

## Branding the Bump

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### Mediating Motherhood and Celebrity Culture in Popular Media

*Consumer capitalism has created new demands for celebrity culture. Celebrities are expected to develop a brand identity to help maintain relevancy in a tabloid culture that privileges novelty. Such industry changes have resulted in numerous celebrity mothers commodifying their maternal identity into profitable lifestyle brands. This process, however, is not viable for all celebrity mothers who already possess distinctive personas in popular culture. Following the success of the Sex and the City franchise, Sarah Jessica Parker transformed her celebrity into a fashion lifestyle brand through partnerships with various clothing retailers and designers. Her brand does not possess symbolic or commercial value without the association to Carrie Bradshaw, yet Parker's role as a mother is in contrast to the traits that define her iconic Sex and the City character. Through an analysis of cultural discourses, trends, and texts, this paper interrogates how Parker has attempted to modulate her identity as a mother in order to maintain the association to Bradshaw. Specific attention is directed towards Parker's adaptation of I Don't Know How She Does It by examining how the film's narrative structure reinforces the legacy of Bradshaw despite its content matter illuminating the tensions of contemporary motherhood.*

#### Introduction: Identifying the Dynamics of Celebrity, Motherhood, and Brand Culture

The topic of motherhood is an enduring and prominent subject in contemporary celebrity culture with tabloids documenting the pregnancies and maternal activities of actresses, musicians, socialites, and other prominent public figures. Maternity is integrated into what Sarah Banet-Weiser terms as brand culture, referring to how the relationships between products, marketers, and consumers

function as larger cultural contexts influencing identity construction within everyday life (4). Motherhood currently is considered a potentially lucrative endeavour for numerous female personalities to reinvent themselves within a highly chaotic celebrity environment. Personalities such as Jessica Alba, Nicole Richie, Gwen Stefani, Tori Spelling, and Jessica Simpson have established lifestyle brands and children's apparel collections that are legitimized by their status, expertise, and identity as mothers. Reporting on this trend of the "mompreneur," *The New York Times* details the logic behind the branding of celebrity motherhood, arguing, "In the last few years, salaries for movie stars have plummeted, record sales have tanked and roles in scripted dramas are going the way of the IBM computer. Yet for a growing number of underemployed actresses, singers and would-be entrepreneurs, parenthood has become a viable Plan B" (Bernstein ST1). Alba's The Honest Company, for example, manufactures and distributes biodegradable diapers and other environmentally friendly baby merchandise, and was reportedly valued at just under \$1 billion in 2014 (Lowrey).

To maintain relevancy in a highly chaotic consumer environment, celebrities must now develop a brand identity. Motherhood proves advantageous for those who do not possess a fundamentally successful brand image, as such celebrities can often mold common experiences shared with all fans for their own commercial benefit. While personalities like Alba and Spelling have subsequently witnessed their celebrity persona increase following their identification and commodification as mothers, the rhetoric, narrative, and practice of motherhood poses challenges for other public figures. In the case of personalities whose celebrity coalesced prior to their role as mothers, their image can be threatened if motherhood opposes the traits that define their public and brand identity. The complications motherhood poses to celebrity identity and personal brand construction is well illustrated in the example of Sarah Jessica Parker. Following a career as a child actor with roles in film and on Broadway, Parker gained prominence for her portrayal of Carrie Bradshaw in HBO's popular comedy series *Sex and the City* (1998-2004). The lavish clothing and uninhibited lifestyle of sex columnist Bradshaw transformed Parker into a prominent fixture in the imaginary of popular culture. After the success of *Sex and the City*, Parker developed her celebrity into a fashion lifestyle brand through partnerships with clothing retailers. The strength of her brand is contingent upon the continued correlation with Bradshaw, yet her personal role as a mother, an identity portrayed by Parker in the film adaptation of *I Don't Know How She Does It* (2011), is in contrast to the traits that define Bradshaw.

