in a more passive way—as a vessel that is used for ostensibly beautiful, righteous ends rather than as an active instrument.

Body as a sacred temple

A third type of response is more difficult to pin down as either active or passive and invokes some of both as commenters gesture toward revalorist feminism (Kinser, 2010). Rather than the more traditional and conservative "passive" language or the active language of warrior discourse, the responses that view the body as a sacred temple often employ a blend of the two in a "third way" language as they celebrate the power and uniqueness of women's life-giving capacity. Revalorist feminism honors "the experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering (or women's physical potential for such experiences) as a common source of knowledge and power among women" (Lindau, 2016, p. 71). Those who adopt this perspective see motherhood "as a special power rather than a burden," which has led to considerations of "women's physiological superiority" (p. 72). Further, revalorist feminists advocate "greater appreciation for what women have contributed within their traditional roles as mothers" (Kinser, 2010, p. 6).

The revalorist perspective highlights and reaffirms the power of women's bodies while also revering birth as a woman-centered domain. Comments that draw on this approach work to shift our cultural focus away from the aesthetics of the postpartum body and the third shift of bodywork to the potency and magic of pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering, which are unique, beautiful, and powerful domains of women. For example, drawing on an earthy, spiritual discourse, Stacey says:

> These children take great pride in knowing that they were lulled by the gentle murmur of my heart beat pulsing through the veins in my uterus, rocked by my womb as I danced with the wind and wrapped in blood and bone by the cells of this very sacred body temple. They honor, revere and recognize the great magic of our oneness.

Stacey's comment does much to radicalize our understanding of the postpartum body as she works to illuminate pregnancy, motherhood, and postpartumness from within women's bodily experience. She too views motherhood and postpartum embodiment as sacred, but this sacredness is rooted in the magical beauty of the woman's body and the unique experience of oneness she feels with her children as a result of her reproductive capacity. In a similar vein, Theresa celebrates the treasure of women's reproductive capacity and honors the imprint of motherhood on the body when she says of the photo, "how do I love this belly … . These hands that embrace this precious body home."

Women's unique capacity for childbirth and its demonstration of women's physical strength and power are honored by these commenters as they shift the focus away from the slender/fit ideal. Amy articulates this perspective as she subtly blends the first two strategies while gesturing toward revalorism: "It's a miracle that we can carry a life inside of us. [T]he scars are just reminders of the strength of a woman." Other commenters more overtly demonstrate this "third way" language. Bec writes, "as a mother, i carry my warrior markings with pride … they mark my journey to motherhood and the birth of my sacred blessings my children." Similarly, Nancie says, "I … am proud of my warrior scars and am so pleased to see this celebration of life!" These gestures toward revalorism have the

potential to be the most radical in their deep valuing of women's strength, diverse bodies, and bodily experiences. However, it is interesting to note that commenters were more likely to draw on combat metaphors and notions of traditional womanhood, which are informed by a patriarchal, rather than feminist, worldview. In addition, these discourses emerge to some degree also within the revalorist approach, demonstrating that even those elements of life as woman centered as childbirth and postpartum embodiment are still often colored by androcentrism.

Notably, commenters driven by these three sometimes very different ideologies do not seem to take issue with one another. As long as comments are supportive and positive, participants appear to see themselves as collaboratively working to redefine the beautiful postpartum body. Accomplishing this redefinition, however, may carry with it an unintended consequence of reifying what it means to be a "real mom" and a "real woman" as one who gives birth naturally and whose body bears the scars. For example, commenters exclaim, "I needed to see and read this today … go moms, real moms"; "I think this is fabulous … the sign of a REAL woman"; and "We are real women with real bodies!" While the intention of this discourse is to empower women, it also carries some problematic implications. In her critique of the Dove "Real Beauty" campaign, Murray (2013) notes that the myth of real beauty encourages women to undergo the additional labor of improving their self-esteem. Thus, "real" is not necessarily easy to acquire. Indeed, the myth of real beauty can be an oppressive ideology in its own right.

