

Constructing Men as Fathers: A Content Analysis of Formulations of Fatherhood in Parenting Magazines

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Abstract

Contemporary ideologies of fatherhood reflect the importance of instrumental support of breadwinning men; however, there has been an increased emphasis on the expressive and nurturing aspects of fathers. This content analysis explores popular portrayals of fatherhood as conceptualized in articles ($N = 50$) from five American parenting magazines. Depictions of fathers fell into categories supportive of hegemonic masculinity that emphasized men's breadwinning identities over their roles as parents. Men were often cast in ambiguous situations where they struggled to establish their parental legitimacy. Many articles revolved around men's pathways to fatherhood. Fathers who internalize these portrayals of fatherhood from popular media may not view themselves as true parents if they do not see themselves positively represented in generalist parenting depictions.

Keywords

fatherhood, family, masculinity, parenting

Parenting ideologies dominate a wide variety of discourses prevalent in the media that work to shape norms surrounding child-rearing practices and what it means to be a "good parent," such as proper disciplinary strategies and child educational trajectories (Assarsson & Aarsand, 2011). For both mothers and fathers, popular media, in the form of advice books, magazines, and tutorials, is designed to provide parents with the knowledge and tools to raise children in the most effective way possible. Research shows, however, that it is beneficial for parents to develop critical thinking skills as a

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way to challenge monolithic parenting norms reified in popular media (Aarsand, 2014; Connell-Carrick, 2006). Although mass media possesses the potential to widely disseminate parenting knowledge that can improve child-rearing skills on a macro level (Sanders & Prinz, 2008), it is necessary to analyze how conduits of media shape cultural conceptions of parenting and the ways these messages influence broader gender ideologies.

In particular, conceptions of fatherhood have undergone a restructuring that is reflected in both mainstream ideologies, as well as the burgeoning discipline of men's studies and its focus on men's roles as fathers (Andrews, Luckey, Bolden, Whiting-Fickling, & Lind, 2004; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Research exploring individual men's interpretations of fatherhood has shown that while men still stress the importance of the instrumental support they provide their children, there has also been an increased emphasis on expressive and nurturing care (Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). Changes in men's involvement with children have the potential to alter unequal gendered dynamics within the household as well as the workplace (Chesley, 2011). This growing acknowledgment of men's emotional connection with their children is unique because it is at odds with the tenets of hegemonic masculinity and traditional fatherhood that detach men from reproduction and parenting (Johansson & Klinth, 2007). As such, further research in this area is needed to better understand contemporary ideologies surrounding fatherhood and how these conceptions can shape family dynamics.

In general, men are commonly portrayed in popular women's magazines as socially incompetent and in need of women to guide them on the path to civilized, relational awareness (Duran & Prusank, 1997), a trope that is further embedded in gendered parenting discourses. Although there has been a growth in research surrounding portrayals of fatherhood as perceived by individual men and wider public opinions (Andrews et al., 2004), there is a lack of research that has examined the mechanisms through which these ideologies are formed. Popular media, such as magazines, act as a conduit for shaping perceptions and opinions of fatherhood, with the majority of parenting and family-related magazines overwhelmingly being written for mothers (Greve Spees & Zimmerman, 2003). In general, depictions of fathers revolve around traditional stereotypes with individual men often relating their parenting to their breadwinning status (Ranson, 2001) and media portraying men as secondary parents compared with mothers (Sunderland, 2000). The association of parenthood with women is thus reflected in studies that primarily examine motherhood ideologies in media (Johnston & Swanson, 2003) and those that compare motherhood with fatherhood in magazines (Francis-Connolly, 2003; Sunderland, 2006).

Although research has noted an increasing emphasis on the greater involvement of men in parenting (Andrews et al., 2004; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001), in-depth analyses of fatherhood in media outlets are rare. An exclusive focus on fatherhood is needed to not only legitimize fathers as parents but also to understand how fathers are portrayed in a culture that primarily equates parenting with motherhood. Therefore, the present study fills this gap by examining formulations of fatherhood in five popular parenting magazines published in the United States, which were chosen based on their

high rates of readership (Cision Navigator, 2012). Using a content analytic methodology, this study posits the following research questions to examine portrayals of fatherhood within a cultural framework of gendered parenting ideologies:

Research Question 1: How is fatherhood conceptualized in popular printed media?

Research Question 2: What stereotypes associated with masculinity and parenting are reinforced or deconstructed in these magazines?

Ideologies surrounding fatherhood have undergone a shift that has transitioned away from traditional breadwinner models and moved to emphasize fathers' involvement with children. As the dual-earner parented household is swiftly becoming the norm in response to increased economic challenges (Cherlin, 2013), families are forced to adjust how they navigate work–family imbalances that include struggles over breadwinning roles as well as housework and child care responsibilities (Gerson & Jacobs, 2004). In addition, women's increasing rates of labor force participation call for a simultaneous reconceptualization of parenting that includes residential fathers' greater involvement in caring for children beyond that of instrumental support alone (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). These changes in family life are also reflected in media representations focusing on the challenges and pitfalls of fatherhood, including television shows, movies, and literature (Kelly, 2009).

