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## Contemporary Motherhood at the Epicenter of Intersecting Cultural Changes

### *The Neoliberal and Post-Second Wave Turns*

Instead of blaming society, moms today tend to blame themselves. They say they've chosen poorly. And so they take on the Herculean task of being absolutely everything to their children, simply because *no one else is doing anything at all to help them*.

—Judith Warner, par. 22, italicized in original

The position of the body within contemporary culture is indicative of a degree of *reflexivity* towards the body and identity that is, arguable, without precedent.

—Chris Shilling, 2, italics in the original

The Introduction began to make the case that the structure of contemporary celebrity mom profiles has changed: the maternal body is the central feature now and, as a result, this key change also suggests that the new momism—the hegemonic “good” mothering ideology—is also changing.<sup>1</sup> Before proceeding to how this change works rhetorically in actual profiles to discover the norms and rules of the new celebrity mom profiles,<sup>2</sup> this chapter addresses *why* the structure of celebrity mom profiles has shifted in response to changing economic and societal factors associated with the neoliberal and post-second wave turns that are at the epicenter of contemporary motherhood. Thus, this chapter is primarily theoretical and weaves

together a variety of conceptual issues and concerns in the service of my contention that the intersecting post-second wave and neoliberal turns are the primary cause for why both the new momism and the celebrity mom profiles that reinforce and romanticize the new momism have both changed.

In fact, after exploring and detailing how the new momism has intensified, I then argue that the conflicting currents now embedded in our post-second wave and neoliberal context are entangled such that the second wave feminist rhetoric of choice is now fundamentally linked to neoliberal choice, individualism, and individual responsibility generally and specifically in the context of contemporary motherhood. Equally important, I also suggest that today the general solution offered for the post-second wave crisis is a neotraditional family configuration: a “new” sophisticated-looking, even progressive appearing, family configuration that continues to place the burden of childrearing on mothers, while also serving as a “foil and a shield” that ultimately erodes many of the gains in the public sphere that unencumbered women enjoy. Finally, I conclude this theoretical chapter by elaborating further on the newfound importance of the body and gendered body panic that have also emerged at these crosscurrents. I do so to substantiate further my argument that the maternal body has become the key symbol and embodiment of contemporary motherhood, and, as a result, celebrity mom profiles now make the maternal body the central feature to further reinforce and promote the newfound role and importance of the maternal body in contemporary maternal subjectivity and contemporary “good” motherhood.

### The Intensification of Intensive Mothering

At the same time that celebrity mom profiles are changing, intensive mothering, or what Douglas and Michaels called *the new momism*, is intensifying by becoming even more demanding of mothers; and, these two changes are related. As noted in the Introduction, Douglas and Michaels’ understanding of the new momism draws on sociologist Sharon Hays’ 1996 work on what she termed *intensive mothering* in her landmark book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. As a review, Douglas and Michaels’ argued that the new momism is the

normative or ideal “good” mothering ideology in affluent Western countries, especially in America. This “good mothering” ideology rests on three core beliefs and values: “the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children” (Douglas and Michaels 4). As a result, the new momism has always been a demanding approach to mothering that is child-centered and requires mothers always to be responsive in terms of their interactions with their children and professional in terms of their concerted efforts to ensure that their children develop into happy, emotionally and physically healthy, and appropriately ethical children and future adults. In addition to being child-centric in that a child’s needs are always to take precedence over a mother’s needs, from the beginning, intensive mothering expectations (IME) are also expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive. As such, intensive mothering requires mothers to bring professional-level skills to their mothering, while also presuming and promoting at least middle-class economic standing, values, and beliefs. Finally, although not all mothers practice intensive mothering, the intensive mothering ideology and the embedded expectations promote a system of beliefs and values about what “good mothers” ought to do and, as a result, mothers who are unable or unwilling to meet IME risk being labeled as *bad mothers*.

Hays also argued, and Douglas and Michaels concurred, that intensive mothering began in the 1980s to redomesticate women through motherhood as more and more women took advantage of the large-scale social, legal, and gender changes brought about the 1960s and 1970s social movements, particularly by feminist groups advocating for gender equality between men and women. Indeed, as more and more women became educated and entered the labor force, while also delaying motherhood to establish their career, 1980s and 1990s media stories promoted good mothering values and beliefs while warning about the consequences of bad mothering. Indeed, IME were embedded in media representations of mothers, particularly in terms of maternal advice, marketing, and news stories about children being abducted and/or molested while at day-care, and in TV stories and news reports about children being taken

away from bad mothers: neglectful, welfare, and/or drug-addicted mothers. Douglas and Michaels suggested, however, that celebrity mom profiles have played the most important role in reinforcing and romanticizing intensive mothering and regulating the behavior of mothers and women into IME.

