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## Regular moms under pressure to be 'hot,' too

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As if modern moms aren't under enough pressure to be successful career women, good nurturers and great wives, now they've got to look fabulous doing it, too.

The message that you should be a "hot mom" is being peddled to women at every turn. New books claim to be the handbook on being a hot mom-to-be or even a "mominatrix." Web sites are dedicated to this singular ambition, and the 1999 movie "American Pie" brought a distasteful four-letter acronym for sexy moms into widespread use.

The cover of this month's issue of Redbook promises women they'll learn how to feel sexier and assess whether their face looks older than they are. Also, the magazine reports, actress and mother of two Julia Louis-Dreyfus looks "hotter at 49 than 29."

In Babytalk magazine, a headline screams "Pregnancy is HOT." News of reality star Kourtney Kardashian's line of Belly Bandit abdominal wraps shares the same page.

Just what every new mom wants – to slap on a corset under her sweat suit.

This onslaught of pressure to be hot has left many moms either cold or steamed.

"Isn't enough demanded of us as it is?" asked Meggan Rush-Ravazzolo, a Sacramento mom who pens the humorous blog [www.meggansamom.com](http://www.meggansamom.com). "We have to be great moms, we have to be fit moms, we have to be everything, and the pace to keep up is ridiculous."

Rush-Ravazzolo said she, along with many moms she knows, misses being stylish and wants to feel good about herself but would rather strive to be a healthy mom than a hot one.

She describes the trend as a sexualization of motherhood and one that is "just creepy."

"I don't want the word mom and sex in any sentence together," she said. "To me, a mom can be sexy, but that's called a wife. ... Leave motherhood to being nurturing and pure. Leave sex in the bedroom with your partner."

But the pairing is a major moneymaker for everything from pole-dance studios to publishing houses.

Take sex columnist Kristen Chase's new book "The Mominatrix's Guide to Sex: A No-Surrender Advice Book for Naughty Moms."

The title isn't the only thing that'll make you blush. If your cheeks aren't rosy (the ones on your face not, ahem, south) by the end of the introduction, just wait until you get to the chapter titled "The Unmentionables."

"If you're having great sex, chances are you're going to have a great parenting relationship with your partner," Chase said in a phone interview from her Atlanta home. "It's important to be happy in the bedroom, so we can be happy in front of our kids."

Sex tips aside, a good portion of the book is focused on helping moms build self-esteem.

"If you're not feeling great about yourself, it's really hard to feel good in the sack," Chase said. "If you can get to a point where you're loving your body, regardless of whether you lost all the baby weight or have stretch marks, you're going to be a happier person."

But for moms, a healthy body image is hard to come by in the age of Angelina and Madonna.

Celebrity moms look picture-perfect during pregnancy, sporting perfectly round bellies under haute couture. A few weeks after baby and their tummies are as flat as a day-old Diet Coke.

Who can forget Heidi Klum, who sashayed down the runway at the 2005 Victoria's Secret fashion show in a white, crystal-studded bikini just two months after giving birth to son Henry?

"Celebrities have changed things," Chase said. "There's a lot more pressure on moms to look hot and feel hot, and that's a bit unrealistic."

While Hollywood pressures have fueled the hot-mom trend for several years, it really became an issue when Barack Obama, and more specifically his "Momshell" wife, Michelle, moved into 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., said Elayne Rapping, an American Studies professor who specializes in media and popular culture at the University of Buffalo in New York.

"When Jackie Kennedy was first lady, it was a different time and everyone wasn't expected to look like Jackie Kennedy – she was the princess," Rapping said. "But when you look at Michelle Obama, she's presented as a role model that we can all aspire to."

Sure, you can take Obama's fashion cues and head to J. Crew for a stylish halter dress, but absent are the staffers who help get the first mom toned up, blown out and camera-ready gorgeous.

The hot-mom phenomenon also can lead to an unhealthy competition between mothers and daughters.

"It's supposed to be that your daughter is going to blossom into this young beauty, and you are going to age gracefully," she said. "Now, women don't age gracefully, and daughters are in a position to compare themselves to their mothers."

"There's been a loss of distinction between what a generational difference is supposed to look like."

The pressure on women to look younger and younger is troubling and speaks to an unyielding double standard, Rapping said.

"This may be politically incorrect, but life has gotten harder with so much expected of women today," she said. "You're expected to do a man's job but still are responsible for the day-to-day home stuff, and now there's more pressure on women to stay really young and good-looking for as long as possible. I think that's unfair."

But for some moms, taking some time to reclaim their bodies post-children, be it a simple workout or the extreme of plastic surgery, can provide a much-needed boost of self-confidence.

Karen Mathis of Rio Oso had a tummy tuck and liposuction about a year ago. It wasn't because she wanted to be a hot mom.

She did it because having two babies after age 35 had left her with a stubborn sack of flab around her midsection.

The loose skin made finding clothes that fit right difficult and made exercising feel pointless.

"I just wanted to have a nice stomach while I had a little bit of youth left," she said.

She has gone from a size 10 to a size 6. Getting dressed is a joy, not a chore.

"There is this little boost it gives me on a daily basis," she said.

A confident, relaxed mom? Now *that's* hot.

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