As a result of shifts in family dynamics stemming from economic changes, men's roles as fathers have also undergone transformations. Although studies continue to find that mothers engage in more of the heavy lifting of parenting (i.e., nurturing, multitasking) when compared with fathers (Craig, 2006), developing research also finds greater involvement of fathers in their children's lives than has been seen in the past. For example, Williams (2008) argued that individual fathers work to shape their own definitions of fatherhood through a process of “detraditionalization,” which deconstructs traditional notions of parenting and creates reflexive experiences of fatherhood. In this process, men continually reflect on their own experiences, which prompts them to improve upon erroneous practices of past generations through their own parenting strategies (Williams, 2008). Although growing numbers of fathers are elevating family responsibility over their commitment to the workplace (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009), many continue to conceptualize their roles as fathers as directly tied to their careers (Ranson, 2001). For example, Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) found that fathers sought to restructure their work–family balance in ways that supported family commitments and wider “webs of responsibilities” in the community, thus complicating men's roles as breadwinners (p. 563).

Men's distinctive social locations can also influence their individual parenting beliefs and child-rearing strategies. For example, social class can affect men's adherence to more traditional expectations of public fatherhood, such as among professional, higher income men, while working-class men can challenge stereotypical gender roles by balancing both public and private involvement with children (Shows & Gerstel, 2009). Related to their social-class backgrounds, fathers also struggle to navigate competing ideologies of masculinity in specific contexts, such as youth sports,

that, on one hand, call for traditional masculinity and, on the other, encourage the involved nurturance of children (Gottzén & Kremer-Sadlik, 2012). Linking the micro- and macro levels of parenting, family policy draws on assumptions of class-based parenting, so it is necessary to consider how differential access to economic resources can affect both individual parents and wider cultural conceptions of gendered parenting (Gillies, 2008).

While women are still conceptualized as primary caregivers of children, men are also deeply affected by the transition to parenthood on a number of different levels. Involved fathering with residential children is positively correlated with levels of life satisfaction, community involvement, and family connectedness (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Similar studies find that men increasingly emphasize the importance of not only economically providing for children but also supporting offspring through emotional nurturance and being a positive role model through enhanced bonding time and teaching opportunities (Summers et al., 2006). The pathway to fatherhood can also create an identity shift for men as they adapt to new expectations and responsibilities surrounding child care (Habib, 2012). Although they remain a minority demographic, stay-at-home fathers also embody a unique opportunity for understanding how changing family dynamics can also effect change in conceptions of stereotypical gendered expectations of parenting (Chesley, 2011). The effects of transforming views of fatherhood are not only evident on the micro level of individuals, but they can also be examined in the broader cultural context of social life.

Constructions of fatherhood in popular media possess the potential to shape stereotypes surrounding fatherhood as well as how individual fathers conceptualize their own roles and responsibilities. American literary fiction is notorious for rendering the stereotypical father as absentee or an extreme disciplinarian who rules with an iron fist (Armengol-Carrera, 2008). Studies comparing how mothers and fathers are disparately portrayed in magazines consistently find that parenthood is overwhelmingly connected to motherhood (Francis-Connolly, 2003; Sunderland, 2006). When depicting parents caring for children, magazines more often featured mothers rather than fathers in stereotypical gender roles such as nurturing and expressive support (Francis-Connolly, 2003). In a similar finding, Sunderland (2006) argued that fathers are depicted as “part-time” caregivers, a role in which they provide auxiliary support and relief to mothers (p. 523). While fatherhood is more often equated as a fulfilling aspect of men’s lives in popular magazines, it is also strongly linked to how fathers’ involvement could benefit mothers (Milkie & Denny, 2014). From these media analyses, men are often cast as expendable and secondary in the child-rearing endeavor, an image that then serves to demean a man’s value as a parent.

Furthermore, parenting advice and help literature (i.e., medical brochures, pregnancy guidebooks) often depict fathers as incompetent and secondary to mothers concerning child care responsibilities (Sunderland, 2000). In a study analyzing portrayals of fatherhood in a family-oriented Canadian newspaper, Wall and Arnold (2007) found evidence of cultural lag, in that expectations of so-called “involved fathering” are not supported in media that presents fathers as detached from parenting and more closely connects them to breadwinning in comparison with mothers. Representations of fathers

in popular television shows also highlight the contradictory nature of fatherhood in that fathers can be viewed as integral to teaching children valuable life lessons at the same time that they are cast in a negative light through portrayals of being clumsy and foolish (Pehlke, Hennon, Radina, & Kovalanka, 2009). Even when television fathers take on more traditional feminine roles, such as stay-at-home parents, they continue to emphasize their heterosexual masculinity as a way to offset the feminizing effects of nurturing children (Vavrus, 2002). In this way, popular media casts men in the supporting role of fatherhood, whereas motherhood is conceptualized as the definition of primary caregiver.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Fatherhood

The theoretical conception of hegemonic masculinity illustrates how an idealized version of masculinity works to systematically subjugate and oppress femininity and women, including men who do not conform to stereotypical ideals of masculinity (Connell, 1987, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this way, men as a collective group possess societal power and privilege even when individual men feel powerless (Kaufman, 1999). Manifestations of hegemonic masculinity include cultural representations that illustrate the ideal worker as detached from emotional and family responsibilities, which is especially problematic for fathers who struggle to balance work and home life (Hill, Hawkins, Märtinson, & Ferris, 2003). Generally, the family works to reproduce heterosexual hegemonic masculinity by its cultural heteronormative definition that underscores the heterosexual (husband/wife) model as the gold standard of what it means to be a family (Smith, 1993). Similarly, the motherhood mystique argues that women are the ideal caregivers of children and are fulfilled by child rearing (Ussher, 2011), which calls on the notion of emphasized femininities as a support structure for hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). This model can place severe limitations on how men engage with fatherhood if the hegemonic standard for men's child-rearing roles is restricted to breadwinner and does not include involved nurturer (Donaldson, 1993). As hegemonic masculinity is evident in cultural representations of fatherhood (i.e., breadwinner, disciplinarian; Wall & Arnold, 2007), it is a useful theoretical framework for analyzing depictions of fathers in popular magazines within a cultural context of gendered parenting ideologies.

