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POP CULTURE

Jolie, Pitt make news and a baby

By **EYDER PERALTA**
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When Angelina Jolie's pregnant belly appeared on the cover of People Magazine this week, it capped a long-running narrative released to the media bit by bit. What's impressive about it is just how paced and nonscurrilous it's been. Compare it to the TomKat debacle, which ended with Tom Cruise firing his sister/publicist.

"The PR strategy seems to be the opposite of the rip-off-the-Band-Aid approach, which is probably smart given the way Americans seem to have taken the Pitt-Jennifer Aniston breakup so personally," said Jamie Diaferia, founder of Infinite Public Relations in New York. "It's almost as if their publicists are easing the country into this relationship."

Rumors that Brad Pitt and Jolie were a little more than co-stars began making rounds while Pitt and Aniston were still married. On Jan. 7, 2005, Pitt's publicist released the former couple's joint statement: "For those who follow these sorts of things, we would like to explain that our separation is not the result of any speculation reported by the tabloid media." But after Jolie vowed she would never steal another woman's man, and Pitt played dad with Jolie's adopted son, the couple made the union obvious — *without* making it official — with a magazine pictorial showing them in '50s-style marital bliss.

"When (Pitt) started dating (Jolie), he had an enormous amount to lose," said Susan Blond, Andy Warhol's protégé and now a publicist for Usher and Ozzy Osbourne, among others. "The idea that he left (Aniston) for someone who was drop-dead gorgeous, busty and skinny ... made us hate him a lot at the beginning."

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But the publicity, she said, was marvelous. Every time anyone photographed the couple, it was with her kids.

"People are responding to (Jolie as) both a good mother and a caring person," said Hollywood publicist Dale C. Olson, who represented A-list celebs Rock Hudson and Steve McQueen. "If that was done by PR people — and it could have been — you can call it manipulation. But I call it is positive awareness."

What's striking, said Kevin Howley, a professor at DePauw University, "is how deftly the PR pros are shifting attention away from the transgressions surrounding the couple's early romance, with its emphasis on infidelity and unbridled passions, to the more sedate and domestic emphasis on legitimacy and child-rearing."

It's also slowly moved Jolie away from the wild-girl-who-wears-Billy-Bob's-blood-in-a-vile, to a more matronly woman who "loves her children and the children of the world," said Elayne Rapping, professor of American studies at the University at Buffalo.

Pitt wins, too, Blond said. "(Angelina) adds a wildness that excites the imagination and all of sudden Brad becomes a little sexier. Before, he was sexy but too perfect. Now we get the feeling he could get burned at any moment."

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