Defining what counts as a "real" mom and woman necessarily excludes some forms of mothering, divides women who could be allies in the struggle against the third shift, and obfuscates the ways in which the pressure to engage in a third shift of bodywork affects women across their differences. Are women who never give birth, whether in these circumstances or by choice, not "real women"? One commenter's claim that "nobody really knows but a mama" seems to foreclose the possibility that others could be allies in the project to redefine postpartum beauty. This reification of "real" motherhood divides women who resist slender/fit postpartum bodies from other kinds of parents among whom they might find allies: nonbirth parents, adoptive parents, fathers, and even some "fit moms." One commenter stops short of overt critique as she describes this divide and attempts to include herself in the definition of a "real mom" by saying: "Although I haven't birthed (adopted). Age creates its own marks—and I'm proud." In addition, women who have given birth but had their children adopted, or those who have had late miscarriages or stillbirths, could ostensibly have similar postpartum forms and yet no "badges" to show for it. These comments demonstrate the importance of this project to women of varying reproductive experiences, all of whom are subject to the pressures and constraints of bodywork. As Cynthia says, "I am not a mother and never will be. This photo speaks to us all."

Constructing a therapeutic community

Participants also use this online space to construct a therapeutic community where they support one another through sharing common experiences. Commenters frequently state that they have grappled with beauty norms imposed by loved ones, media representations, and the broader culture. These norms have created the context for self-loathing, which the participants are trying to work past. Comments reveal the results of a culture that

denigrates the imprint of maternity as participants share insecurities surrounding their bodies, referring to them as "ugly" and making them feel "embarrassed" and "ashamed." Their responses illustrate how Facebook users have engaged Beall's page as a discursive space to communicate their struggle against pressures from these varied sources while supporting one another in their journey away from internalized oppression.

Gaining a healthy perspective on the postpartum maternal body is important because beauty norms can cultivate harmful forms of self-loathing and internalized oppression that affect women's ability to function healthfully and purposefully in life. This is perhaps most powerfully articulated in the heart-wrenching stories commenters share about how significant others and acquaintances—who serve as potent and often cruel purveyors of ideological norms for beauty—have maligned their bodies. In this vein, we see this public space emerging as a site for sharing and processing hurtful messages. Demonstrating how standards of beauty can become a form of currency used to injure, Tracy states:

> Powerful stuff. I can totally relate and would love to participate. 5 years ago when my husband left me he said, "No man will want to sleep with you, you're over 40." And all I could think about were the stretch marks left by my kids, mostly from the son I had had 2 years before. I felt like no one besides the father of my kids could appreciate my body anymore and it hurt me terribly when he said that. I have, since then, come to some terms with my body but still find myself trying to hide my middle.

Tracy's message demonstrates how women's appearance can be positioned as the ostensible measure of their worth in a culture that valorizes youth and beauty and demonizes deviations from a largely unachievable norm.

By collectively expressing their struggle to become the authors of their own lives and bodies, commenters demonstrate how loved ones and acquaintances can worsen the wounds imposed by cultural norms while underscoring the importance of Beall's project to reclaim and redefine postpartum beauty. The following comment by Holli, for example, highlights how the uncritical adoption and articulation of beauty norms by her husband created lasting effects: "I will never forget that after I had my first child my husband and I were making love and he looked at my breasts and said … whew! … look at all those stretch marks! I never let him see me nude in daylight again." Later, Holli's husband tried to undo the discursive damage, but his efforts continued to invalidate: "Turns out after two more children he now says you know your stretch marks really aren't that bad. Too little too late." As Holli shares these discouraging comments from her husband, she does so in a community that understands and validates her concerns. Similarly, Nicky describes negative comments about her body made by an acquaintance: "Last Sunday, a man said to one of his friends about me, 'If you had seen her 15/20 years ago, she was hot. Today her body is deformed, she is unrecognizable.' I almost burst into tears. Your testimony gives me confidence in me." As commenters disclose these traumatic incidents in a supportive community, their narratives work to gain power over the personal and cultural discourses that seek to control how mothers view themselves. These narratives also create space for new ways of thinking and being. That a therapeutic sharing of experiences emerged in this forum suggests both the power and importance of Beall's project and that there is a need for a space where women can vocalize the harm that unrealistic beauty standards impose. It also demonstrates the need for mothers to invent their own narratives of postpartum maternal being outside of androcentric perspectives.