More recently, however, scholars and writers (Bianchi et al.; Coontz; Lee, Sharon; Nelson; Rosenfeld and Wise; Lovejoy and Stone; Villalobos; Warner; Wolf) are arguing that intensive mothering is intensifying and contemporary mothers are doing even more mothering rather than less, even though more and more American women are working. Indeed, Pamela Stone and Meg Lovejoy suggest that the contemporary reality is “that most college-educated mothers in the USA are working (Boushey 2008) and recent cohorts of college-educated mothers are more, not less, likely to be working than ever before (Percheski 2008)” (632). Drawing on Bianchi et al., Ana Villalobos also argues, “There is broad consensus that mothering has intensified during the last four or five decades. Although women’s paid work hours have increased during precisely the same decades, mothers paradoxically spend more time with their children now than they did in 1965” (6–7). Working mothers are also far more actively engaged with their children than full-time mothers were in previous generations (Bianchi et al.; Lee, Sharon; Lovejoy and Stone; *Mother Outlaws* O’Reilly; Villalobos; Wolf). Moreover, financially, families, especially mothers, are investing in and spending more than ever before on their children, while also being more emotionally absorbed by and in their relations with their children (Coontz; Rosenfeld and Wise). By 2007, the Pew Research Center reported: “There is broad agreement among the public that it is harder to be a parent today—especially a mother—than it was in the 1970s or 1980s. Fully 70% of the public says it is more difficult to be a mother today than it was 20 or 30 years ago, while somewhat fewer (60%) say the same about being a father” (“Motherhood Today” par. 1).

Contemporary sociologists (Lareau; Nelson; Villalobos) suggest that economic changes and anxiety also play key factors in the more recent intensification. In *Parenting Out of Control*, for example, Margaret Nelson proposes that the economy and fears of “downward mobility” are central components of the intensification, especially for privileged middle-class families. For these parents, economic uncertainties and worries, specifically the fear of children not getting

ahead and/or maintaining their class position, are fueling a more intensive approach to mothering, especially for privileged middle-class mothers. In fact, Nelson documents how a fear of downward mobility can drive professional parents into “out of control” child surveillance and micro-management<sup>3</sup> to ensure the children have every opportunity to still “get ahead” or maintain their class position. Similarly, Annette Lareau argues that economically privileged mothers respond to this anxiety by taking an intensive “managerial approach” to mothering to ensure a successful future for their children.

The managerial approach is time-intensive and requires finding, securing, scheduling, and shuttling children to the appropriate classes, activities, and/or extra support that experts now deem as necessary for developing healthy children and, equally important, ensuring children’s class and economic success. In her own work and also addressing why intensification is happening now, Villalobos suggests another factor is insecurity. As she suggests, “I argue that these historical trends [a culture of fear and economic insecurity] are related and that, as families have felt increasingly under threat (and less and less protected by social safety nets and other forms of support), they have pinned their hopes on intensive mothering as the security solution for their own individual families” (9). In short, even though both Douglas and Michaels and Hays argued that intensive mothering was labor intensive, this more recent scholarship suggests that intensive mothering is continuing to be refined and developed such that *it is even more demanding* for mothers than it was when scholars first named and detailed *intensive mothering*. This intensification does not mean, however, that the three core principles of the new momism have changed. Rather, the core principles have only become more demanding and exacting for mothers and require mothers to devote even more time and energy to their mothering and children in order to be “good” mothers. What has changed, then, is that contemporary motherhood requires mothers to have and utilize yet more energy to meet the even-more demanding requirements of good mothering today.