Method

To conduct this qualitative content analysis, the following five parenting magazines across the time frame 2007 to 2011 were chosen for the sampling frame based on my ability to access their archived magazine issues electronically for analytical purposes: *Parenting*, *Baby Talk*, *Working Mother*, *Parents*, and *American Baby*. These five magazines were identified as part of the top 10 parenting magazines in the United States based on circulation rates (Cision Navigator, 2012). Table 1 presents how the selected magazine titles were ranked out of the top 10 and their corresponding circulation rates.

Table 1. Parenting Magazines of Interest Ranking and Circulation Rates, 2012.

Magazine title	Cision Navigator ranking in top 10 family and parenting magazines	Circulation rate
<i>Parenting</i>	No. 1	2,227,350
<i>Parents</i>	No. 2	2,215,645
<i>American Baby</i>	No. 4	2,002,876
<i>Baby Talk</i>	No. 5	2,001,733
<i>Working Mother</i>	No. 10	833,601

The years of 2007 to 2011 were chosen in part based on the available issues accessible through either an online academic search engine (EBSCO) or the magazine's website. *Parents* and *American Baby* articles were accessed through the magazines' website (Parents.com), while *Parenting*, *Baby Talk*, and *Working Mother* were available electronically via EBSCO. In addition, this time frame also highlights a burgeoning contemporary ideology focusing on the increased involvement of fathers in children's lives that has been reported in research studies as well as depicted in popular media (Gottzén, 2011; McGill, 2014; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

Qualitative document analysis of popular parenting magazine articles allows for an exploration of implicit cultural messages regarding fatherhood and gendered parenting ideologies that exist within a distinctive social context (Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2008; Krippendorff, 2012). Furthermore, it is important to note that these magazines are primarily written as sources of advice and guidance for parents, with the majority aimed at middle-class mothers. Recognizing the intent of the written material to be analyzed in qualitative document analysis is key in understanding its cultural context and social impact (Bowen, 2009). The protocol for data collection (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) included seeking out articles from the popular parenting magazines that addressed this study's research questions.

Within my multistage sampling plan, I first employed a purposive cluster sampling strategy to hone in on portrayals of fatherhood and utilize elements related to the research question, such that articles were included when they explicitly addressed some manifest content pertaining to fathers and fatherhood within a framework of gendered parenting (Krippendorff, 2012). This method is justified based on the fact that references to fatherhood are in the numerical minority among generalist parenting magazines when compared with the majority of material pertaining to motherhood. Therefore, a purposive cluster sampling strategy is the most efficient method to filter out articles that do not directly pertain to fatherhood (Krippendorff, 2012). The unit of analysis for this study consisted of written articles pertaining to fathers and fatherhood found in each magazine (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). To begin, I created a subsample of articles within each magazine title using the search terms "father" and "dad" to limit the articles related to fatherhood. Within each subsample, I randomly selected 10 fatherhood articles for each magazine from the total time frame 2007 to 2011, resulting in a final sample of 50 articles ($N = 50$).

Sample Characteristics

The 50 articles spanned the years 2007 to 2011 from the magazines *Parenting*, *Baby Talk*, *Working Mother*, *Parents*, and *American Baby*. All of the articles' citations can be found in the appendix. Of the sampled articles on fatherhood, all represented a heteronormative image of family life that excluded same-sex couples. On average, articles were approximately 1,058 words in length. Concerning authorship, 30 (60%) of the articles were written by men, 16 (32%) by women, and the remaining four (8%) are considered gender neutral because they were written by a collective (i.e., staff of *Parenting* magazine) or included personal anecdotes from both members of a couple. While I randomly selected 10 articles from each magazine, these were not evenly distributed across the time frame 2007 to 2011 for each magazine title, such that the subject of fatherhood clustered around particular publication years more so than others. The majority (16) of articles came from the year 2007 (32%), followed by 2008 (13, 26%), 2011 (10, 22%), 2009 (six, 12%), and 2010 (five, 8%). Based on the overall paucity of articles addressing fatherhood in parenting magazines, I was unable to gather an equal number of articles from each year. In terms of topic, eight articles (16%) were specifically designed as advice for fathers, and five (10%) contained direct guidance for mothers in relation to fatherhood. Of the articles discussing parents' perspectives (28), 21 (75%) were from the father's point of view.

Analysis

Although an understanding of hegemonic masculinity and fatherhood guided this study, the final themes emerged from the data following multiple rounds of coding and data analysis to become fully engaged with the text and capture its ethnographic context (Altheide, 1987; Altheide & Schneider, 2013). This strategy resulted in a "hybrid" analytical framework that combined codes derived from both the theory of hegemonic masculinity as well as the textual data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). For example, the code "fathers as breadwinners" was influenced by knowledge of norms surrounding masculinity and fatherhood; however, this code evolved into the more nuanced code "economic pressures of child rearing" after examining additional articles and further rounds of analysis. Similarly, theoretical and empirical explorations of fatherhood in media directed the current study's analyses (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which led to a combination of both an emergent and a priori coding schematic (Stemler, 2001). I conducted all qualitative data analyses of the text-based data using the computer software QDA Miner. The magazine articles were uploaded to QDA Miner as either Microsoft Word documents or PDF files.