Parker's brand identity demonstrates the contradictions, tensions, and ironies embedded within the relationship between identity, celebrity culture, consumption, and branding that ultimately work to construct conflicting representations

of motherhood in popular culture. *Sex and the City* introduced Bradshaw to popular culture, a character noted for her disdain towards motherhood and domesticity as demonstrated in the episodes “The Baby Shower” and “A Woman’s Right to Shoes.” The legacy of Bradshaw also functions as a frame of reference for critics and cultural intermediaries to review Parker’s subsequent work, such as her performance in *I Don’t Know How She Does It*. Although Parker’s film can be classified as a “momance,” a genre that fetishizes motherhood within the context of consumer capitalism, the ‘symbolic baggage’ Parker brings to the role of mother Kate Reddy instead overshadows the narrative of the text. This framing technique blurs Parker and the characters Bradshaw and Reddy into a single identity, while undermining the film’s narrative commentary on the conditions of contemporary motherhood. The interrogation of Parker’s brand identity, constructed through and situated within a variety of cultural texts and artefacts including film, fashion, television, literature, and press materials, highlights the challenges the discourse of motherhood poses to the formation of brand identity in a celebrity culture dictated by the trends of consumer capitalism.

### Celebrity and the “Momance”: Situating Maternity in Popular Culture

Allison Pearson’s 2002 novel, *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, recounts the struggles experienced by Kate Reddy, an investment fund manager, wife, and mother of two working at an established British financial institution. The novel details the impact of Reddy’s demanding career, such as the tensions caused by weekly international travel upon her relationship with under-unemployed architect husband, Richard, and their children Benjamin and Emily. In addition to describing Reddy’s continuous struggle to harmonize her professional and domestic responsibilities, Pearson’s novel also explores the sexism, inequality, and economic anxieties experienced by women working in a high-powered office setting. *The Guardian* noted that the novel’s strength is in how Pearson illuminates “the tragicomic everyday chaos of motherhood, marriage and domesticity, and the way it sits so uneasily with financial and professional success,” while *The New York Times* praised the honesty Pearson incorporated into her dialogue (Knight; Masline). Both a commercial and critical success following its publication, the novel spent 23 weeks atop *The New York Times Bestseller* list, with reportedly \$4 million copies sold since its initial publication (The Weinstein Company).

The release of Pearson’s novel coincided with the intensification of motherhood in public discourse that helped bestow *I Don’t Know How She Does It* with a particular potency in registering with readers. Sharon Hays refers to intensive mothering as an ideological practice in which mothers are expected

to devote their time, attention, and resources to their children, and those who fail to achieve this ideal are stigmatized as deviant (x). The cultural industries helped facilitate a societal obsession with celebrity and upper middle-class mothers who appear to ‘impeccably’ balance their personal, domestic, and professional identities. The ubiquitous phrases “having it all,” and “yummy mummy” became common tropes associated with contemporary motherhood strengthened by the cultural politics of neoliberal consumer capitalism. Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels contextualize this romanticized discourse as the “new momism,” a paradoxical ideological phenomenon that celebrates the agency of women while simultaneously creating a representation of motherhood defined by unattainable ideals. Coinciding with structural socioeconomic changes, the growth of celebrity tabloid journalism, and media representations depicting the characteristics of what constitutes a selfless “mom” versus immoral “welfare mothers,” Douglas and Michaels’ “new momism” symbolizes a lifestyle dependent upon surveillance and self-scrutiny (19-20). Angela McRobbie argues that the discourse of consumer capitalism has transformed motherhood into a disciplinary function of “self-perfectibility,” while Elizabeth Podnieks explores how the “celebrity-industrial complex” constructs new “momist myths” reflective of contemporary maternal values (88-89). McRobbie contends that “respectable” motherhood is determined by a mother’s ability to maintain her status as an acceptable consumer, otherwise colloquially referred to as a “yummy mummy.” “Respectable” motherhood privileges women who postpone having children until they have acquired the disposable income required to maintain their status as proper consumers, while simultaneously discriminating against younger mothers whose inability to sustain these consumption standards is a mark of their “failed femininity” (McRobbie). Such scholarship theorizes the larger cultural discourses constructing contemporary representations of motherhood and maternal practices. It also provides a framework to critique Parker, her image, and *I Don’t Know How She Does It* within the context of the social relations circulating in public discourse that ultimately influence the production, consumption, and reception of these texts in popular culture.