I maintain that this intensification and the need for even more energy from mothers are at the epicenter of understanding the changing and new landscape of contemporary motherhood and celebrity mom profiles. In particular, though I agree with the

sociological explanations, I also contend that another critical factor in the intensification, which is also fundamentally linked to why celebrity mom profiles have changed in structure, is that contemporary motherhood is now unfolding squarely at the intersection of the post-second wave and neoliberal turns. As a result, this intersection is a significant contributing reason why intensive mothering has intensified and, equally important, is also why the structure of celebrity mom profiles has changed. Villalobos's writing even hints at the importance of this intersection when she notes that families are "less protected by social safety nets and other forms of support," and, as a result, are "pinning" solutions on individual families, requiring even more from mothers rather than less. I concur with Villalobos and also suggest that our contemporary intersecting neoliberal and postfeminist context is a primary cause for the lack of social safety nets and, equally important, this context is the key reason why solutions—both security and "having it all"—are being "pinned" on individual families. In short, I suggest that another compounding factor for the intensification, which is also tied to the key economic and societal changes that O'Reilly suggests ideologies of good motherhood have always been tied to, are the contemporary economic and social trends that have emerged at the intersection of the post-second wave and neoliberal turns that now undergird both the new structure of celebrity mom profiles and contemporary motherhood. I now turn to making this case.

Intersecting Cultural Changes:  
The Neoliberal and Post-Second Wave Turns

*The Post-Second Wave Turn*

Presently, American motherhood is now sitting at the cross currents of the neoliberal and post-second wave turns such that neoliberal principles and sensibilities of individualism, individual responsibility, and choice are now entangled with postfeminist rhetoric of and ideas about reproductive choice and gender equality in ways that, ultimately, make contemporary motherhood and IME even more demanding for mothers. In fact, in an American context, neoliberal

principles became entangled with post-second wave feminist ideas, in part because both emerged at the same time historically. Indeed, the neoliberal turn in the United States coincided with a “post-second wave turn”: the shift from asking for gender change to living with the results of second wave feminist gains. Although debates remain about how exactly to define second- and third wave feminisms and whether it is appropriate to describe the second wave as “over” or “continuing,” I prefer, following Bonnie Dow’s lead, to understand the second wave as “history,” with both ongoing problems and possibilities for contemporary culture. Indeed, drawing on the work of both Dow and Evans, I understand white second wave feminism as feminism of the 1960s and through the 1970s that was primarily but not exclusively organized by and around white, middle-class women who focused on securing equal rights for women—their “sisters”—with men and is generally marked as ending with the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982. Moreover, at least within white American feminism, the 1980s through the mid-1990s is viewed as the time when American culture, women, and feminists began to live with the successes of and backlash against second wave feminist gains.

In terms of second wave feminist gains, it is irrefutable that second wave feminisms had many successes that transformed women’s lives. As I have argued elsewhere (*White Feminists*), the Women’s History section of *The Encyclopedia Britannica* online summarizes these successes succinctly:

Women gained access to jobs in every corner of the U.S. economy, and employers with long histories of discrimination were required to provide timetables for increasing the number of women in their workforces. Divorce laws were liberalized; employers were barred from firing pregnant women; and women’s studies programs were created in colleges and universities. Record numbers of women ran for—and started winning—political office. In 1972, Congress passed Title IX of the Higher Education Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in any educational program receiving federal funds and thereby forced all-male schools to open their doors to women and athletic programs

to sponsor and finance female sports teams. And in 1973, in its controversial ruling on *Roe v. Wade*, the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion. (50)

Undeniably, then, by the 1980s and continuing today, privileged women began to live as second wave beneficiaries: women who took advantage of the changes brought about by second wave feminism, whether or not they identified as feminist. At the same time, however, the early backlash against second wave gains emerged, particularly during the 1980s, as Douglas and Michaels and others (Dow; Evans; Hays; Hirsch and Fox Keller; Katzenstein; McRobbie *The Aftermath*) also suggest. One of the primary reasons for this backlash was the conservative political and social climate that were the hallmarks of the Reagan presidency in the 1980s. Mary Katzenstein also summarizes this climate: “The decade of the 1980s was distinctive for ten uninterrupted years of antifeminist, antiliberal, self-identified conservative presidential administrations” (30). Moreover, Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller concur: “no discussion of either feminism or feminist theory in the 1980s can begin without at least acknowledging the hostility of the larger political, economic, and cultural climate which we have had to endure” (1). From the 1980s on, then, the post-second wave context simultaneously acknowledged and refuted second wave gains, while also beginning to be entangled with the 1980s social and economic “Reagan Revolution.”