Overall, I completed five rounds of coding, that began broadly and transitioned into more specific ideas concerning fatherhood, resulting in a coding scheme of "tracking discourse" within a shifting cultural framework of gendered parenting (Altheide, 2000). This qualitative method contributes to both the "rich rigor" of this study by enhancing my immersion in and familiarity with the data, as well as its overall

credibility by allowing the data's story to emerge naturally (Tracy, 2010). To begin, I examined all of the magazine articles separately to develop a general understanding of how they portrayed fatherhood. Although I began coding the articles with a preestablished sense of how fatherhood would be portrayed through a lens of hegemonic masculinity, thus creating a type of mental a priori coding frame, I ultimately followed an emergent coding scheme by exploring the articles and identifying their shared meanings and messages (Stemler, 2001). Processes of open coding followed by focused coding were completed to establish the foundations of emergent themes and create linkages to identify commonalities and differences among the articles (Charmaz, 2014).

Clusters of codes were then used to formulate the overarching themes and patterns related to broader messages regarding fatherhood, or "the recurring typical theses that run through" the articles (Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p. 53). For example, the codes "economic pressures of child rearing" and "emasculatation" were combined to create the broader theme "Negotiating Breadwinner Stereotypes." Next, codes such as "fathers as incompetent" and "fear of fatherhood" were used to establish the theme "Coming to Terms with Ambiguity and Uncertainty." Furthermore, the codes of "bonding with child" and "fatherhood as fulfilling" are examples of codes contributing to the final theme of "Navigating the Path to Fatherhood." Finally, I used thematic analysis to extract representative examples of the major themes from the corresponding codes within articles that best illustrated the concepts of interest (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This study's resonance is improved upon by establishing accessible, overarching themes from the data that are transferable to readers' experiences as both scholars and human beings (Tracy, 2010).

The process of first identifying fatherhood-related articles and subsequent data analyses consisted of a circular method of tracking my interpretations through numerous iterations of coding by returning to the articles multiple different times. This method allowed me to immerse myself in the data and capture meanings and messages in the articles that I may have missed in previous rounds of coding. While I entered into the analysis of the magazine articles with an open mind, I must reflexively consider how my own scholarly background in men and masculinities studies may have influenced my reading of the articles by priming me for gendered depictions of parenting. Throughout data analysis, I grappled with the challenge of acknowledging how my own personal critiques of media and its reification of stereotypes shaped my coding processes and textual interpretations. As a gender scholar, I am well aware of the widespread dissemination of gendered stereotypes throughout the media, and my constant critical analyses of these in my daily life led me to pursue this project and make sense of my perceptions in a systematic study (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In this way, my academic background and my role as a media consumer shaped my motivation for this analysis, and it is necessary to consider how these factors influenced study findings. This reflexive consideration expands on the potential for bias within the findings at the same time that it promotes the quality of this study by enhancing its overall sincerity and transparency (Tracy, 2010).

Table 2. Constructions of Fatherhood Sample Magazine Article Quotes.

Qualitative themes	Selected qualitative quotes
Negotiating breadwinner stereotypes	Maybe it's a function of how dads are genetically wired, but we can't look into our children's little eyes without seeing visions of college tuitions, spring breaks, trips abroad, and the little Picasso who's going to grow up to be a starving artist.
Coming to terms with ambiguity and uncertainty	When we were in the delivery room, I was a little let down by how let down I was. I had hoped for a surge of delight and confidence . . . Wishful thinking, clearly.
Navigating the path to fatherhood	It's our own little father-son vaudeville routine: Isaac zips around the apartment smiling, his half-open diaper hanging from his side, and I scurry after him with a tube of A+D cream.

Results

Fatherhood's portrayal in popular parenting magazines in the United States follows a stereotypical gendered formula with few exceptions. Depictions of fathers predominantly fell into categories supportive of hegemonic masculinity that emphasized men's masculine identities as overshadowing their roles as parents. In addition, men were often cast in ambiguous parenting situations where they struggled to establish their legitimacy as parents. Finally, many articles revolved around men's pathways to and struggles with fatherhood. The three major themes that emerged from the magazine articles included the following messages depicting portrayals of responses to fatherhood: *Negotiating Breadwinner Stereotypes*, *Coming to Terms With Ambiguity and Uncertainty*, and *Navigating the Path to Fatherhood*. These themes, however, are not mutually exclusive as the majority of articles addressed multiple different portrayals of fatherhood simultaneously, resulting in a combination of codes for the same article that spanned several different nuanced themes of representations of fatherhood. Percentages provided within each theme are derived from the number of articles that contained the corresponding codes for those particular characteristics. Illustrative quotations from each theme are outlined in Table 2.

Negotiating Breadwinner Stereotypes

The majority of articles ($n = 44$) highlighted men's masculine identity in some way, ranging from fears related to emasculation or promoting gender stereotypes concerning men's strength and resilience. Although cultural ideals appear to be promoting a new style of fatherhood that encourages fathers to be more involved in their children's lives, representations of fathers in popular parenting magazines strongly reinforce hegemonic masculinity. For example, an emphasis on the breadwinning role of fathers was evident in 20% of the articles ($n = 10$), which included any reference to father

employment. As the breadwinner has historically and stereotypically been conceptualized to be the realm of men within families, this status was also closely tied with fathers' identities as men, and this cultural message reinforces norms of stereotypical masculinity. According to one father in *Parenting* magazine,

Maybe it's a function of how dads are genetically wired, but we can't look into our children's little eyes without seeing visions of college tuitions, spring breaks, trips abroad, and the little Picasso who's going to grow up to be a starving artist. (Kerner, 2008, p. 27)

In this statement, men's roles as fathers are inherently tied to their responsibilities as breadwinners, possibly even on a biological level. This focus on men's economic contributions as their primary role in fatherhood reifies essentialist ideologies regarding parenthood that casts men as being more naturally adept at providing instrumental support for children rather than engaging in emotional, expressive connections with their offspring.

