

“The Model Mum”, *The Age*, 10 November 2007.

I've never been particularly vain. But when I was pregnant something in me snapped. I was sitting in a cafe, enjoying my third cake for the day (one for each trimester), when I was approached by a woman who asked me whether I'd be interested in modeling for them.

"Them" turned out to be a chemist chain who were putting together their catalogue. Autumn, to be precise. At first I was suspicious. Why did they want a pregnant woman? Was I going to be promoting incontinence products for expecting mothers? But the nice lady reassured me. My pregnant belly would be obscured in the photo. It was my face that had caught her attention.

At that moment my inner narcissist was released.

Up to this point I'd felt like a pregnancy failure. In the first months of gestation, the sense of losing your looks can be quite acute. My first (and last) attempt at Pilates, replete with uncontrollable flatulence and a displaced hip, confirmed that I was struggling in the yummy-mummy-to-be stakes. I'd even been driven to an internet search for pregnancy porn, wondering how I could still be sexy with a human life bulging from my centre of gravity.

So how could I say no to the chance of being a model? I may have felt bloated (my partner had innocently inquired why it was that my eyes seemed smaller), but for the first time in months I also felt wanted and desired. Not for who I was, but for my looks. Every girl's dream.

I imagined my face adorning seasonal catalogues across the nation, filling letterboxes with my cheeky-yet-desirable grin. I fantasised about my proud partner bragging to his mates "My girlfriend is a model". Every boy's dream.

The shoot confirmed my new-found glamour. Not only was there a photographer, but a whole cornucopia of slick advertising types, including a woman whose only job was to ask me repeatedly if I wanted a cup of coffee. All this attention and all for me, (and the bag of chemist products I was instructed to hold.)

By mid afternoon I was finished, my face adorned with inch-thick make-up, a nice little cheque in my handbag, a new spring in my displaced hips.

When the agency called me back and told me that another of their clients had been impressed with my "look" I jumped at the chance to affirm my newly rediscovered allure. This time it was bread rolls I was holding over my belly, not chemist products, but the poolside setting added the touch of glamour I'd come to expect.

As I stood smiling, discreet behind my tray of baked goods, it struck me that I was a pioneer. What Sophie Dahl had done for 16 plus girls, I was doing for the objectification

of pregnant women. My "look" was in demand and as soon as I got myself an agent I'd be promoting sports-cars, slabs of beer, and any other merchandise that needed a dash of sex to sell. As long as the product was big enough to hide my belly.

Then, five minutes into the shoot, the photographer spoke those fateful words: "Give us that mumsy smile! The one we saw on the chemist catalogue." The only words that could have made my heart sink lower were "multiple birth".

I wasn't a pretty, coquettish model sporting an incidental baby bump. I was 15 stone, I was wearing Tenna lady, and I was "mumsy".

A few weeks later a friend mentioned that she'd received some hilarious junk mail; a chemist catalogue featuring a woman who was the dead spit of me. Her boyfriend actually thought it was me, at least for a moment. "Of course it's not", she laughed. "Although it did look like you as a 50 year-old." Like all canny professionals, I realised it was time to retire.

In our body-obsessed culture, most pregnant women are ripe with insecurities, which are cleverly harvested by marketers, encouraging them to keep up appearances, to see pregnancy as incidental to their physical sense of self. But when your body has doubled in size, when your ankles are thicker than your knees, when "pelvic floor pressure" is a fancy way of saying "oops, I did it again", remaining fashionable, sexy and desirable is just too much to ask.

Pregnancy ought to be a time-out from all that. Despite what the fashion industry, the glossy magazines, and the Pilates instructors want us to believe, vanity and child bearing don't always mix. As a former model, I should know.