#### *The U.S. Neoliberal Turn*

In fact, as a result, I also assert that the post-second wave turn intersected and became entangled with the neoliberal turn in the United States that was first implemented in earnest during the so-called Reagan Revolution. David Harvey marks the beginning of the “neoliberal turn” in the United States in 1979. He argues that it began in 1979 when Paul Volker, “engineered a draconian shift in US monetary policy. The long-standing commitment in the US liberal democratic state to the principles of the New Deal, full employment as the key objective, was abandoned in favour of policy designed to quell inflation no matter what the consequences might be for employment” (23). But, Harvey and other scholars (Bezanson and Luxton; Brown; Craven; Miller, Antonio, and Bonanno; Vavrus) also



argue that neoliberal thinking and economic policy took off in earnest with Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. As Harvey puts it, "The Reagan administration then provided the requisite political backing through further deregulation, tax cuts, budget cuts, and attacks on trade union and professional power" (25). These trends gained ground and accelerated through the 1990s, particularly in terms of reducing welfare and social policies (Brown; Lee, Sharon; McRobbie *The Aftermath*). And, this neoliberal turn spread. Thus, as Sharon Heijin Lee argues today, "Globally, neoliberal policies have spread over the last 30 years under the US leadership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, albeit unevenly" (50).

Within the American context, then, neoliberal rationalities have become pervasive in all parts of society. Wendy Brown, in fact, suggests "Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player" (italics in original, par. 7). Writing about contemporary American culture, Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton suggest that one consequence of this infusion of neoliberal sensibilities is that individuals are now held responsible for their circumstances, even if they are impoverished or unemployed. As they put it: "Neoliberalism emphasizes free markets, decreased state regulation of capital, lower direct taxes, and an approach that sees the individual, rather than the market, as blameworthy for poverty and unemployment" (4). The centrality of individualism is also noted by Kati Kauppinen who argues, quoting Butterwegge et al., "In this respect one of the key features of neoliberalism is individualism, as manifest both in the crucial idea of 'actions of groups and collectives only being reducible to the goals, attitudes and performance of individuals'" (86). Thus, the neoliberal turn represents an ideological shift away from Keynesian economic policies, which saw the state playing an active role in market regulation and social provisions, to an emphasis on free markets, decreased state regulation, and a shift from the "public good" to "individual responsibility."

Two key consequences in the public sphere of the neoliberal focus on individualism and individual responsibility are an emphasis on freedom of choice and the fundamental assumption of the equal capacity of individuals to make fully "free" choices. As Stuart Hall

puts it: “Neoliberalism is grounded in the ‘free, possessive individual’ with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive. The welfare state, in particular, is the arch enemy of freedom” (par. 3). The language and key idea of second wave feminism that is most often invoked with neoliberalism is *choice*. In fact, recent feminist scholarship on the rhetoric of choice (Craven; Douglas and Michaels; Hayden and O’Brien Hallstein; Stone; Vavrus) also reveals the central role choice—contemporary women’s ability to control reproduction such that motherhood is now considered a woman’s choice—plays in contemporary women’s understanding of femininity and motherhood. Indeed, as I noted in the Introduction, Douglas and Michaels argued that the choice to “do it all” is already embedded in post-second wave understandings of femininity and motherhood.

Social problems, then, are seen as outside the purview of the state and instead individuals need to take responsibility for solving their own “problems” via their own good choices. Or, as Harvey argues:

each individual is held accountable for his or her own actions and well-being. . . . Individual success or failure is interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings (such as not investing significantly enough in one’s own human capital through education) rather than being attributed to any systemic property (such as the class exclusions usually attributed to capitalism). (65–66)

Consequently, neoliberalism extends and disseminates market values to all institutions and social action, while also individualizing and privatizing social problems via individual choices. Including, as I argue next, in contemporary motherhood.

### Contemporary Motherhood at the Epicenter of the Post-Second Wave and Neoliberal Turns

Contemporary American motherhood is at the epicenter of these post-second wave and neoliberal crosscurrents and sensibilities. Equally important, contemporary American women who came of

age at the center of the intersection between the neoliberal and post-second wave turns employ a kind of maternal agency that integrates both neoliberal and post-second wave ideas, especially in relation to individualism, choice, and the assumption of privatizing social problems. One consequence is that many contemporary mothers now believe that family life and the post-second wave crisis in femininity can and should be resolved via their own individual choices in the private sphere, and the next two chapters show that celebrity mom profiles cultivate and reinforce these beliefs.