Men's primary status as breadwinner also places them at a disadvantage as it relates to their (in)ability to connect with their children. As one advice article states directly to mothers, "His job keeps him on the road, you're home with the kids. Here's how to survive" (Torroll, 2007, p. 39). From this perspective, men who fulfill the gendered expectation of being breadwinners are simultaneously framed as absent from their children's lives, which further reifies the masculine norm that men are emotionally and physically detached from the child-rearing process. Many of these articles were tinged with sympathy for mothers whose husbands were increasingly absent from home life as a result of the father's work responsibilities. One such article expresses this poignant sentiment in the following words of a mother who self-identified as "a married single mom": "He [my husband] was becoming a stranger to them [children]—and me. I missed my warmhearted, funny best friend. A lot" (Latvala, 2011, p. 54). Although these fathers were positively depicted as caring family men, it is clear that their breadwinner expectations severely compromised their ability to be involved fathers. These portrayals provided support for the cultural message embedded in these articles that men are assumed economic providers for children, regardless of the toll this takes on father-child bonding.

In addition to stressing adherence to the masculine role of breadwinner, fatherhood was also closely tied to feelings of emasculation for men, as stereotypical masculinity dictates that men maintain their roles as authority figures in families and fatherhood can work to usurp this. Eight (16%) of the articles expressed either explicit or implicit fears of fathers concerning their loss of masculine identity as a result of becoming fathers, which referred to codes of "emasculation" within the text. One article, aptly titled, "You Know You're a Dad When . . ." addresses this very idea quite directly when it asserts that men undergo a fundamental change when they have children. The author states, "Here comes a moment in every new father's life when he realizes he's not fully a man anymore . . . every halfway decent dad crosses that line from manhood to fatherhood" (Johnson, 2007, p. 17). From this representation of fatherhood, stereotypical norms of masculinity and nurturing children are mutually exclusive categories that are incompatible for men to successfully achieve simultaneously.

Men's masculine identity is especially called into question as new family forms take hold that threaten the traditional gendered dynamic that relegates men to the working realm and women to the domestic sphere. Specifically, the shift toward dual-earner households has led to new negotiations of economic contributions and child care within families, and this changing dynamic threatens the cultural status quo of the gendered division of labor supporting hegemonic masculinity. Of the sampled articles, eight (16%) explicitly addressed the category of stay-at-home fathers, often framing them as a new breed of man that falls outside of stereotypical masculine norms of fathers as primary breadwinners in families. However, father's breadwinner status is typically interwoven with these discussions, as one article referred to a man who stayed at home to care for his children as the "original *work-at-home dad*" (Evans, 2007, p. 44, emphasis added). This emphasis on working from home for fathers is distinct from references to women who stay at home, who are often referred to as "homemakers." Rather, men are encouraged to stress their masculinity despite being placed in roles that pose a threat to their identities, resulting in a cultural imperative that exhorts men to mitigate their loss of masculinity from being stay-at-home fathers by overemphasizing their gender normative traits, such as economic contributions.

Furthermore, individual men often reported in these magazine articles that their loss of breadwinning status in the family came as a blow to their masculine identities. One such man described his downward shift in self-esteem after becoming a stay-at-home dad in the following way: "I had just turned 40, and with nothing going on in my career, I sank into a weird place emotionally . . . to not be contributing anything to our family finances was uncomfortable for me" (Scott, 2010, p. 21). As such, roles that deviated from the gendered stereotypical norm of breadwinning status for men were often portrayed as difficult for men to cope with and were conceptualized in ways that greatly differed from women as stay-at-home mothers. One author succinctly illustrated this mother/father divide: "Nobody uses 'father' as a verb . . . Mother? Now there's an action verb" (Bean, 2009, p. 56). This idea directly relates to debates concerning the differential parenting capacities of men and women that are often grounded in essentialist claims of men's and women's inherent distinctions. However, the potential for a sense of gender equity in parenting and dismantling of hegemonic norms could also emerge from the experiences of stay-at-home fathers, as one article simultaneously describes, "As if being Mr. Audrey [his infant daughter's name] weren't threatening enough to my masculinity, Kristen's [his wife's] and my roles are now officially reversed," he later goes on to say "I became sensitive to the frustrations of stay-at-home moms" (Kolker, 2006, p. 15). The large majority of articles ($n = 40$, 80%) reinforced gender-stereotypical notions that equated involved parenting with motherhood and economic support with fatherhood.

Coming to Terms With Ambiguity and Uncertainty

Another common theme throughout the articles was the idea of fathers' experiences of ambiguity and uncertainty related to child rearing. Many articles ($n = 29$, 58%) discussed new fathers' common feelings of fear, ambivalence, incompetence, and stress

as they approached parenting for the first time. This common thread throughout the articles was further supported by the notion that men are viewed as auxiliary parents compared with mothers and not crucial to the child-rearing process. Primarily, men were depicted as both unsure of their feelings toward becoming new fathers as well as lacking the skills to successfully parent once they attempted to engage with their children. Interestingly, only one article directly challenged fathers' complacency with their secondary parenting status by cueing men's masculine identities: "We need to attack fatherhood like everything else we do: with equal parts unsubstantiated confidence and stubborn stick-to-itiveness" (Bean, 2011, p. 41). Although the majority articles fell into patterns consistent with norms of masculinity that detached men from parenting, others could potentially deconstruct these norms by utilizing the drive for masculinity to promote involved fatherhood.

