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Reproductive Surveillance: The Making of Pregnant Docile Bodies

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In this paper, I consider how the female body is disciplined utilizing Foucault's notion of the panoptic gaze. I build upon his insights concerning societal surveillance by examining how the pregnant body is disciplined to fit into four general categories. I first review literature about pregnant women and find that most scholarship frames pregnant women in four ways: women are disciplined to be commodified, to be selfless, to protect the fetus, and to respond willingly to the medical gaze. I then further this line of inquiry to consider how the reproductively primed body (i.e., a female that has reached menarche) is disciplined similarly. I make the argument that the pregnant body and the reproductively primed body are disciplined in order to continue keeping women docile within a body politic. Ultimately, exposing the ways pregnant bodies and reproductively primed bodies are disciplined allows us to consider how we might break or change discipline in order for women to control their own bodies.

Keywords: Pregnant Bodies; Discipline; Panoptic Discipline; Foucault; Docile Bodies

Walking through the grocery store, I lazily identify the items I need in the aisles. I notice the pregnant woman ahead of me slowly making her way through the baking aisle. She stops to investigate the different sweetener options as an elderly woman makes her way toward us from the opposite end of the aisle. I'm busy looking at the different brownie mixes, but I notice that the elderly woman walks up to the pregnant woman, stops, rests her hands on the pregnant woman's belly, and asks, "Boy or girl?" The pregnant woman addresses her as though this is common practice. I, on the other hand, stop and stare. I'm amazed that this elderly woman not only feels comfortable, but as though she has the right to touch another person's body in such an intimate way. Furthermore, I'm surprised that the pregnant woman isn't surprised.

Many women who have been through pregnancy confirm that strangers touching their pregnant bellies often and without permission is a common

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experience. In fact, the phenomenon of touching pregnant women's bellies prompts writers to discuss "Belly Etiquette" (Mirza Grotts, 2012) and has even persuaded Pennsylvania to create a law making it illegal to touch a pregnant woman's belly without her permission (Hanton, 2013; Wallace, 2013). When I saw the elderly woman place her hands on the pregnant woman's belly, I remembered Lupton (2012) who believes the pregnant body has become a public figure, "Her body is on display for others to comment upon, and even to touch, in ways not considered appropriate of any other adult body" (p. 332). The pregnant woman in the grocery store has been put on display because of her pregnant belly in ways my body has not.

As I watched this scene unfold, I couldn't help but think of Foucault's (1977) notion of panoptic discipline. The pregnant woman's body was already involved in reproducing, in making a body that would be disciplined through various discourses in life, just as the pregnant woman herself was disciplined by various discourses. Yet, even in that making, the pregnant woman was further disciplined as strangers touched her belly. In this essay, I am interested in the ways bodies are disciplined. I take Foucault's (1977) panoptic discipline as a starting point for considering some of the ways that (in this case, cisgender, or non-transgender) women's bodies have been disciplined into a controlled normalization. Then, I consider how the pregnant body has been further disciplined as a body in need of containment. In order to do so, I review scholarship from various fields, including communication, gender studies, medicine, and motherhood research that look at pregnant bodies, and I focus on four emergent themes across the literature. Finally, I briefly look at how the reproductively primed body (i.e., a female that has reached menarche) is disciplined because it has the potential to become a pregnant body. Exposing how pregnant bodies and reproductively primed bodies are disciplined creates spaces to break or change these discursive practices so that women can gain a greater amount of agency over their own bodies without having a patriarchal, hegemonic script to fit.

Disciplining the Female Body

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) discusses how discipline and punishment have worked within Western society since the late Middle Ages. Specifically, he explains that "discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (p. 170). This discipline comes through a variety of mechanisms such as the rules we agree to live by in communities. Although some types of discipline may be necessary in order to live within a society that operates peacefully, Foucault's (1977) work makes clear that disciplining bodies still limits the available options we have in how to move through the world. For example, wearing clothes is a rule we generally live by in society, yet the amount necessary, placement of clothes, and expression available by clothing may be restricting to some members. As such, clothing is one way

we discipline bodies to live within specific societal limits; we place rules on who should or is allowed to wear what and where.