For now, however, it is important to reveal just how much American motherhood now draws on notions of individualism, choice, and privatization of social problems. Addressing why many contemporary mothers in their thirties and forties are apolitical and assume they must solve any difficulty they face as mothers on their own, Judith Warner's (*Mommy Madness*) work reveals these connections well. Warner argues, "Good daughters of the Reagan Revolution, we disdained social activism and cultivated our own gardens with a kind of muscle-bound, tightly wound, über-achieving, all-encompassing, never-failing self-control that passed, in the 1980s, for female empowerment" (par. 12). Also raised to be independent and self-sufficient and deferring motherhood for a career as post-second wave beneficiaries, many contemporary mothers integrate second wave feminist ideas of female independence and self-sufficiency with neoliberal principles in their contemporary understanding of motherhood. Again, talking about contemporary American mothers, Warner is helpful here when she argues, "They've been bred to be independent and self-sufficient. To rely on their own initiative and 'personal responsibility.' To *privatize* their problems" (italicized in original par. 21).

Another significant consequence of being "good Reagan daughters" and "good second wave beneficiaries" is that contemporary mothers blame themselves and/or hold themselves responsible for any difficulty they experience mothering. Moreover, mothers do so because they have been disciplined to assume that the problems they face result from their own poor choices. As Warner argues, "Instead of blaming society, moms today tend to blame themselves. They say they've chosen poorly. And so they take on the Herculean task of being absolutely everything to their children, simply because *no one*

*else is doing anything at all to help them*" (italicized in original par. 22). Feminist scholars (Kauppinen; Thompson; Vavrus) who explore neoliberalism and contemporary representations of motherhood also suggest mothers blame themselves when women fail to succeed in "juggling it all." As Vavrus puts it, noting how second wave feminist ideas are also entangled with self-blame and the postfeminist fallacy that feminism is no longer needed, "if women fail to succeed under these conditions [postfeminist conditions], they have only themselves to blame (such 'failures' are often explained using the language of Second Wave feminism)" (49).

*Contemporary Motherhood's Double Entanglement:  
The Struggle to "Have it All"*

I assert, then, that for many American mothers, especially privileged women who have taken full advantage of the educational and professional opportunities that opened up to already privileged women after second wave feminism, contemporary motherhood now sits squarely at the epicenter of conflicting and intersecting cultural changes and ideologies brought about by the post-second wave and neoliberal turns. Indeed, as the previous discussion suggests, post-second wave beneficiaries have been "bred to be independent," to rely on their own initiative, personal responsibility, and good choices. At the same time, however, once they become mothers, post-second wave neoliberal mothering *now* coexists with *unchanged* values in the private sphere in relation to gender and family-life management and responsibilities that continue to suggest that mothers still have primary responsibility for childrearing and family-life management. Thus, as I noted in the Introduction, many American women fully realize these double entanglements and conflicting crosscurrents when they first begin to struggle to have it all, juggle it all, do it all, and/or find balance between their roles as mothers and professionals. And, as I argued in the Introduction, this is also the moment when the post-second wave crisis in femininity emerges most fully for many contemporary women.

The most obvious place, then, that the having-it-all struggle emerges is within the so-called work-life balance dilemma: the struggle to "juggle" or balance work commitments in the public

sphere in relation to childrearing and care responsibilities in the private sphere. Moreover, the issue of balance is also a uniquely post-second wave issue. As Rosemary Crompton and Clare Lyonette note:

Until the closing decades of the twentieth century, the question of work-life “balance” was perceived as relatively unproblematic because of two widespread assumptions: (a) the “standard worker” was full-time and usually a man, and (b) women were conventionally assigned to the unpaid labour of caring and domestic work (Crompton, 1999). Thus a “balance” between market (employment) and caring work was resolved via the domestication of women, coupled, to varying degrees, with their formal and informal exclusion from market work. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, this arrangement is in the process of re-articulation and attitudes to and policy perspectives on women’s employment have undergone a profound transformation. (379)

Today many women are now “standard workers,” working full time. Unchanged, however, as scholars (Crittenden; Stone; Williams) have shown decisively, is that workplace organizing assumptions continue to be based on a masculine model that assumes that full-time workers—whether male or female—are unencumbered by family responsibilities.

This means that assumption two has not changed: women continue to be assigned to the unpaid labor of caring and domestic work. To put it another way: while attitudes and perspectives on women’s employment have transformed as a result of second wave feminist gains, “standard worker assumptions” and women’s ongoing domestic and childcare responsibilities have not. Additionally, because women now have even more domestic, childrearing, and childcare responsibilities and affordable, reliable childcare remains elusive in the public sphere, many American mothers find themselves struggling on a daily basis to try to meet their obligations at home and at work and, more often than not, ground solutions in their own individual choices.