Other commenters interrogate and expose the deleterious affect of media images on their sense of embodiment. Speaking directly to the negative impact of celebrity mom images while she points to the ways Beall's project has transformed her thinking about her own embodiment, Janine states: "I have struggled to maintain an 'acceptable size and appearance' based on society and how celebrities look after birth. I have recently experienced a revelation!" Raiderette affirms Beall's effort as she reimagines how media representations of women could look if they took Beall's cue of embracing women's postpartum embodiment in all its diversity: "I wish this was advertised in magazines and on tv instead of those perfectly airbrushed women. They are not perfect. THIS is perfect." Another commenter extends this line of thinking: "If our collective society could see and promote the beauty of this woman instead of the airbrushed 'beauties' we're bombarded with in all types of media then maybe, just maybe they'd see that beauty is natural as is motherhood." Using Beall's project as a point of departure, these commenters extend the radical potential of her postpartum imagery by launching critiques of media representations of glamorized beauty while also reconceptualizing what we could be seeing in our broader media culture.

Pressure from loved ones, acquaintances, and the media is rendered highly visible as participants convey a range of stories explaining their inability to meet the narrow standard of beauty articulated by the broader culture. Many express gratitude for the project's resistance to such norms. Jaya infers this as she communicates the power of Beall's project to restore women to oneness and themselves: "ok i can relax and go to sleep now. I just jumped back into my body and heart." Invoking a maternal metaphor for the project as she expresses how she has wrestled with her changed body, Sarah states: "Tears of joy & empowerment … This woman is representing my stretched belly that i have been embarrassed & ashamed of for nearly 19 yrs & 5 kids later … i feel blessed to be able to witness the birth of this creation." Another participant verbalizes hope that young women might cultivate healthier relationships with their bodies as a result of this project as she conveys the ignominy she has felt: "I spent so many years ashamed of my body and it makes me happy that perhaps through your efforts and others like you, more young women can make peace with their new bodies and embrace them." Robin indicates that her negative feelings toward herself were so profound that they affected her sexual expression, but reflects that the project is giving her a new way to think: "I have stretch marks … and, yes, I [have] often thought of my body as ugly to the point of not sleeping with my husband, but you know what? You're right!" Robin affirms her enthusiasm for the goals of Beall's project—demonstrating that postpartum bodies are beautiful in all their shapes and conditions—and extends this logic to her own embodiment. As these commenters share their responses to Beall's effort, they simultaneously highlight the cultural pressures that exist while they work against the slender/fit ideal.

The project, and its ensuing commentary with the sharing of experiences, represents a form of consciousness raising that enables the women to recognize the commonality of their experiences and to rethink their position in the world. O'Brien Hallstein (2015) argues that consciousness raising is an important strategy in deconstructing the new momism, maternal body norms, and the celebrity mom profiles that seek to promote both (p. 189). One can witness the benefits of consciousness raising and the supportive climate that emerges in the thoughtful commentary between Miranda and Maria. Miranda laments the fact that beauty standards have distanced her from herself and have created a form of

self-contempt: "I've given birth to 3 beautiful children and I still don't like to look at myself in the mirror." She then expresses gratitude for the solidarity of the forum: "I'm tired of stressing about my body and I'm glad I'm not alone." In a gesture of support, Maria states: "No you're not alone Miranda. I have had four children." Similarly, Jo states that she had "an emergency C-section [and] I still look like a train wreck." She continues:

> Stretch marks are a result of genetics not creams or weight … The tissue damage will never go away and I have to come to terms with that because I too have been sold the lie that women should have perfect bodies no matter what we go through. Thank you for helping me in my journey of coming to terms with my different body.