Our clothing choices are only one way society disciplines bodies. As Bordo (1989) makes clear, the body is “not only a *text* of culture;” it is a “*practical*, direct locus of social control” (p. 13, italics original). Not only can we read the expression of cultural norms from a body (e.g., the way someone dresses or wears his/her hair), we can also read cultural norms onto a body, making it a useful site of societal discipline. Bordo (1989), drawing upon Foucault’s (1977) notion of panoptic discipline, argues that societies create docile bodies or bodies useful for the continual reproduction of dominant social systems. Panoptic discipline operates through a system of “self-surveillance” where those useful, docile bodies police their own “bodies, gestures, desires, and habits” (Fraser, 1989, p. 24), ultimately reinforcing the status quo. The notion of docility does not necessarily mean passivity; rather, docility is about creating bodies that are useful in policing themselves. Sawicki (1999), for instance, argues that discipline aims “to render the individual both more powerful, productive, useful, *and* docile” (p. 190, italics original). In this way, the body becomes a productive part of the machine that drives society.

The productivity of the body depends on its ability to be controlled. Jette (2006) explains that the body is “produced by and exists in discourse, becoming a central site of power relations” (p. 333). Lock and Scheper-Hughes (1990) help elucidate the body as a site of power relations when they write about three bodies: the individual body (each person’s lived experience), the social body (a representational use of the body), and the body politic (the “regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies”) (p. 50). They claim that “the stability of the body politic rests on its ability to regulate populations (the social body) and to discipline individual bodies” (p. 51). Therefore, bodies will learn, through a panoptic (self-) discipline, how to be and stay docile and useful; yet, should a body attempt to move outside of the body politic, it is necessary to also punish the body back into normative structures through the very discourse used to create it.

Lupton (1999) links the ways panoptic discipline creates and maintains docile bodies to how women’s bodies have been disciplined. She argues that women are constantly aware of the “appraising gaze of others” so they must “take vigilant steps not to let such female bodily processes as menstruation and the hot flushes [flashes] of menopause come to others’ attention, and attempt to contain the fleshy, female parts of their bodies, rendering them hard and taut” (p. 60). Bordo (1991) points to fashion as a form of panoptic discipline saying that it creates a “powerful discipline for the normalization of *all* women in this culture” by instructing the female body “in a pedagogy of personal inadequacy and lack” (p. 113, italics original). As a part of that pedagogy of inadequacy and lack, Trethewey (1999) claims that the rules of femininity are most often diffused through “standardized visual images”

(p. 424), conjuring images of fashion magazines, music videos, and even TV commercials.

This pedagogy of personal inadequacy and lack (Bordo, 1991) is nothing new. Pointing out some of the history behind this pedagogy, Alcoff (1996) traces contemporary male domination to the creation of the Cartesian dualism (i.e., the mind-body split) in that men were linked to the mind and women to the body, making women something (like the body) in need of control. Women were banished to the realm of the body, nature, the unpredictable, and the irrational, while men continued to occupy realms to which women could only aspire to if they tamed their bodies.

Under panoptic discipline, oppression comes in the form of the male gaze upon the female body, as well as the disciplining of women by other women. The male gaze and discipline work by reminding women that the female body is never enough—thin enough, good enough, maternal enough, hard-working enough, sexy enough, and so on—with the goal being to work constantly to make up for the lack (Bordo, 1991). Bordo (2000) puts it this way:

Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity—a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion—female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, ‘improvement.’ (p. 309)

Thus, women’s bodies are continually seen as lacking, as needing work, and as requiring external help. In the case of pregnant bodies, panoptic discipline is a literal reproduction, both as a disciplining of the pregnant body, as well as through the “production” of a child. Although pregnant bodies are certainly disciplined in similar ways to those discussed above, they are also disciplined in ways that are unique to the pregnant state. However, we don’t often discuss the ways society polices pregnant bodies or how pregnant bodies are encouraged to police themselves in order to have access to activities that are part of the status quo. This policing is present in moments such as making choices that benefit the fetus only or following Western medical advice over other types of advice (e.g., a woman knowing/trusting her own body; alternative medicine and practices such as yoga). A pregnant woman is not only under the panoptic discipline that affects women in general, she also becomes a body in need of containment due to her specific status as pregnant.

Disciplining the Pregnant Body

If panoptic discipline creates docile bodies useful for the continual reproduction of the system, then nowhere is this better seen than in the reproduction of society through pregnancy. Because “motherhood is an

inherently political site” (Comeau, 2007, p. 21), it’s vital that we consider how pregnant bodies are disciplined into docility. In other words, we need to pay more attention to the ways that pregnant bodies are disciplined into taking responsibility for remaining part of the status quo. Motherhood, as Sawicki (1999) argues, has been both empowering and restricting for women. That pregnancy and motherhood might be empowering, restricting, or both is important to remember as I describe the categories below. Although many may argue that discipline curbs or even steals a woman’s agency, others may find empowerment through the discourses used, or in resistance to those discourses.

