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Dear Editor,

We read Roth et al.'s study regarding how Australian women's magazines portray the postpartum body with interest (Roth et al., 2012). The authors conclude that media messages may 'normalise extreme expectations of the early postpartum body, encouraging readers (mostly women) to think that they are not only meant to, but also must, regain their pre-pregnant weight and shape' (p. 133). Furthermore, the authors mention that a limitation of their study is that they did not ask postnatal women of their views regarding the magazine stories. It is with this in mind that we would like to share with you some of our recent findings regarding postpartum women's views on celebrity weight loss (Bashir et al. in preparation). As part of a larger longitudinal interview study, we asked 10 women (6 weeks to 10 months post-partum, aged 23-34 years, 8 nulliparous, majority of White British ethnicity) about their views of Victoria Beckham's (one of Britain's most famous women) post-partum weight loss.

The majority of women we interviewed reported not paying much attention to celebrity weight loss, and appeared to clearly differentiate themselves from celebrities. The women acknowledged that celebrities have access to wider resources to help them lose weight and thus expecting celebrity weight loss was deemed unrealistic.

'I tend not to pay too much attention to that really as I know they tend to have all trainers and dieticians and the rest of it so. Um, yeah I don't really pay too much attention to that kind of thing' (Michelle)

'Well you know, if I had a million pounds, a personal trainer and a cosmetic surgeon I am sure I can do the same if I had the inclination' (Lucy)

'No. If I had her money I'd expect to lose weight that fast. I think that celebrity weight loss is unrealistic.' (Alice)

Nevertheless, one woman agreed that Victoria Beckham influenced her way of thinking about her own weight, motivating her to regain her pre-pregnancy weight.

'It does in a way [motivate you] because then you think that if they [celebrities] can do it, why can't you?' (Rabia)

In summary, our findings suggest that media messages about a celebrity's postpartum weight loss may not encourage all women to get back to their pre-pregnant weight, due to the women differentiating themselves from the celebrity in terms of money and resources. A limitation of our research was the decision to highlight a celebrity mother famous for her expensive lifestyle and slender physique; it may be that Victoria Beckham was an extreme example. Perhaps our participants would have been more encouraged by a celebrity with whom they were more able to identify. Despite this potential limitation, our findings support Roth et al.'s point regarding the importance of interviewing women regarding their perception of media messages. More research is needed to disentangle which women are influenced by unhealthy media portrayals and to identify what motivates women not influenced by media messages to regain their pre-pregnancy weight.

Reference

Roth H, Homer C, Fenwick J. "Bouncing back": How Australia's leading women's magazines portray the postpartum 'body'. *Women and Birth* 2012; 25(3):128-134.