While men in these articles were still portrayed as possessing at the very least a latent desire to parent, the common thread throughout was their lack of confidence in pursuing parenting. One article described a father's disenchantment when his second child was born: "When we were in the delivery room, I was a little let down by how let down I was. I had hoped for a surge of delight and confidence . . . Wishful thinking, clearly" (Williams, 2008, p. 12). Although both fathers and mothers can certainly experience this feeling of uncertainty, it is especially salient for fathers, as they do not share the same biological connection with children as mothers do. There is also a sympathetic, if not condescending, tone that accompanies these depictions of men's parenting ineptitude, captured in the following description of new fathers: "The world watches him schlepping and fetching and moaning and thinks: Oh . . . you . . . poor . . . bastard" (Lewis, 2009, p. 29). These messages are thus supportive of gender-stereotypic norms of parenting and fatherhood that overtly paint an image of men as lacking natural inclinations toward child rearing by highlighting their self-doubt as well as the social pity that is bestowed upon "schlepping" men who become fathers.

Feelings of uncertainty are also linked to men's parenting status as auxiliary when compared with mothers. A large number ($n = 16$, 32%) of articles underscored men's parenting status as secondary in relation to their wives, which was derived from codes such as "fathers as auxiliary" and "emphasizing motherhood." As one author contested, "As I say, the American father of a baby is really just a second-string mother" (Lewis, 2009, p. 23). Women are portrayed as vital to a child's upbringing, whereas men are viewed as complementary parents at best, or expendable at worst. For example, one male author explicitly asserts,

Look, I'd be lying if I told you that in an infant's life, the dad is as important as the mom. When it comes to caring for an infant, and instinctively knowing what to do, women have the market cornered. (Kelby, 2007, p. 40)

In addition, fathering is continuously compared and contrasted with mothering practices, solidifying the message that mothering is the gold standard of parenting, which further upholds norms of masculinity and their supportive component of emphasized femininities. For example, in an article directed at the mother, the female author

described a father's lack of connectedness with parenting: "But while you're cooing and cuddling, your husband is hovering in the background. He looks, well, lost" (Aquino, 2009, p. 17). By displaying fathers as secondary participants to parenting who remain "in the background," articles such as these in parenting magazines send the message that within the gendered hierarchy of parenthood, fatherhood remains inferior to motherhood.

Underlying the fears and feelings of uncertainty expressed by fathers in these articles is the dominant theme that fathers are inherently incompetent at parenting. Several articles ($n = 8$, 16%) made allusions, both overt and subtle, that fathers lacked the natural skills associated with child rearing and these messages were coded as "fathers as incompetent." In discussing fathers' subpar parenting abilities, some articles framed this idea in terms of advice for mothers, specifically in providing guidance on how to socialize their husbands into fathers. One such article warns mothers against "hammering him [the father] so much that he takes a pass on parenting altogether," which could ultimately result in the mother "becoming the only competent parent" (Bishop & Whitehead, 2007, p. 55). Articles referring to men's incompetence as fathers often drew on biological explanations as a way of understanding why mothers were the preferred caregiver for children. Fathers' perspectives supported the essentialist divide between men and women as parents, exemplified in a father's words highlighted in one such article: "If I could balance the mother-father hierarchy by carrying a baby in utero, would I do it? Absolutely not. I'm not equipped for that job" (Bean, 2009, p. 62). The gendered imbalance of parenting was taken as a given in articles describing parenting perspectives or those providing advice or guidance, which established mothers as the most skilled at parenting and fathers as lacking the necessary aptitude for the intensive caregiving required by children.

Although fathers in these magazine articles were predominantly portrayed as auxiliary to mothers, five articles (10%) challenged this notion rather than reinforcing it by emphasizing "involved fatherhood," which included men's explicit dedication to child rearing. When discussing parenting outside of comparisons with mothers, fathers were often depicted as determined to be involved and nurturing despite their own fears or lack of confidence. For example, one article described a man's perspective on his parental goals of involvement: "I grew up without a dad, and that absence has driven me to be present for my children" (Gatsiounis, 2010, p. 38). Similarly, another article emphasized a father's realization of his own child-rearing responsibilities as being more substantial than actions alone:

It reminded me that my job wasn't just to provide, to teach, to guide, and to back Mom up when she derailed the Popsicle train. My job—no, my vow—would be to make as many memories with them, for them, as I could. (Spiker, 2008, p. 54)

These articles stress the importance of fathers' presence in children's lives, but acknowledge that men face distinctive barriers to parenthood, stemming from norms of masculinity that detach fathers from child rearing. Examples such as this are in contradiction to the overarching theme of father's auxiliary status through their emphasis on

fathers' unique contributions to child rearing as well as their determination to avoid the mistakes of past generations. While in the minority of article topics, the message of fatherhood as beneficial to children's lives has the potential to challenge gender-stereotypic norms of parenting, while at the same time it can also reify essentialist understandings of mothers' and fathers' roles.