One way panoptic discipline operates is to mark some bodies as dominant (specifically, this is the mythical norm (Lorde, 1984) of the White, heterosexual, able-bodied man), and to mark all other bodies outside of this as Other or as deviant (Davis, 1997). Bodies that share traits of the dominant body (e.g., women who share racial identification or men who share gender identification) may gain limited access to privilege as a result of these shared demographics, but in most other ways may be marked as Other. In order to gain access to societal privilege, the Other must “pay the price of [dominant body] approval” (Rich, 1976, p. 58). White women, especially those in the middle or upper classes, may be marked as Other in terms of gender, but their race privilege still affords them power. Historically, White, middle/upper class women were seen as the premier pregnant bodies (presuming they were carrying White offspring) and were viewed as the hope on which the future of the nation rested (Comeau, 2007).

However, due to the discourses that view women’s bodies as unruly or out-of-control, the pregnant body is constantly seen as in need of discipline. Indeed, as Lupton (1999) argues, the pregnant body with “its fleshly swellings and ever-present potential to open and release fluids and another human, confounds the ‘civilized’ ideal of containedness, tightness and dryness” (p. 79). Furthermore, the pregnant body mystifies social control as she represents both a sexual being and a continuation of the species. In other words, the chasteness to which women “should” subscribe is broken by the pregnant body, even as she may receive approval for the reproduction of progeny.

This double-bind of representing a lack of chastity and a continuation of the species is especially difficult for women that work through their pregnancies. As Trethewey (1999) notes in her study on women’s embodied work identities:

Maternal bodies reveal a professional woman’s fertility, looming motherhood, and potential lack of commitment to the organization, according to at least two of the participants. Maternal or pregnant bodies display, for all to see, a woman’s femaleness. That [most or cisgender] men cannot embody pregnancy and women can, again, points to women’s difference and otherness. (p. 438)

Thus, the pregnant body becomes a potential threat as it inhabits the “in-between;” the pregnant body risks becoming a “source of ‘social pollution’ As such, it is disorderly, inspiring the meanings of fear, danger and potential contamination” (Lupton, 1999, p. 78). Because the pregnant body cannot be controlled by outside forces, it always signals possible moments of release that make it a contaminant to the status quo. Therefore, panoptic discipline desperately seeks to contain and police pregnant bodies into self-control as they are disciplined through specific discourses which operate to keep them as in line as possible.

To gain a sense of the discourses that we use to discipline pregnant bodies, I searched for “pregnancy and discipline” and “pregnancy and Foucault” as starting places. I let the literature I found there direct me to other searches, including “pregnancy and commodity” or “pregnancy and medical gaze.” The literature came from a variety of sources and academic fields, but I tried to look at literature from the 1980’s or later. I thought that choosing this later time period would offer more in terms of literature directly relating to Foucault’s (1977) notion of discipline. As I looked through much of the literature on pregnancy and discipline, I identified four main arguments. To discipline the pregnant body, women are: commodified, expected to be selfless, expected to protect the fetus, and expected to respond willingly to the medical gaze.

Pregnant Bodies as Commodities

In the first category, pregnant bodies as commodities, the pregnant body fits well within a capitalist system of supply and demand. I refer to commodities as goods/services available to consumers within the system for ownership (Hartsock, 2004; Rudman & Fetterolf, 2014). As I mentioned earlier in the paper, women’s bodies are often commodified in Western societies (Bordo, 1991; Trethewey, 1999); however, that commodification changes in light of pregnant bodies. Pregnant bodies consume and produce in a cycle of creating other bodies-as-products that will eventually become part of the system. Rothman (2004) sees the commodification of (pregnant) bodies as inevitable. She believes, “This is where it [capitalism and pregnancy] is all heading: the commodification of children and proletarianization of motherhood” (p. 19). Critiquing capitalism sharply, Rothman (2004) believes that women and children are simply “laborers and their products” (p. 20), respectively. The commodification of children as products is required in order to perpetuate a system that treats mothers as mere producers. Simultaneously, pregnant bodies become the machines that create bodies-as-products to be consumed by others.