The adaptation of *I Don’t Know How She Does It* is part of a broader trend in film negotiating the anxieties that contemporary motherhood afflicts upon privileged, upper middle-class white women. Referring to Hollywood’s latest female fixation as the “momance,” *The New York Times*’ Alessandra Stanley argues these texts act as a cultural response to the popularity of extremely vulgar “bromance” films produced within the past decade. The topic of maternity, however, is not a new cinematic narrative; films produced during the late 1970s and 1980s, such as *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), *Baby Boom* (1987), *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), *The Good Mother* (1988), and *Parenthood* (1989) explored the contradictions of motherhood alongside gender politics within a

changing social landscape (Raymond; Kaplan; Hauck). The films identified by Stanley as comprising the current genre of “momances”—including *Knocked Up* (2007), *Baby Mama* (2008), *The Switch* (2010), *The Back-Up Plan* (2010), *What to Expect When You’re Expecting* (2012), *Friends With Kids* (2012), and *Admission* (2013)—differ from previous cinematic depictions of motherhood in that they explore rather polemic topics such as fertility, advancements in reproductive technology, surrogacy, and artificial insemination that presently ignite discussion and debate within public discourse.

A common theme prevalent in the majority of “momances” is that actresses commonly known for their celebrity tabloid presence and for playing iconic characters in their previous career endeavours are cast in the lead female role. Stanley’s cultural critique of the “momance” concentrates on how comedian, producer, and writer Tina Fey integrates motherhood into her various creative works. Constituting the “headaches of privileged motherhood” as termed by Stanley, Fey addresses the anxieties of balancing her career and motherhood through the character development of protagonist Liz Lemon in the later seasons of her comedy series *30 Rock*. The themes of motherhood and guilt comprising Lemon’s storyline on *30 Rock* are also present in Fey’s autobiography *Bossypants*, where she writes about breastfeeding, mommy blogs, and her reservations about raising a second child. Motherhood is also a prominent subject in Fey’s recent films. *Baby Mama* depicts Fey as a business executive expecting her first child through a surrogate, and addresses cultural fears pertaining to surrogacy firms and fraud. Fey again depicts a career woman in *Admission*, where she struggles to reconnect with the son she previously gave up for adoption after giving birth during college.

Although motherhood is a subject extensively addressed, questioned, and negotiated by Fey’s work, and serves as the main focus of Stanley’s “momance” analysis, the trend encompasses other celebrity personas. Jennifer Aniston and Jennifer Lopez portray women struggling emotionally due to complications arising from artificial insemination in *The Switch* and *The Back-Up Plan*. Prior to the release of these films, Aniston and Lopez occupied privileged positions in the iconography of popular culture. Aniston’s celebrity continues to be associated with her *Friends* character Rachel, while Lopez’s romantic relationships are key tabloid subjects validating her celebrity status. Motherhood is a subject consistently addressed by tabloid coverage of Aniston and Lopez. Celebrity lifestyle publications continue to monitor Aniston’s figure as part of the enduring “bump watch” (“Is Jennifer Aniston Pregnant”). Motherhood is a prominent narrative framing Lopez’s more recent press coverage, best illustrated by posing for exclusive photographs distributed by *People* following the birth of her twins (2008). The persistence to which motherhood has been linked with Aniston and Lopez not only creates an association between their public personas and

the material addressed by their characters in “momances,” but also naturalizes their identities so that motherhood does not seem removed from their celebrity. These films reinforce the narrative that gives these celebrities cultural value, and it is no coincidence that the majority of “momances” discussed by Stanley feature actresses whose forays into motherhood—or their desire to start a family—are well-documented by the lifestyle and tabloid culture identified by Douglas and Michaels.

The prominence of highly visible personalities in comedies on motherhood also extends to Parker’s venture into the “momance” genre with *I Don’t Know How She Does It*. Parker’s profile exhibits similarities to Aniston, including how both actresses increased their public recognition through leading roles in highly successful television comedies while struggling to develop credible film careers following the conclusion of their sitcoms. What distinguishes Parker from Aniston is her identity as a mother, and how this aspect of Parker’s personal life is negotiated into the rhetoric of her celebrity. In addition to focusing on issues that connect with contemporary arguments, values, and beliefs pertaining to motherhood and featuring lead actresses whose tabloid presence upholds their portrayal of mothers, the “momance” genre also reflects McRobbie’s argument of the “yummy mummy” in popular culture. The social privilege and cultural capital of the mothers portrayed in these films strengthens the association between “respectable” motherhood and the discourse of consumerism, but while *I Don’t Know How She Does It* is categorized as a “momance,” the film challenges the genre due to the rhetorical prevalence of Bradshaw.