Another article that challenged parenting magazines' insistence on the primacy of mothering highlighted the experiences of a man who self-identified as a "single dad, efficient parent" (Newman, 2007). Stereotypical, traditional norms of masculinity exclude single fathers from definitions of acceptable masculinity based on parenting's association with feminine characteristics of nurturing and caregiving. As such, this article conveyed the message that single fathers must make conscious efforts to establish their roles as parents in the absence of maternal influences. In this article, a father shared his experience raising his children after going through a divorce from his wife: "I kicked into survival mode, and every bit of extraneous activity had to go because I now saw my kids only on weekends and had a lot to accomplish in that limited window" (Newman, 2007, p. 73). For this man, then, the importance of fatherhood became even more salient as he was forced to place his role of father at the forefront of his masculine identity and work through his own uncertainties regarding parenting.

Navigating the Path to Fatherhood

The final theme that expands upon the processes of fathers negotiating masculine stereotypes and coming to terms with ambiguity and uncertainty toward parenting involves fathers actively navigating pathways to fatherhood. Twenty (40%) of the articles addressed the issues men faced as they came to understand the expectations and behaviors surrounding their newfound roles as fathers, including experiences such as "bonding with children," "vulnerability," and "wonderment." This process included men acknowledging both their masculine identities as well as navigating their own lack of self-confidence related to parenting. Throughout these pathways to fatherhood, men were depicted as developing increased levels of self-awareness and introspection, which challenges cultural hegemonic norms of masculinity by encouraging fathers to embrace their vulnerability as parents. In one man's case, becoming familiar with the intricacies of fatherhood was most profound when he was afforded one-on-one caregiving time with his children. For this father, his parenting skills were most strongly primed when his wife was away from home: "I get to handle all the tasks from which I'm usually shut out, and the kids talk to me as if I'm in the room with them—which, by the way, I've been all along" (Leebron, 2008, p. 66). In other articles such as these describing men's rites of passage toward parenthood, the mechanics of fatherhood are represented as a stepwise process that requires active skill and determination rather than something that comes to them effortlessly.

Another element to navigating the path to fatherhood for men in parenting magazines revolved around strategies of bonding with children. As fathers lacked the biological connectedness that mothers shared with children (i.e., gestation, breastfeeding), articles addressing fatherhood were much more explicit in providing advice for both

mothers and fathers on how to improve father's bonding with children. Many articles ($n = 16$, 32%) discussed the importance of paternal influence on child development that can occur through father-child bonding. However, these articles also suggested that fathers required guidance in this process as if they lacked the inherent, or natural, desire to connect with their progeny. For example, one article directed at mothers suggested to "tap into Dad's expertise" as a means of bonding with children. This article urged mothers to "get your spouse to bring his 'A' game to homework help by playing to his strengths. An editor? Let him proof English papers. An engineer? All aboard for math and science" (Warren, 2011, p. 59). From this viewpoint, fathers can be coaxed into interacting with children only by stroking their egos or through explicit manipulation on the mother's part. In this way, some articles focusing on paternal bonding with children reinforced the notion that men are incompetent as fathers and require outside assistance (primarily from mothers) to be successful parents.

However, other articles focusing on father-child bonding strictly highlighted the father's perspective in a more objective manner. One such article described the experiences of a father who attempted to implement the use of cloth diapers without much success. The father recounted his parenting mishaps regarding the routine of diapering in the following way: "It's our own little father-son vaudeville routine: Isaac zips around the apartment smiling, his half-open diaper hanging from his side, and I scurry after him with a tube of A+D cream" (Apple, 2008, p. 47). This article was unique in that it avoided a gendered parenting hierarchy and lacked comparisons with motherhood as it primarily focused on fathers as parents rather than fathers as men. Similarly, this article portrays an image of fatherhood that could easily also apply to motherhood in that it underscores the reality of direct caregiving of children from a comedic perspective, rather than one that delineates a normative, stereotypical gendered parenting framework. This anecdote could also act as a type of therapeutic message for new parents by emphasizing the lighthearted relief that can be found in the struggles of parenting.

Finally, bonding with children was illustrated in other articles as something that fathers were not only consciously aware of but a goal that they actively sought. Stay-at-home fathers are especially primed to connect with their children, as one author argues, "A new breed of man is changing diapers and exploding stereotypes . . . these dads are forming powerful bonds with children, and if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" (Drevitch, 2007, p. 38). In a similar article, fathers were depicted as breaking free of the chains of hegemonic masculinity through their pursuit of bonding with children and seeking guidance from support groups. This article, titled "The New Face of Fatherhood," painted a picture of involved fathers striving to establish new norms of parenting in the following way: "These men have gathered to do something their own fathers would have mocked or, at the very least, misunderstood: bond with each other—and their babies" (Most, 2008, p. 29). From this article's portrayal, "new fathers" are presented as symbols in strategic positions to reconstruct antiquated notions of fatherhood as well as provide positive reinforcement to fathers that highlight their strengths as parents rather than their weaknesses compared with mothers.