Rothman (2004) believes that women’s bodies may belong to them, but that they are not of high value; rather, women’s bodies are seen as the place where a man’s child matures. Although women’s bodies may be under their own control, when pregnant, women are seen akin to incubators to grow a

man's child. In this way, the body-as-product, which the pregnant woman is carrying, is considered more valuable than the pregnant woman herself. Similarly, Hanson (2004) argues that "as a social function, reproduction is laden with social and economic meanings, and in this context some pregnancies are always considered more valuable, both economically and ideologically, than others" (p. 37). In other words, the bodies that more closely resemble the mythical norm (Lorde, 1984) of dominance are those considered more valuable. Only those pregnant bodies that produce the status quo are given value by a society that sees them as commodities.

Along similar lines, Sharp (2000) discusses the ways women's bodies are "consistently manipulated, fragmented, employed, and raided in ways altogether different from men's bodies," which "renders women's bodies particularly vulnerable to regulation and commodification" (p. 299). For example, women's bodies are more often regulated through the judicial system (e.g., *Roe v. Wade*) or through public discourse (e.g., Rush Limbaugh slut-shaming Sandra Fluke in 2012¹) than are men's bodies. These regulations on women's bodies certainly raise questions as to the ownership of bodies—both women and fetuses. However, when pregnant bodies or their fetuses-as-products are considered commodities, the ownership of bodies never belongs to the individual. Rather, the body is always "owned" by those who stand to make the most profit from the commodification of the bodies.

We discipline pregnant bodies as commodities by treating them only as producers of a new generation. When we focus more on the product the pregnant body offers and less on the pregnant body as a human, we relegate pregnant bodies through disciplinary techniques as mere producers. These producers are judged on the value of their products, so they are told that they should want to have a good pregnancy and be good parents, options made partially possible by buying maternity clothes and pregnancy products (such as an at-home fetoscope), especially name-brand. Good motherhood, by extension, is the ability to buy name-brand baby products for their "quality" and "safety" rather than whether or not a baby actually needs the product. For example, the Bumby Seat has become a popular product for parents of infants, regardless of recent warnings against the product (Deardorff, 2012; Talmud, 2013). Inundating pregnant women with ads, coupons, and other marketing material encourages the pregnant woman to consider all the "must-haves" of pregnancy, including the well-known and the latest innovations in baby products.

We discipline pregnant bodies by telling them they should want these material goods. Pregnant women not only become commodities which reproduce bodies-as-products and not only become consumers to which companies avidly market, they are praised for doing so. We discipline pregnant women as commodities when we tell them that their purpose as mothers-to-be

1 For some useful sources relaying the episode from Rush Limbaugh about Sandra Fluke, see Bady (2012); Cammeron (2012); Elliott (2012); Lavender (2012); Mirkinson (2012); and Reeve (2012).

is in producing offspring that will become useful and docile members of society through their ability to consume and produce. Pregnant bodies as commodities become bodies who are to forget what is good for themselves and to focus on what is good for society at large by consuming products.

Pregnant Bodies as Selfless

The second category, pregnant bodies as selfless, draws upon a traditional notion of femininity that pressures women to build “other-oriented emotional economies” (Bordo, 2000, p. 313). This type of economy requires that women see the meeting of their own needs as “greedy and excessive” (Bordo, 2000, p. 313). Ultimately, this category builds upon a patriarchal view of women’s roles, disciplining all women through shame because they should want to be mothers and wives who sacrifice for the good of their families.

Wolf (2001) argues against this understanding of pregnancy and pregnant bodies. Wolf’s text is a way to speak back to dominant voices about all of the ways pregnancy and birth happen, rather than a more sugar-coated pregnancy manual like some of the most popular resources for pregnancy (e.g., *What to Expect When You’re Expecting*). Moreover, Wolf’s (2001) work functions to encourage women to consider “what they need from their partners and from society at large in order to mother well, without having to sacrifice themselves in the process” (p. 7). Wolf recognizes that all people interact more fully in relationships when their own needs can be met. It may seem like common sense that women might function better in relationships when they can meet their own needs, but we continue to discipline pregnant women to focus on others first.

