

## Annette Bening, Naomi Watts Lack the Connection in 'Mother and Child'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 23, 2010 - 3:28pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Mother and Child,” with an all star cast of Annette Bening, Naomi Watts, Samuel L. Jackson, Jimmy Smits and Kerry Washington, is mindful of its subject matter, that rare and elusive connection between a mother and their offspring. However, the film has difficulties when the characters become inconsistent with their past backgrounds after that connection is introduced.

Mother and Child opens with a flashback, a birth. Fourteen year old Karen brings an unexpected pregnancy to term and gives up the daughter for adoption. In the present day that girl is Annette Bening, over 50 and single. Her life consists of caring for her elderly mother and working long hours as a physical therapist. She is embittered, and blames much of her life’s trials on the giving up of her child, who she doesn’t know. It is her obsession, even in keeping a diary of thoughts to the child.

That grown child is Elizabeth (Naomi Watts), a hard charging career attorney about to take on a new job with a prestigious firm anchored by Paul (Samuel L. Jackson). The two begin an affair, where Elizabeth is revealed to be slightly off-kilter, for example tying her fallopian tubes at a young age to prevent any children.

The secondary story involves Kerry Washington as Lucy, a married professional who is looking into adoption because she cannot conceive. The Catholic adoption agency is run by Sister Joanne (Cherry Jones), and that agency becomes the centerpiece for both those hopeful connections...Karen to Elizabeth and Lucy to a child.





Renewal: Annette Bening as Karen and Jimmy Smits as Paco in 'Mother and Child'  
Photo Credit: Ralph Nelson for © 2009 Sony Picture Classics

When Karen's mother dies, a renewal begins for her through the passion of her co-worker Paco (Jimmy Smits). He falls in love with her and encourages the search for Elizabeth – the adoption agency will put a letter on file. Elizabeth's life goes into a tailspin when, against all odds, she finds herself pregnant. The resolution to all these circumstances are filtered through the prism of the parental bond.

It is great to see Annette Bening on screen again. She has a abiding presence, and develops the character of Karen very astutely. Her depression and anger are apparent from her actions to the lines on her face. It is regret that informs her and she lashes out inappropriately to even the slightest attempt at connection. It is psychosis on parade.

Naomi Watts is even more stunning in her characterization. Her life is one on the run, casting about from job to job, an exercise in monumental self-destiny. Her life as an adopted child was a horrible experience, and the tying of her tubes was a symbolic and physical detachment from anything having to do with family. Her legal career has given her the opportunity to also stay rootless.

It is Kerry Washington's Lucy who stays truest to her goal...to be a mother. She goes through the hell of a surrogate being indecisive, her husband Joseph not completely on board and a family whose advice is mostly discouraging. But there is one significant line that defines her. She tells the truth, she says, "because it's easier to remember."



Decisions: David Ramsey as Joseph and Kerry Washington as Lucy in 'Mother and Child'  
Photo Credit: Ralph Nelson for © 2009 Sony Picture Classics

In following these characters and those who support them – the lovers, family and church – the first half of the film offers a very honest assessment of human nature, highlighting the mistakes we make by letting our regrets or callousness effect everyday life. The second half, at least with the Bening and Watts characters, there is a complete flipflop. Their lives do change significantly with love and pregnancy, but is that enough to make them almost saintly? It would have been more interesting to keep them in their psychotic loop, as in how would such darkness interact with the change presented?

The men in the film are interesting as well. Jimmy Smit's Paco is practically a saint, but he eschews religion completely. He also relentlessly pursuits Bening, despite behavior from her that would have any sane person running away. Samuel L. Jackson's Paul is also a saintly presence, always wanting to do the right thing against the tide of Watt's nomadic personality. Both are symbolic of the support necessary to sustain families.

Ironically, it would have been a better film overall if the "mother and child reunions" had less of a beatific result. The first half reminds us that life is hard and a constant challenge, the second half seems to imply that all these problems can drift away in the presence of a child's smile. Maybe, but in reality not so likely.

*"Mother and Child" opens in a limited release, including Chicago, on May 21st. Check local listings for showtimes. Featuring Annette Bening, Naomi Watts, Samuel L. Jackson, Jimmy Smits, Cherry Jones and Kerry Washington, written and directed by Rodrigo Garcia. Rated "R."*  
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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]  
Senior Staff Writer  
HollywoodChicago.com



[16]

[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [16]

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