Discussion

Findings from this content analysis of 50 articles from parenting magazines underscore popular conceptions of fatherhood within a framework of gendered parenting ideals that overemphasize men's stereotypically masculine identities while placing them in auxiliary, secondary parenting positions in relation to mothers. However, other articles from fathers' perspectives specifically challenged these traditional fatherhood scripts by stressing involved fathering and the importance of father-child bonding. Major themes included common portrayals of fathers as men, in particular their roles as breadwinners, which served to overshadow their roles as parents and reinforce parenting stereotypes. Fathers were also often depicted as experiencing uncertainty and feelings of ambiguity as they encountered parenting for the first time. Finally, paths to fatherhood were illustrated as complex and rigorous, requiring fathers' explicit dedication that was typically complemented by maternal influences. Findings also support previous research that has highlighted a distinct connection between parenting and mothers that dominates popular media, which often excludes men as equally competent parents (Sunderland, 2006; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

Although fatherhood can be a fulfilling, life-changing journey for men (Milkie & Denny, 2014), this analysis highlights the stereotypical masculine ideology that underscores fathers' experiences as portrayed in popular magazines. Findings from this magazine content analysis align with previous research showing that men are repeatedly cast as auxiliary parents compared with mothers in parenting literature (Greve Spees & Zimmerman, 2003; Sunderland, 2006; Wall & Arnold, 2007). As such, popular media messages that construct fathers as incompetent or ill-equipped for parenting because of their masculinity may inhibit the implementation of public policies that support men as fathers by reinforcing cultural ideologies that detach men from child rearing. Mothers are poorly supported by social policies that stress the importance of employment with little to no regard for child care responsibilities (Hays, 2003). Combining this lack of public support for mothers with cultural conceptions that link parenting with motherhood may further exacerbate fathers' likelihood of receiving both social and institutional support for parenting their children.

Furthermore, research has established that men's masculine roles as breadwinners in caring for children supersede those associated with nurturing, bonding, and love for their offspring within the realm of public policy and its associated literature (Curran & Abrams, 2000; Haney & March, 2003). Specifically, Curran and Abrams (2000) found through a review of academic and social service literature that public policies concurrently emphasize men as economic providers to their families as well as their identities as fathers. The parenting magazines analyzed in this study were also contradictory in their portrayals of fathers as both detached from the parenting process at the same time that they are determined to be involved parents and establish bonds with their children.

The overarching emphasis on fathers' masculine identities in parenting magazines has implications for not only shaping public opinions of fatherhood but also influencing individual men's views of their own capacities as fathers. However, if fathers lack

the social scripts and popular support for balancing breadwinning and parenting identities, it will be difficult for them to successfully adopt new strategies of fathering. This deficiency of public support for fathers could be especially harmful to single fathers and gay men who pursue fatherhood. Although many of the articles discussed in this study provided advice for parents on how to include fathers in parenting, these strategies will be difficult for individual families to employ in the face of widespread cultural resistance to acknowledging men as legitimate parents.

If men are portrayed as incompetent parents through widespread cultural messages, then individual men may be inclined to internalize these feelings and detach themselves from parenting. Inundated with these cultural messages, men may come to view themselves as unnecessary to the parenting process. As such, fathers who internalize these collective ideas from popular media may be less likely to view themselves as legitimate parents if they do not see themselves represented in general parenting depictions. These fathers then will fail to reap the psychological benefits of parenting, and their children may suffer the indirect consequences of a detached father. Although there are no data on how many men subscribe to or read parenting magazines as gender is not tracked in circulation rates (Cision Navigator, 2012), research shows that men are aware of the various popular discourses surrounding fatherhood and its focus on traditional gendered parenting norms (Brownson & Gilbert, 2002). Therefore, future studies of media representations should gauge individual men's, including fathers' and nonfathers', interpretations of portrayals of fatherhood in popular media and explore how this shapes self-conceptions of their own parenting capacities.

In addition, the articles stressing fathers' feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity as they navigate the path to fatherhood further reinforce the idea of men as secondary, if not unnecessary, parents. It is important to note that although some of these articles could act as a type of "therapeutic discourse" in providing advice for navigating pathways to fatherhood (Bonner & McKay, 2000), these types of messages are not the norm in generalist parenting magazines when referring to fatherhood. The numerical minority of articles addressing fatherhood in mainstream parenting magazines generally portrays fathers as largely unimportant in comparison with the critical functions of mothers. Although research shows that engaged parenting among fathers has positive outcomes for fathers' well-being (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001) as well as developmental outcomes for children (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005), the lack of fatherhood's presence in parenting magazines conveys the idea that fathers are less than crucial to parenting.

Although the present study provided a more nuanced analysis of fatherhood depictions in popular parenting magazines, it is not without limitations. The findings revealed that gendered depictions of parenting clearly favored mothers as primary parents compared with men; however, it is less clear how men from varying social locations may interpret these messages differently. Specifically, future research should expand analyses to include how conceptions of fatherhood differ along the lines of race, class, and sexual orientation. Furthermore, consideration of author gender should also be included in future studies to understand how this plays a role in the presentation of information. This content analysis was restricted to print magazine articles; however, more comprehensive analyses could be conducted on parenting websites and

blogs as electronic outlets are becoming the dominant source of news and information for people. Finally, this study was limited to one person's interpretations of the fatherhood articles (the author's), which could lead to interpretative biases and possibly remedied by implementing assessments of intercoder reliability (Boyatzis, 1998).

Conclusion

This study significantly contributes to present understandings of fatherhood in the media by expanding on previous content analyses on fatherhood, as well as broadening the scope of these messages to include how they reinforce hegemonic masculinity and men as both passive and active agents in the fatherhood process. By emphasizing men's stereotypically masculine identities and their feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity on the path to fatherhood, fathers in these articles were cast into contradictory positions of being disconnected from parenting at the same time that individual fathers expressed desires to reframe what it means to be a father. Fathers have been historically presented as secondary, and sometimes unnecessary, to the parenting process, and media representations are thus one mechanism through which these cultural messages are disseminated and reinforced.

Appendix

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- Bean, S. (2009, October). Manny knows best. *Baby Talk*.
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