Bordo (2003) explains that a pregnant woman is “*supposed* to efface her own subjectivity, if need be. When she refuses to do so, that subjectivity comes to be construed as excessive, wicked” (p. 79, italics original). For instance, the archetype of the “selfish” woman that puts her career before a family (e.g., Cristina Yang from *Grey’s Anatomy*) stands in contrast to those we may think of in movies and television shows where women risk their own health and safety (or desires, wants, needs) for their fetus (e.g., Michelle Duggar of *19 Kids & Counting*²). Bordo (2003) explains that when women become pregnant, all other aspects are “minimized, marginalized, and (when they refuse to be repressed) made an occasion for guilt and self-questioning” (p. 86). Women are disciplined into remembering their roles as caregivers, regardless of personal wishes, needs, or desires, and shame and guilt are powerful self-disciplining tactics. As Alcalde (2011) succinctly states, “Pregnant women are expected to embody discipline and self-control, yet, as mothers-to-be they are also expected to be especially attuned to the needs of others and exhibit selflessness” (p. 212). These sometimes conflicting expectations add to the already terrifying pressure involved in becoming a parent.

2 See Garrison (2011) for more information. The title, “Maternal martyr, Michelle Duggar, willing to risk life for baby no. 20,” is especially telling for this category.

So, not only is the pregnant body a product for commodification, it is also *supposed* to be working for the betterment of others' lives, not its own. As Lupton (2012) says, "Pregnant women are represented as the carriers of the precious foetus rather than as individuals in their own right who have their own needs and priorities that may not always coincide with those of the foetus" (p. 331). Lupton points out that we discipline pregnant bodies as a container filled with precious cargo. That precious cargo comes before all else and all decisions must be based on the needs of the fetus. We discipline pregnant bodies to remember that they are to be other-oriented to those outside *and* within their own bodies, while foregoing their own wants and needs. A pregnant woman should always strive to be read as selfless, disciplining herself to ignore herself in order to attend to others. In this way, the pregnant woman gains access to power in the status quo; she is granted labels of being a good mother because she ignores her own needs. Perhaps it is the idea that pregnant bodies are to be selfless which makes the next category easy to also wield against pregnant bodies.

Pregnant Bodies as Protectors

Through the panoptic discipline of commodification and selflessness, pregnant bodies begin to learn the role they are intended to play in the third category—that of the protector of the fetus. Although the first two categories are not necessarily stepping stones to this category, all four categories play with, through, and into one another. The pregnant woman as protector is, as Kroløkke (2011) suggests, a woman's "first maternal duty" (p. 21). Or, as Baxter, Hirokawa, Lowe, Nathan, and Pearce (2004) point out, "With motherhood comes the obligation and responsibility to place the fetus' needs as primary. A mother who fails to do everything possible to protect her baby from risk is a selfish, irresponsible, and poor mother" (p. 238). In short, pregnant bodies that do not heed the call to be the protectors of their fetuses are marked as less-than-mothers.

Bordo (2003) explains some of the history of this category. She points to some of the legal struggles over women's bodies in U.S. American society. Many of these court cases specifically consider the fetus's rights over the mother's, thereby rendering the woman's subjectivity devalued (Woliver, 2002) or as a mere life-support system for the fetus. The pregnant woman has the responsibility to care for the fetus (Bordo, 2003). In fact, because in some places, such as Tennessee, a woman can be charged with assault if she uses drugs while pregnant (Bassett, 2014; Feeney, 2014), pregnant women must be vigilant protectors of their respective fetuses. This protection includes being cognizant of what the pregnant woman puts in her body, as well as the environments in which she lives. However, there is little to no recourse for the system at large or her partner whose actions also influence the fetus. Following Lupton (1999), "Pregnant women are encouraged to be highly vigilant in their policing of their bodies so as to ensure that the health of their

foetus, is not compromised by their own actions” (p. 64). Pregnant women are to be vigilant of the health of their fetuses rather than their own health. Seen as the protector of the fetus inside, pregnant bodies are considered as life support or as incubators, regardless of the women’s own health or safety.

Lupton (2012) argues that “health conditions or problems or developmental delays in children are often attributed to their mothers failing to respond appropriately to expert advice concerning appropriate health promoting behaviours during pregnancy” (p. 331). So, pregnant bodies that do not act as the great protectors of their fetuses are branded “bad mothers” who are putting their children’s lives in danger. They risk being labeled as the cause of any childhood “problems,” regardless of whether or not there is a correlation between the pregnant body’s activity and the child’s issue. And, if women do engage in activities that are potentially damaging, they risk legal battles over whether or not they are fit to be parents or other kinds of stigmatization (Ettorre, 2008). Legal issues over the rights of parenthood are about who is the expert in the situation, just as the discourse of the medical gaze is about the doctor as expert over the pregnant woman’s body.