### Carrie Bradshaw and the Uneasy Mantle of Motherhood

Parker’s celebrity transforms her personality into a consumable product, and it is through this exchange that her identity develops the symbolic meaning that provides her brand with credibility. Scholarship by David Marshall and Graeme Turner (*Understanding Celebrity*) theorize celebrity as a discursive construct negotiating changes in cultural politics. More recent work deconstructs celebrity culture within the social context of advanced capitalism and the promotion of excess consumption as a standard in consumer society (Cashmore; Ferris and Harris). Turner’s definition of celebrity, “as representation, as discourse, as an industry and as a cultural formation,” provides a more inclusive framework applicable to the construction of Parker’s identity and how her persona circulates in public discourse (“Approaching Celebrity Studies” 13). Parker’s status was legitimized in 2004 when the Council of Fashion Designers of America presented the actress with their Fashion Icon Award in recognition of her “personal and professional commitment to fashion, and for her quint-essentially New York style” (“Sarah Jessica Parker Honored”). Deconstructing

the consumer spectacle facilitated by *Sex and the City*, Pamela Church Gibson contends that “never before [has] a series and its subsequent cinematic forays become quite so fashion-linked, so brand-aware, nor created such an iconic fashion heroine of its central character, managing so completely to blur her identity with that of the actress who created her” (104). While Parker’s celebrity identity strengthened in the face of immense coverage in celebrity tabloids, she also gave birth during the period of the program’s production to her first child with husband Matthew Broderick. Balancing her public persona as a style icon with her maternal responsibilities, however, caused tensions to the rhetorical construction of Parker’s celebrity image as an independent, single, and fashion-orientated career woman (Jermyn “Still Something”). Parker then embarked on a semi-successful film career portraying the romantic protagonist in comedy-dramas that often downplayed her new role as a mother, evident in such films as *The Family Stone* (2005), *Failure to Launch* (2006), and *Smart People* (2008). The adaptation of *I Don’t Know How She Does It* would mark Parker’s first cinematic portrayal of a mother, a role that required Parker to confront the rhetorical construction of her celebrity in promotional material designed to market the film.

In her prior professional endeavours, Parker exhibited an acute awareness as to how her identity as a mother is juxtaposed against the characteristics of Bradshaw. Following the arguments of Deborah Jermyn (“Still Something”) that motherhood is predominantly considered unglamorous and asexual, Parker deliberately adopts a confessional rhetoric, evident by emphasizing her “ordinariness” and how fame has made Parker a more appreciative individual, in press interviews and other promotional coverage in order to maintain her status as a fashion icon (164). Helen Warner (“Fashion Celebrity”) positions Parker as a cultural intermediary reinforcing class-based values of taste and aesthetics, an argument best represented in how Parker praises high fashion designers and describes the rather unrelatable experience of wearing haute couture designs (383). Jermyn notes that Parker’s confessional rhetoric is shaped by a discourse of social mobility resulting from a productive work ethic, in which she openly discusses her impoverished childhood and how the birth of her son will provide balance to her life, despite the fame and expectations arising from the success of *Sex and the City* (169-171). Parker’s connection to Bradshaw represents the pressures posed by the contemporary media environment, where “the complex and interlinked operations of a star’s persona—including their choice of acting roles, media coverage of *both* the ‘real’ star and the characters they play/films they appear in—each hold the potential to collide, impact on or undo each other” (Jermyn “We Know How” 252). *I Don’t Know How She Does It* poses challenges for Parker’s brand since the film problematizes the contentious relationship between

symbolism, commercialism, and motherhood that is specifically negotiated by her public persona.