The role choice now plays in mothers' lives is confirmed, in fact, by Pamela Stone's recent work. In the context of high-achieving privileged women's lives, for example, Stone notes that many of the 54 women she interviewed relied on what she refers to as *choice feminism*—a form of third wave feminism that emphasizes individualism, personal choices, and personal agency—in describing their decision to quit working when they faced work-life balance issues. As Stone reports, “choice rhetoric—phrases such as ‘active choice,’ ‘professional choice’—studded their interviews, appearing in 70 percent of them and implicit in others” (113). While Stone calls this *choice feminism*, Sharon Lee refers to it as *neoliberal feminism*. As Lee argues, neoliberal feminism equates female empowerment with consumer choice (56). Thus, the second wave rhetoric of reproductive choice has become intertwined with neoliberalism's understanding of choice and individual responsibility generally in the context of motherhood and more specifically within the context of having it all and managing the post-second wave crisis in femininity.

#### *Everyday Conversations about “Having It All”*

The preceding argument that the intersecting post-second wave and neoliberal discourses of choice, individualism, and individual responsibility converge such that the only “normal” and “natural” solutions to having-it-all struggles center on women's post-second wave neoliberal choices has primarily been theoretical. The proliferation of the intersecting neoliberal and post-second wave ideologies, however, are also now “common sense” in contemporary culture, particularly in the context of “everyday conversations” about having it all. Harvey argues that, in order to understand fully just how much neoliberal rationalities have proliferated in the United States and become hegemonic or commonsense ideologies, we must “look to . . . qualities of everyday experience” (40–41). Recently, much discussion has emerged in the popular press in the United States about motherhood and having it all, and this discussion reveals just how much post-second wave neoliberal choice, individualism, and personal responsibility are currently common sense and embedded in contemporary American culture and conversations about contemporary motherhood at the intersection of the post-second wave and neoliberal turns.

A June 12, 2012, *New York Times* article, “Motherhood Still a Cause for Pay Inequity,” by Eduardo Porter, for example, implicitly addresses the post-second wave crisis women face and the ways that individual responsibility and choice are tangled up with contemporary motherhood. Noting ongoing pay inequity for women, while also explicitly recognizing how much more similar men and women’s lives are in the public sphere, Porter argues, “Most economists believe the gap between women’s and men’s wages does not stem primarily from employers paying women less than men for the same job. . . . Much, though, is a result of the constraints of motherhood” (par. 6). Consequently, Porter suggests that obvious or overt gender discrimination is not the primary issue; rather, the primary issue is mothers’ choices. As he puts it, “But outright sex discrimination has declined sharply, most economists agree. Today, women’s career choices—constrained by the burdens of motherhood and family—account for most of the pay gap between women and men” (par. 11). Moreover, after the recent publication of Anne-Marie Slaughter’s *Atlantic Monthly* cover article, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” where Slaughter argued that American women still cannot have it all due to professional and social barriers, Ellen Galinsky, president of the Families and Work Institute, was asked in a National Public Radio hour-long show devoted to the *Atlantic Monthly* article, why the article was getting so much press attention, particularly because issues of work-life balance have been discussed among women for a long time. Galinsky’s response: “Everybody thinks of it as a personal problem[,] and that they have to solve that problem” (Transcript par. 7).

Equally revealing is the way the online responses to Porter’s article invoked and used the rhetoric of choice and individual responsibility. While there were some more nuanced and thoughtful responses, most respondents, who addressed issues related to Porter’s call for public policy changes to accommodate mothers, rejected the public policy suggestions and did so by drawing on neoliberal and post-second wave understandings of choice and individual responsibility in the private sphere. In addition to being grounded in the rhetoric of choice, “TS,” for example, suggests, “If women want more successful careers, they should demand partners who will equally share domestic responsibilities. Dividing the burden of childcare is a personal choice made between the parents, and if one assumes more

responsibility than the other, that parent's career will likely suffer. Why should any employer or coworker [sic] have to make up for that?" (June 12, 2012, comment 3). A grammatically incorrect comment by Anne Ingram also concurs that, because motherhood is a choice, professional institutions need not support working mothers. As she puts it: "My feeling is that if you have kids, [sic] that is your business. don't [sic] bring it into the workplace and make other people compensate for you. it's [sic] your choice and your problem" (June 12, 2012, comment 16). These comments are crystal clear and continue to confirm that the general solution to having it all is grounded in contemporary mothers' choices, and, if any individual woman is having difficulty "juggling it all," then, it is her "choice and her problem," her personal responsibility to manage in the private sphere.