Pregnant Bodies and the Medical Gaze

The fourth category, pregnant bodies and the medical gaze, is perhaps the most-studied panoptic discipline surrounding pregnant bodies due to the pervasive nature of the medical gaze. As Kukla (2005) posits, a pregnant woman is not considered a “static entity with a fixed ‘nature,’ but rather a dynamic entity that needs to be *governed and ordered*” (p. 21, italics original). The medical gaze serves as the authoritarian voice over pregnant women’s experience, marking the pregnant woman as Other even to herself.

Foucault (1973) defines the medical gaze as the institutional support that endows a doctor “with the power of decision and intervention” (p. 89). Through surveillance, doctors observe, decide, and intervene in/on the patient’s body on behalf of the patient. Pineau (2000) describes surveillance in the medical gaze in her own experience of giving birth. For her, the medical gaze is apparent as medical professionals come to check on her dilation:

Because even when it’s gentle, and even when it’s considerate, and even when it’s necessary, they are still strangers: Robin, Mary, Ellen, Sue, Bob, Nancy, Francis, Tom, Dick, and Harry who have entered my body and made me stranger to myself.

Because it’s not about sex. It’s about access.

Access to me. To a part of my self that lies deep in the folds of my flesh that they part and they pry and they peer with consummate . . . detachment. (p. 7, paragraph breaks and ellipsis are original)

In this performative piece, Pineau (2000) describes her experience with the literal medical gaze and the ways it disciplines her body to be a detached, distant, “stranger” to herself.

Pineau’s (2000) experience echoes Young’s (2005a) description of the prenatal checkup, which follows the gynecological exam, “requiring an aloof matter-of-factness in order to preclude attaching sexual meaning to them” (p. 59). Regardless of the fact that medical personnel are peering into an intimate part of a woman’s body, there must be a separation between the medical-ness of the moment and the sexuality present throughout. By ignoring the sexuality present in the moment, pregnant women are once again caught in the double-bind of representing a lack of chastity and a continuation of the species, yet they are to see the medical moment as receiving an expert’s advice on their pregnancies.

Hanson (2004) argues that “as the mechanism by which society reproduces itself, pregnancy is by no means a private matter, but is peculiarly susceptible to social intervention and control” (p. 6). As pregnancy becomes a public entity through discourses such as commodification, the medical gaze is pushed into even the private aspects of women’s lives (Woliver, 2002). Sharp (2000) concisely covers a range of medical intrusion saying, “A host of medical practices undermines female agency over their reproductive capacities, whereby the female subject may be rendered ‘invisible’, transformed into a ‘work object’ or ‘laboratory’ for medical practice or research” (p. 300). It is here where the link between the medical gaze and commodification is clear. As sonograms and other reproductive technologies became standard practice, the respect of woman’s experience/knowledge of her own body and pregnancy diminished. Instead, women’s agency is passed over in favor of “medical technologies of visualization, laboratory test results and written reports about the foetus, to which the woman has no access except through expert intervention and interpretation are the dominant source of knowledge” (Lupton, 1999, p. 62). The pregnant body, so desperately in need of control via panoptic discipline, has been rendered docile by the medical gaze. Through the transfer of expertise from the pregnant body to “experts,” pregnant women have been disciplined into remembering their places as commodities.

Pregnant women are also disciplined to be selfless as they experience a host of medical tests and interventions during pregnancy and childbirth. During these “routine” medical exams, a pregnant woman should focus on how the exam helps doctors understand the growth of the fetus, not how potentially invasive exams such as amniocentesis might be. Some scholars, such as Sears and Sears (1994), suggest pregnant women carefully consider the potential risks and benefits of medical exams and say no to those exams that the pregnant woman feels are unnecessary or too risky. Although their suggestion may seem helpful to women seeking agency in interactions with the medical gaze, Sears and Sears (1994) are also disciplining women to be championed

protectors of the fetus who cannot voice its concerns during these medical exams. Ultimately, the medical gaze has granted personhood to fetuses even as it makes pregnancy a “technological and disembodied experience” for the pregnant woman (Kroløkke, 2011, p. 20). As a result, the pregnant body once again inhabits the double-bind of dis/empowerment by trusting the medical gaze. She is disciplined to endure “invasive medical scrutiny” while also being held responsible for the health of her fetus (Ettorre, 2008).

Empowerment in (Spite of) Discourse

Although these discourses are used to discipline pregnant bodies into docility and usefulness for the status quo, some women might also find them empowering. For example, a new mother may find joy in buying new products. She may appreciate the ability to engage in buying commodities that allow her to contribute to the well-being of her society. The message that pregnant women are “helping” small businesses (e.g., shops on Etsy) by buying their products may allow her to feel that she is contributing to building society through her consumption. Along the same lines, a pregnant woman may find great strength in sacrificing for her children. She may find new insights about herself and her changing identity by engaging in selfless acts.