A central obstacle to Parker's identity as a mother resides with Bradshaw's apparent and celebrated rejection of maternal values and domestic life, traits that help support the character's depiction as the "single-girl heroine" (Nussbaum). Commemorating the tenth-anniversary of *Sex and the City's* series finale, *Vanity Fair's* Richard Larson published a reflection piece highlighting the comedy's iconic episodes. Larson identified "The Baby Shower" as season one's best episode, while noting that one of the strongest moments of season six occurred in the episode, "A Woman's Right to Shoes." In both episodes, Bradshaw attends a baby shower for expectant mothers who were previously socialites infamous for frequenting the Manhattan party scene. These episodes also capture Bradshaw's disdain towards motherhood, a theme significantly interwoven into the narratives. "The Baby Shower" involves Bradshaw and her friends Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda leaving New York to attend the baby shower for a former "wild child," Laney. Following her marriage to an investment banker and moving into a traditional colonial-style home in suburban Connecticut, Laney is expecting her first child. The episode's opening scene features the four women criticizing Laney's new identity as a mother; when Samantha remarks, "I think it's sad the way she's using a child to validate her existence," Bradshaw rhetorically replies, "Why can't she just do sex and a nice cocktail like the rest of us?" Further complicating the invitation to Laney's baby shower is Bradshaw's late period, and the episode details her ambivalent attitude towards potential motherhood. The final scene of "The Baby Shower" has Bradshaw watching children at a park playground, sitting on a bench slightly removed from the activity. In a voiceover, Bradshaw wonders whether she would be able to be a "good" mother while still maintaining her *identity*—which viewers understand to mean the sexuality, vanity, and selfishness associated with her character. The episode resolves Bradshaw's internal 'dilemma' with the concluding voiceover, "On the way home, I got my period."

In the sixth season, "A Woman's Right to Shoes" highlights the discriminatory judgments mothers bestow upon single women, and the episode's plotline vindicates Bradshaw's conspicuous hobby of shoe shopping. The episode opens with numerous shots of Bradshaw purchasing different baby registry items, such as the "Burpie Blanket" and the "Little Me Activity Chair." The scene works to create an automatic association between motherhood and consumerism, and the rather outlandish names of items Bradshaw purchases underscores the conspicuous nature of such consumption. Bradshaw attends the baby shower of Kyra, and is asked to remove her \$485 Manolo Blahnik stiletto pumps to prevent Kyra's children falling ill from dirt brought into the



house. Bradshaw realizes someone attending the shower has stolen her shoes. Kyra offers to repay Bradshaw but upon hearing the price will only reimburse Bradshaw for less than half of the cost, proclaiming that it is insane to spend such an amount on a pair of shoes, especially when she has other (maternal) responsibilities: “No offence Carrie, but I really don’t think we should have to pay for your extravagant lifestyle ... It was your choice to buy shoes that expensive.” Calling this an act of “shoe shaming,” Bradshaw asserts that she has a “right to shoes.” After realizing she has spent “\$2300 celebrating [Kyra’s] choices and she is shaming me for spending a lousy \$485 on myself,” she leaves Kyra a voicemail informing her that she is marrying herself and is registered at Manolo Blahnik. Kyra purchases the shoes, and, in an act of vindication for both Bradshaw and the *Sex and the City* viewer who identifies with the protagonist’s situation, the sales person asks Kyra, “And could you please watch your children, we don’t want them touching the shoes.” Episodes such as “The Baby Shower,” and “A Woman’s Right to Shoes” demonstrate the extent to which Bradshaw’s character—and, consequentially, Parker—is disassociated with motherhood, a relationship that presented challenges for promoters of Parker’s portrayal of maternity in film.

### Parker as “Yummy Mummy”: The Long Shadow of Carrie Bradshaw

*I Don’t Know How She Does It* required the celebrity of Parker and nostalgia from the Bradshaw legacy in order to appeal to the female market sought by the production team. Rather than differentiate Bradshaw from both Parker and Reddy, promotional material only served to reinforce this connection (Jermyn “We Know How”). The best illustration of this narrative device is in Eve MacSweeney’s reporting on Parker for the August 2011 edition of *Vogue* published prior to the release of the film. Followers of Parker’s brand will also identify the connection between this particular *Vogue* issue, which is the magazine’s annual “Age” edition, to the first *Sex and the City* (2008) film where Bradshaw is asked to participate in a fictional “Age” *Vogue* as the “Forty-year-old bride.” The persona of Bradshaw is a prevalent theme addressed by the piece, and although Parker proclaims that, “Bradshaw’s life is nothing—nothing—like mine,” MacSweeney consistently highlights the similarities between Parker, Bradshaw, and Reddy (153). Within the introductory paragraphs of *Vogue*’s piece, MacSweeney provides an overview of the film detailing these connections for the reader:

The script ... is full of richly comic moments of the kind every working mother can identify with: Kate arriving at work to find she has pancake batter on the lapel of her suit; Kate feeling an irresistible

urge to scratch her head as she is preparing a presentation and simultaneously receiving a text message from school announcing that her daughter has lice. It's as if we're seeing Carrie Bradshaw, the character that has dominated Parker's career for the past twelve years, in a new phase of her life. (153)

MacSweeney briefly mentions Parker's maternal identity and how she balances her multiple public roles with her domestic life in passing towards the end of the piece. The editorial does, however, open with MacSweeney mentioning the nanny in charge of Parker's toddler twins and the "someone" who helps "with the logistics of eight-year-old James Wilkie's schedule" (153).