These comments illuminate the collective struggles the women endure in a culture that requires women to conform to ever narrower standards of beauty despite the important life-giving work in which they engage. By coming together in this forum, the women recognize the systematic and collective nature of their struggle, and they support one another in breaking down postpartum body norms and resisting the third shift of bodywork. One participant attempts to capitalize on the energy emerging in this space. Stacey suggests transforming the momentum of the forum into a social movement in the broader culture, saying, "Lets set this movement ablaze!!! And re-inform this society of what we call BEAUTY … We as women can make HUGE changes just by telling our stories/releasing our stories and loving ourselves!"

These representative posts demonstrate the important rhetorical work that this project and public forum accomplishes by creating a supportive, affirming space that struggles against prevailing norms. In this space, the women come to terms with their changing bodies after childbirth in a culture that has been hesitant to embrace diverse representations of postpartum beauty. The space demonstrates the need for conversations like this to happen in the broader culture—not just for the women themselves, but to educate loved ones, friends, acquaintances, and producers of media, all of whom play an important role in women's interpretation of their bodies.

Resisting, missing, or ignoring the point

Although the preponderance of responses worked to support and extend Beall's ideas, some comments worked against the goal of the project by actively resisting, missing, or ignoring the point Beall was trying to communicate. Of course, as anyone who has perused a Facebook forum recognizes, any discussion has the potential to devolve into an argument. When a forum is attempting to affirm women's bodily diversity and subvert beauty norms, critical comments seem inevitable. It is important to note, however, that negative, sexist, or comments that miss the point of the project on this site are not pervasive. Currently, fewer than 15 of the 497 could be categorized in this way. There is evidence that there once were more egregious comments that have been policed by members and/or have since been deleted, probably after receiving the condemnation of members of the community. Photos that were posted at a later date in the photo album are headed by a message from Jade Beall with "*POSITIVE COMMENTS ONLY* thank you. If you are offended by this photograph, I honor your needs and I honor you un-liking my page." Although the origin picture that is the focus of this study does not bear this warning, it is possible that such framing and positioning by Beall may have discouraged some negative comments on later posts, but it did not cut them off entirely, and Beall let many of them stand. On the origin photo,

Beall polices particular negative commenters by calling them out. For example, Beall specifically names Travis, whose post cannot currently be found on the page:

> Poor Travis … Too bad it seems you don't have any real men in your life to be role models for how to respect a woman. One day, however, if you ever have a daughter and are lucky to become a grandfather, and some young fellow describes your daughter this way, will you give that guy a high-five and say "Way to go! Insult my daughter some more!"? But I bet you don't think about that? … But I bet it feels satisfying to type such insults? How fleeting the satisfaction is though and soon enough you will have to insult someone else to get that rush.

While the community's condemnation of negative comments likely discouraged some responses, others were posted nonetheless.

Several of the remaining negative comments seem to largely miss or ignore the point of the project and sought to rhetorically define the photo as gross and inappropriate by situating the body in the realm of the sexual/erotic rather than in the context of the life-generating potential of women. Crystal's comment bears a Victorian attitude toward the body: "I really hope that those r the moms elbows covering her boobs!! kinda disturbing that she is naked in front of pre-school aged kids, especially having her boobs in the kids face……dislike!" Similarly, Monica states, "those kids are too old to b with naked boobs in their faces." Mandy says, "Daughters mouth is a little close to a bare breast. Gross." These types of comments characterize mothers' uncovered bodies as sexual and therefore inappropriate to be seen by their children. Subsequent participants question this construction. For example, Sherita states:

> Sorry Mandy … after a child lives in you for months then slithers out covered in fluid pees, poos, and spits up on you. Then drinks milk that your body has produced in some magical way … not much is gross after that. #beautyofmotherhood I understand your point though its one of those things you can't fully comprehend until you become a mom.

Sherita strategically moves the discourse away from the sphere of sexuality and toward a discussion of the practicalities and beauty of motherhood. In this way, Sherita suggests that Mandy lacks the experience necessary to understand the normality and, indeed, banality of mothers being in the flesh in front of their children. Stacey provides a similar rhetorical approach, focusing readers' attention on mothers' life-giving capacity: "it is neither sexual or obscene, modest or private, it is undeniably life." Through this dialogic engagement, forum participants are given the opportunity to consider alternative ways of viewing the postpartum maternal body.