Often, we praise mothers who sacrifice for the good of their children; we consider those mothers that fiercely protect their offspring as heroines. A pregnant woman or new mother may find power in being the protector of her young. A pregnant woman may also find hope in the medical gaze. Because the idea that pregnancy is a medical issue has been taught for years (Sears & Sears, 1994), many women often still distrust their own bodies. As a result, a pregnant woman, especially a first-time pregnant woman, may find peace by adhering to the discursive practices that constitute her motherhood through medicalization. Trusting that doctors have access to medicine and tools that can ultimately save the fetus’s or her life (not to mention give her a “painless” birth or a surgical alternative) helps many pregnant women relax throughout their pregnancies. So, although these discourses may feel damaging as disciplining measures, some women may still find empowerment by adhering to them.

Just as some women find empowerment by acting within the discourses they are offered, other women find empowerment through resisting these discourses. Resistance to these discourses is not a new phenomenon; rather, women have found ways to work against them since these discourses began. Resistance strategies might include pregnant women that seek an abortion over carrying to term or women who sell their eggs. Often, doctors try to dissuade women who want VBAC (vaginal birth after Cesarean), yet many women each year prove VBAC is a viable option. Pregnant women continue to find ways to empower themselves by resisting the discourses aimed at disciplining their bodies.

To be clear, none of us can escape the discourses used to discipline our bodies in society; we can only find ways to be empowered by enacting or resisting those discourses. The four categories of discourses aimed at pregnant bodies as commodities, as selfless, as protectors of the fetus, and as responsive to the medical gaze frame how we understand pregnancy. Although these four discourses may be unique to the pregnant body, they are indicative of the ways we react to other types of bodies, as well. In the next section, I briefly look at how we discipline the reproductively primed body (i.e., a female that has reached menarche) in ways that show our fear that she may become a pregnant body.

Disciplining the Reproductively Primed Body

Part of panoptic discipline, and part of the ways women have learned to repeat acts of gender, is through bodily movement (Butler, 1990). A necessary part of that movement is to be on constant guard against possible sexual/physical, as well as emotional/psychological, assault. Yet, as Young (2005b) explains, this “bodily invasion” may occur in more subtle ways, “It is acceptable, for example, for women to be touched in ways and under circumstances that it is not acceptable for men to be touched, and by persons—i.e., men—whom it is not acceptable for them to touch” (p. 45). The “touching” of a woman, I argue, is not always only physical, however. Because our bodies are a “site of struggle” (Bordo, 1991, p. 322), we cannot forget that language also works to control, discipline, and shape how each of us carries our bodies.

Lupton (2012) reminds us that in Western societies, the female body has often been seen in opposition to that of the male body. She says,

As feminist theorists have contended, the female body in western societies has traditionally been understood as symbolically leaky, open, fluid, its boundaries permeable and blurred. Particularly in states such as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause, the female body is culturally portrayed as chaotic, subject to hormonal and emotional fluctuations and instabilities. In a cultural context in which the ideal body is dry, contained, controlled by the mind, closed off from other bodies and autonomous, the female body represents an anomaly and is therefore considered inferior, lacking, uncontrollable and disturbing. (p. 333)

Thus, the female reproductively primed body (i.e., a female that has reached menarche and is, therefore, “primed” for reproduction) must be disciplined by any means necessary to be as close as possible to the ideal (read: male) body. However, the reproductively primed body’s capability to change from a body that is primed for reproduction to one that is in the midst of reproducing (i.e., a pregnant body) means that society must be on high alert in order to discipline the body back into a controllable status quo. In short, if the

reproductively primed body can be controlled before she becomes a pregnant body, society has a better chance of rendering this particular pregnant body docile and useful through the length of her pregnancy.