MacSweeney's editorial for *Vogue* is accompanied by a series of photographs by Mario Testino that capture Parker in a domestic setting with a luxurious New York City apartment serving as the location. The images also include Parker's husband Broderick, son James, twins Tabitha and Loretta, and friends of their children in a nursery, playroom, and family living room. Parker's garments showcase a variety of high-end labels in which *Sex and the City* audiences and *Vogue* readers are accustomed to seeing the actress photographed wearing, such as a Chanel tweed suit, dresses and gowns by Proenza Schouler and Bottega Veneta, and Bradshaw's signature Manolo Blahnik stilettos. Warner (*Fashion on Television*) provides a semiotic reading of Parker's *Vogue* editorial, arguing the household setting of the photographs alongside the rather retro styling of the actress's wardrobe reference the domestic television comedies of the 1950s and 1960s (115). The incorporation of Parker's private, yet still publicized life within the *Vogue* photo editorial represents for Warner an affirmation of "her position as [a] 'real' working mother, but somewhat self-reflexively acknowledges the constructed nature of the 'celebrity' 'yummy mummy'" (115). Warner's critique of the *Vogue* piece highlights how contemporary motherhood is a discursive construction that requires management by the cultural intermediaries who shape such representations. Her analysis is set within the context of McRobbie's framework of "respectable" motherhood and celebrity consumer culture, yet she does not address the influence of Bradshaw in the editorial's construction and meaning. The exaggerated composition of the photographs, evident through the juxtaposition of Parker's nostalgic wardrobe in an apartment accessorized with current technology, captures the viewer's attention due to the forced nature of the imagery. *Vogue* readers thereby approach the images from the imagined perspective of Bradshaw, a framing technique textually enforced through MacSweeney's editorial.

While the character of Reddy in *I Don't Know How She Does It* exemplifies McRobbie's classification of "respectable" motherhood—with her highly

tailored wardrobe, well-groomed appearance, and brownstone in an exclusive neighbourhood—it is not the topic of motherhood that sells the film to audiences, but rather the opportunity to extend the narrative power of Bradshaw. Bradshaw and Reddy are two distinct characters, yet the film *I Don't Know How She Does It* exhibits numerous similarities to the production techniques employed by *Sex and the City*. Pearson's novel is written in the first person, and the film depends on Reddy's voiceovers to further the plot. The casting of Parker problematizes this convention, since Parker's voiceovers create an automatic association between the film and *Sex and the City*, which was also dependent upon the protagonist's voiceovers throughout the duration of the series. *I Don't Know How She Does It* employs the "fourth wall" technique where the action freezes and both major and minor characters speak to the camera directly. Similar to the voiceovers, this technique was also incorporated into the first two seasons of *Sex and the City*. These resemblances in production help to enhance the connection between Bradshaw, Parker, and Reddy for audiences, particularly since the film was marketed to female fans of the *Sex and the City* brand by representing Parker as a "fraught working mother" (Jermyn "We Know How" 251).

Film reviews of *I Don't Know How She Does It* also highlight the parallels between Reddy and Bradshaw. *Time's* Mary Pols, for example, identified the similarities between Bradshaw and Reddy: "Kate is Carrie Bradshaw stripped bare of her bachelors, even. She has an architect husband ... who is more beta than Big ... Carrie and Kate aren't all that different—they both spend a lot of time worrying, for one thing." There are also uncanny resemblances in the appearance of the two characters. Reddy's assistant Momo makes repeated remarks concerning her boss's poor grooming, pointing out Reddy's outgrown roots and unkempt hair. The disheveled appearance of Reddy is a style that is considered a trademark of Bradshaw, symbolic of Bradshaw's sexuality and carefree lifestyle. *The New York Times's* Stephen Holden further remarked upon how Bradshaw haunts the film, both physically and narratively:

The curse of Carrie Bradshaw infects *I Don't Know How She Does It* with a severe case of what might be called post-Carrie Parkeritis. Parkeritis, if you haven't heard, is the term given to a new ailment named after Sarah Jessica Parker, in which a star finds herself condemned to eke out the last drops of freshness from the role ... that made her world famous eons ago.... Bradshaw flirted her way into mass consciousness in the late '90s.... If Kate's hyperkinetic cheer and shrill self-absorption are Carrie trademarks, 13 years after *Sex and the City* first appeared on television, their appeal has all but evaporated. *I Don't Know How She Does It* seems stuck in the past. (C6)

Holden's unfavourable review highlights how the blurred identity of its lead actress in popular culture damages the film's narrative structure. His commentary more broadly speaks to how Parker's position in public discourse is threatened due to changes in cultural politics, particularly in a cluttered commercial landscape that is continuously searching for the next personality—whether fictional or genuine—to embrace. Such commentary demonstrates that critics and other cultural intermediaries did not approach the film through the character of Reddy, nor did they consider the potential for the plot to act as a social commentary on the tensions placed upon working mothers. Critics conversely viewed *I Don't Know How She Does It* through the persona of Bradshaw. Parker's role as a mother is deliberately restrained since it is not her association with motherhood that sells *I Don't Know How She Does It*. The film provides an opportunity for Parker to personify Bradshaw in order to protect her brand, a brand that is not enhanced by her maternal identity quite like other personalities occupying the celebrity landscape.

The idea of Bradshaw and Parker as an interchangeable entity, however, is a construction now fully situated into the iconography of popular culture. Cultural intermediaries reproduce this iconography and work to complicate Parker's multifaceted identity. Parker is also highly aware of how, in the context of spectacular consumer capitalism, her celebrity and monetary value as a brand identity are dependent upon the continued relevancy of Bradshaw in popular culture. Her maternal identity is not recognized by the symbolic economy with the commercial value conferred to other celebrity brands. This self-awareness and reflexivity in the maintenance of iconography, combined with the labour of other cultural intermediaries, is a process best exemplified by Parker's recent brand-building career endeavor. In June 2013 it was announced that Parker had partnered with Nordstrom, an American luxury department store chain, and George Malkemus, the Chief Executive Operator of Manolo Blahnik, to create a line of accessories. Distributed under the label SJP, Parker's collection was reported to offer shoes for approximately \$300 and handbags at a cost of \$700. When reporting on Parker, journalists commonly allude to Bradshaw in their work to directly communicate a frame of reference for readers. Supported by the headline, "Carrie Would Be Proud!," Britain's *Daily Mail* reported the collection to be more affordable than "Carrie's pricey footwear weaknesses" (Peppers).

Parker created an Instagram account advertising her collection to online audiences, providing a more intimate connection to consumers by featuring candid images of Parker interacting with guests at events sponsored by Nordstrom. Parker reinforced her connection to Bradshaw in images showcased by the SJP collection Instagram account, an example of what Alice Marwick refers to as the neoliberal entrepreneur constructed through self-regulation

(13). The SJP collection Instagram acts as an avenue to not only maintain Parker's visibility, but to reinforce Bradshaw as an identity, or product, "to be watched and consumed by others," through the selection of iconic *Sex and the City* imagery (Marwick 13). Recent photographs showcased shoes from the collection placed strategically on the steps of the brownstone that served as Bradshaw's beloved apartment in *Sex and the City*, a building that is now considered an iconic New York landmark. The background of the image showcases Parker stepping over a chain link barricade to place her shoes on the brownstone's steps. Another image captures the sign reading, "Do NOT go on staircase please," which was placed by the current owners to prevent constant trespassing on their property by tourists and other *Sex and the City* fans. Accompanying the photograph was the caption, "It was take your @sjpcollection shoes to work day. #longdayforCarrie #whewwwwthosesteps #runninginheels #taxi!," with the latter hash tag referencing the common phrase Bradshaw would utter after running down her brownstone steps in a pair of stilettos (Collman). This imagery further exemplifies the dissonance entrenched within Parker's image, since, as she expressed to *Vogue*, she is "not a crazy shoe lady" who does not "think about fashion all day long" (MacSweeney 153). The visual imagery utilized to advertise the SJP collection is just one example of how Parker has chosen Bradshaw to develop and promote her brand as opposed to the actions of other celebrity mothers in popular culture.