Unfortunately, some participants stubbornly characterize the picture as sexual by grounding their interpretation in a view of women as the object of the male gaze. Critiquing the fact that the picture features only the lower part of the mother's breasts, Emmanuel says, "Oooh no the photo is too short that's crazy." Similarly suggesting that this picture of the mother with her children should be serving a pleasure function for men, Mario states, "Why cut ou[t] the tits for? What's the point in that." These participants choose to see the picture as sexual and yet not titillating enough to serve their needs.

Another grouping of commentary that misses the point is rooted in a discourse of self-help in which participants offer unsolicited suggestions and strategies for self-improvement. For example, El-Gharbi, who appears to want to "help" these women, somewhat mechanically and paternalistically asserts, "[I]t is advisable to moms by general practitioners to engage in exercise to reduce these problems and in general there are good

results." Wrapped in positive regard for what he posits as his ambitious wife, Kevin is more colloquial and condescending with his advice as he frames those who do not achieve the slender/fit postpartum body as lacking motivation:

> Hit the gym they will go away with a little help. My wife gave birth to our son a year and a half ago. She is in better shape now then pre preggo, used skincerity to get rid of the stretch marks. All while taking care of the lil guy by herself, as I work away from home three weeks at a time. It takes a little drive, don't accept what happened as trophies get off the couch and change.

Referencing Skincerity, a product that he later reveals his wife sells, Kevin resists and lodges criticism against those participants who seek to reclaim and redefine the postpartum maternal body as an active instrument. Instead, he draws on third-shift, neoliberal logic to assert that mothers are lazy if they do not "get off the couch," "hit the gym," and purchase products that will enable them to inhabit a body that meets contemporary beauty standards. Kevin thus insists upon his male gaze as the proper lens through which women's bodies should be viewed.

However, Kevin then becomes the object of critique, as several commenters take him to task for his "advice." For example, Pamela states, "Oh Kevin! What a supreme jackass you are! Stretch marks are permanent and no amount of lotions or cremes will get rid of them … Only time will help them fade." Ulrike suggests the locus of the problem is in Kevin: "Kevin instead of getting rid of her stretch marks (that are permanent by the way) she should get rid of such an ignorant husband! I'm really speechless." Brandy calls Kevin a "weirdo" and a "selfish arse" who should be thanking his partner "that she gave up a precious youthful stomach for you guys to have a family … something way more important than a perfect stomach anyway." In a remarkable move, these commenters rally and vigorously rise up against Kevin's imposition of the slender/fit ideal and the third shift of bodywork.

Although Beall and her attendant Facebook community combine efforts in a variety of ways to wrest the image of postpartum beauty out of the realms of the celebrity media, reclaim postpartum beauty in all its diversity, and provide consciousness raising and support to one another, Kevin's remarks illustrate that the community is not sheltered from the dominance of the male gaze when it comes to disciplining women's bodies. However, their shared resistance against ideas like this form part of the project to reclaim and redefine the postpartum body. When Beall set out to add her photographic art to her Facebook page with the goal of affirming the diversity of women's bodies, she could not have predicted exactly how an active community of commenters would form not only to appreciate the art and its intent but also to further her act of resistance through their discourse.

Reclaiming the postpartum body

The postpartum body is often framed as wounded and pathetic—the ostensibly rightful subject of public and private shaming—rather than as accomplished and impressive. Beall questions and rejects this framing by affirming the postpartum body in all its shapes and conditions, while a preponderance of commenters support this effort. As Beall and commenters work to redefine postpartum beauty and cultivate a therapeutic community that supports postpartum bodies in all their diversity, we argue that they rise against the third shift. They do so by refusing to affirm the normalized slender/fit postpartum ideal and by rejecting the third shift of energizing bodywork that is required to obtain that ideal.

However, the fact that there also is resistance to this progressive approach in such an otherwise affirming environment demonstrates the strength of the third-shift imperative.