Although women's bodies are disciplined throughout their lives, and differently during pregnancy, a woman's body is considered especially suspect if it is (assumed) capable of reproducing. These are especially volatile bodies as their status, or the ease with which they can be disciplined, has the potential to shift. The disciplining of reproductively primed women's bodies is no secret; discipline is seen clearly in countless abortion debates over who owns a woman's body (Bordo, 2003; Hendricks, 2010; Woliver, 2002). Discipline is seen in the moments that the reproductively primed body may experience the shame, victim-blaming, traumatic stress, and the often unbearable memory of sexual assault. Discipline is seen in the moments when she experiences touch—physical and/or verbal—that mark her body as indocile, undisciplined, wild, unruly, and in need of correction back into the body politic. Discipline is also seen in the moments of alienation where “the objectification or appropriation by one subject of another subject's body, action, or product of action, such that she or he does not recognize that objectification as having its origins in her or his experience” (Young, 2005a, p. 55) happens. The disciplining of reproductively primed female bodies by society is based on their ability to change into pregnant bodies rather than the seemingly unchanging bodies of reproductively primed men (Alcoff, 1996; Lupton, 1999; Young, 2005a). Thus, reproductively primed bodies are discursively framed by societal norms as being in need of surveillance as a way to keep their bodies under control. This discursive framing and surveillance seems to be a well-planned project. As Bordo (1989) establishes, “Viewed historically, the discipline and normalization of the female body... has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control” (p. 14). We are careful to keep reproductively primed bodies under close watch and strict discipline in order to prepare for the moment they may change into the pregnant body in need of containment and control through the four discursive categories discussed earlier.

Conclusion

In this essay, I examine how the (cisgender) female body is disciplined, through Foucault's (1977) notion of panoptic discipline, into being a docile body. I look at how the pregnant body is specifically rendered docile by particular panoptic disciplining discourses. Because the pregnant woman is also a site of a larger struggle over the disciplining of female bodies, I consider how the reproductively primed (female) body is disciplined through normalizing judgments, too. Although women in Western societies have seen phenomenal changes in their favor in the last century, the fact remains that each day is a potentially treacherous time to assert female equity in the body politic. To claim that they should have equity does not mean that a disciplining

of bodies will stop. Rather, as Foucault (1977) notes, the disciplining of bodies is part of a social contract to live in a system and society. As such, it is the disciplining of bodies into docility that is problematic. One need only look at everyday media in order to see the ways women's bodies are treated and disciplined to fit a mythological ideal of femininity and beauty. This is, of course, not to say that men's bodies are not also disciplined into docility, but it is to understand how millennia of panoptic discipline has reigned over women's bodies in ways altogether different from men's.

Further work most assuredly needs to be conducted to name and expose the ways women are touched by panoptic discipline, both physically and verbally. This work might take the form of explicitly considering how women's bodies are touched physically in ways that discipline (e.g., sexual assault, violence against women). Work which researches how new medical technologies—whether during pregnancy or not—affect the medical gaze, which disciplines women's bodies throughout their lives, is surely needed (Sawicki, 1999). And finally, as more laws are passed like that in Texas, in which a woman must have a vaginal ultrasound at least 24 hours prior to having an abortion, more explicit work should be conducted on disciplining discourses surrounding women's reproductive choices (Kristof, 2012; Winter, 2012). One medical doctor cited in Kristof (2012) suggests that these vaginal ultrasounds are akin to state rape, a volatile discourse meant to discipline women against having an abortion.

What I have done in this essay and even in the calls for future work, is to explicitly mark the ways women's bodies have been disciplined throughout their lives starting with discipline as a reproductively primed body and then specifically during pregnancy. It is terrifying to think that in the U.S., we are moving swiftly through the twenty-first century and yet women are still implicitly considered second-class citizens whose bodies (let alone voices) are not wholly welcome within the body politic. All too often, women in Western societies are allowed to be a part of the body politic only when they have learned the dominant discourse discipline, and have adequately policed themselves into docility and/or utility. As cases like the Sandra Fluke-Rush Limbaugh controversy expose, a case of a hegemonic, patriarchal male disciplining a reproductively primed female, when a woman wishes to use her voice and body to make others aware of the injustices she has faced, she is quickly silenced and disciplined back into the body politic. And, if she cannot be adequately readjusted, she can be quickly marked as Other, as a deviant body to whom no one should listen. What options, then, does that leave women in order to pursue equity? To be fair, Fluke has asserted some resistance through the finishing of her law degree and in her current campaign, in which she leads the polls, for a California state Senate seat (O'Neal, 2014). Still, I make no assumptions that I could suggest a way out of docility. I stand encouraged by feminisms past and present that the beginning is to become informed. As controversies surrounding women's bodies, whether

reproductively primed, pregnant, or otherwise, continue to unfold, specifically in the realm of politics, it is my hope that this essay can be a starting point to help society see the ways we discipline (pregnant) bodies into docility, and to open a space of discussion about how we can change that discipline into ways women can have agency of their own bodies.

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