‘Missing Daddy’: The Exclusion of Fathers in Mainstream Parenting Magazines

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Social construction of gender

- Parenting roles
- Changing definitions throughout history
- Normative attitudes are not the average (Brandth and Kvande)
Fathers through the years

- Variable and culturally based
  - Colonial fathers: ‘child’s guide, governor, disciplinarian, and protector.’
  - 19th century fathers: entertainers
  - Early-20th century fathers: sports, entertainment, and masculinity
  - 1970s and 1980s: greater responsibilities (Pleck)
The development of fatherhood

- Continually defined by the media (Beynon)
- Easy for fictional media to conform to stereotypes
- ‘Mr. Mom’ vs ‘Ms. Dad’ (Unger)
The myth (and perils) of parenting magazines

- Clarifies advertising message (McCracken)
- Even a local parenting magazine can send the wrong message
Rhetorical examples

• ‘Part-time father/Mother as main parent’
• ‘Father as mother’s bumbling assistant’
• ‘Father as line manager’ (Sunderland)
More text examples from the literature (Rashley)

*From BabyCenter website:*

- "Dad’s cheat sheet for childbirth class."
- "The father is increasingly important in care—but not that he is an equal partner."
- "Strategizing the date of conception around the potential conflict between birth and certain sports."
Hypothesis

- Parenting magazines take a negative view of the role and responsibilities of fatherhood more than 50% of the time.
Methodology

- Students reviewed six months of Parenting, Parents, Family Circle, and Family Fun (2011).
- All mention of fathers in the editorial section logged.
- Evaluated as positive/neutral/negative.
- Coders also chose from a list of topics that described text/image content.
# Range of content types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student A</th>
<th>Student B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive/Neutral</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral</strong></td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative/Neutral</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
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## Category of behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Togetherness</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperating with Spouse</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing with kids</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring about family/kids</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating kids</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Chores</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned about kids</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel with family</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports (with kids)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neutral/positive quotes

- "The kids love using dry-erase markers on the images to make silly faces, turning each other, and Mom and Dad, into clowns, pirates, cats, bunnies and more." (Family Fun)

- "Everyone in the family- including mom and dad- received a sticker for each book read." (Family Fun)
Quotes

- “It's especially common for kids to be sad about leaving mom (Sorry Dad!).” (Parenting Early Years)

- “If you try to straighten the house every day, and your husband likes to chill in front of the TV each evening, and you have a baby, something has to give.” (Parenting Early Years)
More quotes

- “A sleep-deprived, grumpy father snaps at his son for a minor offense (spilled chocolate milk?). The boy begins to cry. The mother comforts the child while giving Dad the evil eye.” (Parenting Early Years)

- "...women are at a greater risk of back pain than men (so why is he always the one complaining?)" (Parenting Early Years)
Authorship

- Most male writers: doctors, celebrities, or don’t write about the act of parenting.

- Need to balance fathers and mothers as authors.
Daddy Blogs

Market focus/trapped in the past

- Hypothesis not proven.
- However, these magazines perpetuate enduring stereotypes (Sunderland), possibly as a means to simplify ad sales.
- Images offer more equality, blandly, but negative portrayals of fathers continue.
- A greater gender balance of authors is necessary.
Works cited

- “‘Baby entertainer, bumbling assistant and line manager: Discourses of fatherhood in parentcraft texts’” by Jane Sunderland in Discourse Society 11:249.
- Decoding Women’s Magazines by Ellen McCracken.
- Men Can: The changing image and reality of fatherhood in america by Donald N.S. Unger.
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- “‘Work it out with your wife’: Gendered expectations and parenting rhetoric online by Lisa Hammond Rashley, NWSA Journal 17:1.
Thank you

- Questions?
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