Parker's image prevents her from successfully integrating her role as a mother into her public persona in a manner similar to other celebrities who have successfully rebranded themselves as "momtrepreneurs." Parker herself also undermines this aspect of her personal identity by consciously incorporating elements of Bradshaw into her later career endeavours. It is this self-reflexivity and recognition that her celebrity is dependent upon Bradshaw that distinguishes Parker from personalities like Alba or Fey, who have demonstrated how motherhood is compatible with their celebrity and other professional work. Parker rejects motherhood as a means to enhance her celebrity status and persona, instead relying on a narrative that celebrates the youth and freedom stereotypically associated with the single, conspicuous female consumer lifestyle. Motherhood consequentially represents Parker's 'inconvenient truth' in that maternity is irreconcilable to the discourses that compose her celebrity and success.

### Conclusion: Marketing Celebrity Motherhood in Brand Culture

Bradshaw's personality and traits—particularly her love of designer shoes combined with the character's fashion choices that became tabloid fixtures resulting from the expertise of *Sex and the City's* celebrated costume designer

Patricia Field—resonated with audiences in a decade that witnessed an intensification of consumerist values in cultural politics. Parker's endeavours with the fashion industry are a result of an identity attached to the iconography of Bradshaw in popular culture and represent her attempted transformation into a consumable brand. Parker's tabloid status as a fashion 'icon' is a complex classification ensuing from her identity as Bradshaw, a status legitimized by numerous activities involving the fashion industry after *Sex and the City* developed in cultural significance. In a celebrity climate where motherhood is appropriated as a means to increase social value, Jermyn ("Still Something") contends that Parker has efficaciously incorporated motherhood into the discursive construction of her celebrity. Parker's persona, however, signifies a site of struggle negotiating the contradictions that comprise her identities as a mother, actress, business executive, and wife, tensions which Jermyn argues also "speaks to some of the contradictions embodied in women's experience of post-feminist motherhood and culture generally" (173). Jermyn suggests that it is this precise element of Parker's celebrity that has helped expand her brand to a "remarkable new apex" (173). Despite Jermyn's detailed rhetorical analysis of how Parker accounts for her role as a mother in interviews, this aspect of her identity continues to be restrained and moderated. It is a liability to her brand as Bradshaw, which becomes an imperative image to maintain as Parker ages into her late 40s. Fronting advertising campaigns for clothing retailer The Gap, a design partnership with Halston Heritage, and clothing label and distribution deals with retailers including the now defunct Steve & Barry's and Nordstrom are just a few of the industry-related initiatives undertaken by Parker to maintain the prestige of her celebrity. These activities, however, play a critical role in reinforcing Parker's affiliation with *Sex and the City*, since Parker's brand has little legitimacy or relevancy without maintaining the connection to Bradshaw. Parker's persona as Bradshaw may help her maintain the privileged celebrity status she has grown accustomed to, but it reinforces the long withstanding beliefs that motherhood is not a viable identity for all female personalities in public discourse.

The promotional material developed to market *I Don't Know How She Does It* provides insight into how Parker has attempted in recent years to underplay her identity as a mother in order to protect her emerging celebrity lifestyle brand. Parker's celebrity continues to be associated with Bradshaw, yet the traits defining Bradshaw as the "ultimate single girl" are in contrast to the discourses of acceptable motherhood as acknowledged by the media and other social institutions (Nussbaum). The film's promotional material struggles to reconcile these dissonances between Parker's multiple roles as an actress, mother, and fashion icon, while ultimately reinforcing Parker's fundamental brand identity as Bradshaw to consumer audiences. Cultural intermediaries,

such as MacSweeney's editorial on Parker accompanying her August 2011 *Vogue* cover, strengthen the correlation between Parker's image with the self-centered and conspicuous characteristics of Bradshaw. *I Don't Know How She Does It* attempts to provide a cultural commentary concerning the social expectations and demands placed upon contemporary working mothers, particularly in a society in which maternal standards are constructed and determined by consumerist values. The narrative of the film is overshadowed by Parker's celebrity status and by the continued rhetorical longevity of Bradshaw in the imaginary of popular culture. Despite the commercial power of trends such as the "mompreneur" and "momances," popular representations of motherhood are continuously challenged by the intensifying relationship between motherhood and celebrity culture.

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