As a result, because American motherhood is now founded on an intersecting post-second wave and neoliberal foundation, today, motherhood is understood as a personal, individual choice for women. Among other things, this means that American mothers' relationship to contemporary society has continued to change because of this intersecting foundation. Writing about reality television and neoliberal ideas, Mary Thompson argues, "neoliberal ideologies that rely on notions of the individual, 'free choice,' and individual responsibility, have emerged as a new mode of expressing the changing relationships of the individual to 'neoliberal' society" (337–338). Thompson's ideas also apply to contemporary motherhood: post-second wave women's contemporary relationship to society has fundamentally changed from one of *maternal destiny* to *post-second wave neoliberal maternal choice*. The implications of this shift are both freeing—unencumbered women's lives are more and more similar to unencumbered men's lives in the public sphere—and problematic—women's encumbered lives in the private sphere continue to be shaped by maternal responsibilities, responsibilities that are now viewed as women's "free" post-second wave *and* neoliberal choice.

Contemporary maternal choice that sits at the conflicting and intersecting neoliberal and post-second wave turns, however, primarily works *as a postfeminist neoliberal rationality* because it depoliticizes the second wave feminist politics of choice by suggesting that the public sphere is no longer sexist; and, if the family is,



then, it is a result of women's choice to have and/or to make those sexist arrangements. As "TS" suggested: if family life is problematic because women are not getting enough support at home, then, women are to blame for their poor choices, not ongoing gender-power structures in both the private and public spheres. This intersection is also postfeminist in denying any ongoing need for feminist action or intervention in contemporary mothers' struggle to have it all. Thus, the postfeminist neoliberal foci on individual choice, personal responsibility, and privatization all discourage social solutions for work-life concerns—the time when the post-second wave crisis in femininity emerges most clearly—and instead encourage mothers and families to find their own individual solutions in the private sphere, as do "good" Reagan daughters, and, as a result, also continue to intensify intensive mothering.

*The Neotraditional Family:*

*The General Solution to Contemporary Mothers' Double Entanglements*

Both structurally and at the everyday level, then, intersecting neoliberal and post-second wave rationalities have become so entangled that very few "solutions" emerge when contemporary mothers face the post-second wave crisis in femininity. As they struggle to find the energy to have it all or balance it all, in fact, the individual and privatized solution many mothers find themselves "choosing" is the "new" contemporary commonsense solution: the neotraditional family structure. As I (*When Neoliberalism*) have argued elsewhere and Miriam Peskowitz concurs, neotraditional family configurations appear to be new and even progressive because many contemporary, privileged heterosexual families have both an educated and professional mother and father and are founded on *the idea of gender equity*. This family configuration continues to be problematic, however, because the basic foundation of pre-second wave family roles and responsibilities still hold in the private sphere once children arrive: mothers continue to be primary caregivers of children in this "new" family type, even when they work and are partnered with men who believe in gender equity and equitable caregiving. In other words, while unencumbered women have benefited in real and important ways from second wave feminism, once women become mothers, especially high-achieving privileged women, most of those women

adopt neotraditional family configurations because the intersecting post-second wave and neoliberal foundation of contemporary motherhood combine such that the only commonsense solution to the post-second wave crisis in femininity is to “choose” the neotraditional family configuration, which, ultimately, encourages women to have it all by doing it all alone in the private sphere.

As with postfeminism generally, where key feminist principles are simultaneously acknowledged and refuted, then, neotraditional family configurations as the “best” solution to the crisis in femininity is a postfeminist neoliberal solution that simultaneously acknowledges and integrates key features of second wave feminist ideas and rhetoric, while also undoing those ideas and undoing state support or function from social provisions for families. In other words, I am making an analogous argument to Wendy Brown’s argument that neoliberalism is a contemporary political condition that simultaneously acknowledges and guts democracy, while also serving as a foil and a shield for the undoing of democracy. As Brown puts it about neoliberalism, “this is a political condition in which the substance of many of the significant features of constitutional and representative democracy have been gutted, jettisoned, or end-run, even as they continue to be promulgated ideologically, serving as a foil and shield for their undoing and for the doing of death elsewhere” (par. 30). I contend, then, that postfeminist neoliberal neotraditional family configurations appear to be new, even progressive, while also making the family the primary location for individual, private-sphere solutions for the choices women and men make in relation to work-life balance issues, which means that this family configuration makes an “end-run” around any social support for family life and work-life balance problems and any perceived need for feminist action. Thus, neotraditional families also serve as a foil and a shield for the undoing of key second wave ideas about reproductive choice.