The insurrection that Beall inspires, and which gains momentum via the commenters, occurs in part through consciousness raising on the site, which O'Brien Hallstein states is a crucial aspect of resisting third-shift imperatives. This study adds to O'Brien Hallstein's findings by identifying the rhetorical strategies used in this context to resist the slender/fit postpartum ideal. In particular, we find that the commenters reclaim and redefine the postpartum maternal body in three main ways that possess three potentially conflicting ideologies. While these ideologies might clash in other contexts, supportive commenters from these different perspectives focus on their similarities instead of their differences. Together, in their varied ways, they work to affirm the beauty in the diversity of postpartum embodiment while moving against a normalized slender/fit postpartum ideal. By alternatively valuing "tiger stripes," the "footprints of life," and the "sacred body temple," these varying approaches operate in tandem to affirm the postpartum body in whatever shape it takes. Thus, they eschew the third shift required to craft the normalized ideal and resist the fashionable "glamour labor" that exists in our digital age. Can something be learned from this generous climate—in which commenters employing varying ideologies converge in support of this project—that could be instructive in future work to empower women and reclaim notions of diverse embodied beauty? As women's rights and status come under renewed attack in a concerning political climate, the response to Beall's project suggests that engaging broad coalitional support, however difficult and imperfect, may be an important and necessary avenue of activism moving forward.

We also observe that the site is a space where many commenters constructed a therapeutic community. In the dialogic engagement that ensued subsequent to Beall's call, the commenters used this space to express their personal struggles to move beyond narrowly defined postpartum beauty norms. The commenters revealed in intimate terms that these norms, which they demonstrated were promoted in both public and private discourses, had contributed to varying forms of self-loathing. In this space, the commenters worked to express, share, and resolve these feelings with the support of other commenters. As they did so, they further laid the groundwork for rising against the third shift by demonstrating the harm of the slender/fit ideal and their desire to resist this imposition on their daily lives.

Finally, we recognize that some commenters resisted, missed, or ignored the point of the project. They did so through stubbornly viewing the body as purely sexual, existing for the male gaze, and in need of improvement. These commenters demonstrated the ideological and cultural force of the slender/fit postpartum body in particular and of woman's body as the subject of the male gaze in general. In other words, this theme points to the strength of the third shift of bodywork both in terms of the broader culture's conceptualization of postpartum idealized bodies and in terms of the practices advanced to achieve the slender/fit ideal. That such comments appeared on a page whose stated purpose was to affirm postpartumness in all its diversity suggests how resistant some elements of society are to such a reclamation.

A more disappointing insight centers around commenters' construction of "real moms" and "real women" as ones who exhibit postpartum flaws. In the well-intentioned quest to frame postpartum women's bodies as beautiful, rather than resisting only the perfect celebrity bikini-ready mom bodies as the standard against which all should be measured, the commenters also exclude potential allies. Must reclaiming the postpartum body as

beautiful in a diversity of forms include setting up a dichotomy between "real" women/mothers and others? Certainly, there are ways to move beyond knotty binaries to celebrate all of our bodies for their amazing service and function, rather than just how they look.

Women's embodiment has long been shaped and controlled by others. Our analysis underscores the continued importance of women striving to be the authorities of their own bodies in a controlling and invalidating cultural context. While legislatures scramble to control women's bodies by passing antiwoman legislation, the culture industries shape how we view and evaluate women's embodiment. As women grapple with the prospect of living by their own terms—a radical act in such a controlling culture—they need discursive, political, and cultural spaces to cultivate and promote such expression and ways of being. Beall's project has, perhaps unwittingly, become such a cultural space. While Beall's project is, at its base, a commercial one, albeit fueled by her personal passion and compassion, it appears to have meaningful political potential. We believe that this important cultural project might be productively harnessed and expanded further by those whose aims are substantive political change that works in the service of promoting women's bodies as active, powerful, self-determining instruments, not instruments of their own oppression. As maternity has shown us, women are warriors, with the scars to prove it; and in this sociopolitical climate the new third shift should consist of women fighting for themselves and for one another.

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