#### *Why the Structure of Celebrity Mom Profiles Has Changed*

Given the intensification of intensive mothering, the fact that contemporary motherhood now sits at the epicenter of the post-second wave and neoliberal turns, and the rise of neotraditional family configurations as the “best” answer when “good” postfeminist neoliberal mothers face the crisis in femininity, it now makes more sense why

the structure of celebrity mom profiles has begun to change. These new profiles are changing in response to the economic and social changes that ground our contemporary postfeminist neoliberal context and the new momism today. And, this context now undergirds contemporary motherhood and the everyday, commonsense solution to the post-second wave crisis at the heart of motherhood today: the neotraditional family. In light of the fact that celebrity mom profiles have always been the most influential media form to sell the new momism, it also makes sense that celebrity mom profiles have been redesigned to account for the changing economic and societal factors that are now entangled at the intersection of the post-second wave and neoliberal turns. Moreover, the analysis in the next two chapters reveals that celebrity mom profiles work rhetorically to promote maternal body management in slender-pregnant profiles to encourage contemporary mothers to accept, even embrace, their post-second wave subjectivity and encourage body work in postpartum profiles to energize women's ability to have it all, to support and further re-entrench neotraditional family structures as the commonsense norm, and to erase the difference maternity continues to make in contemporary women's lives.

What has yet to be explained, however, is: Why, in this new context, is the maternal body the key feature of the contemporary celebrity mom profiles? To put it another way, while the preceding theoretical arguments make the case for why celebrity mom profiles have been redesigned, why the new momism is intensifying, and why neotraditional family configurations are the commonsense and more general solution to the post-second wave crisis in femininity, the preceding does not explain fully why the maternal body has become so important and central to the contemporary profile structure. Consequently, before moving on to the analysis of *how the profiles work rhetorically* in the next two chapters to promote the new structure of celebrity mom profiles, I trace the growing importance of the body in general in contemporary culture and specifically to the maternal body. Doing so also allows me to elaborate further my understanding of the contemporary entanglement of the post-second wave and neoliberal turns in relation to the body and body work and to lay the necessary theoretical groundwork to argue in the next two chapters that celebrity mom profiles are also integrating pregnant body management and postpartum body work as the fourth new core principle

and value in the new momism and as the now more-specific solution to do it all alone within neotraditional family configurations. Thus, I now turn to detailing current thinking about the body generally in contemporary culture and the maternal body specifically, ultimately, to argue that today the maternal body has become the most important symbol and embodiment of good motherhood.

### The Maternal Body at the Intersection of the Post-Second Wave and Neoliberal Turns

Bodies scholars (Dworkin and Wachs; Jette; Shilling; Sweetman; White) and other neoliberal scholars (Brown; Gershon; Gimlin; Gremillion; Lee, Sharon) argue that the body has taken on new meaning as a result of the neoliberal turn. In order to understand why the body has taken on this new meaning, it is important to review contemporary scholarship on the ways neoliberalism has changed cultural understandings of subjectivity, agency, and the embodiment of those changes. Indeed, the shifting focus to neoliberal rationalities has had a profound effect on neoliberal subjectivity and how neoliberal agency is enacted in general and through the body.

After noting that Harvey suggests that the hallmarks of neoliberalism are deregulation, privatization, and state withdrawal from social provisions, Ilana Gershon, for example, reports that “Harvey argues that these shifts from liberal economic policies to neoliberal policies were also necessarily accompanied by relatively successful efforts to promote new conceptions of what it means to be an individual and an agent” (538). Drawing on Foucault’s understanding of governmentality—the organized practices (techniques, mentalities, and rationalities) of a government to produce citizens best suited to fulfill the government’s policies—Brown also argues that a neoliberal political rationality is emerging as “a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social” (par. 2). This neoliberal rationality, Brown also suggests, “reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire” (par. 7). Or, as Lee puts: “As many scholars assert, neoliberalism does not just shift state functions to the private sector but also functions as a mode of governmentality that