

VISUAL DEPICTIONS OF GENDER IN PARENTING MAGAZINES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender-behavior modeling in the photographs of parenting magazines. This magazine category has been largely ignored in research on gender depictions in the media, even though the content may have primary media effects on adult readers and secondary effects on their children in terms of gender behavior expectations. The social acquisition of gender theory asserts that people continue to shape gender attitudes into adulthood and the social learning theory has shown that viewers adopt behaviors modeled in the media. Thus, parenting magazine readers are susceptible to internalizing gender behaviors modeled in photographs. The goal of this study is to understand the scope of visual gender depictions that a reader encounters in the magazines. A quantitative analysis of photographs from the editorial content of *Cookie*, *Family Fun*, *Parenting*, and *Parents* explores whether the behaviors, activities, and attributes of 2,479 characters were linked to gender. The findings revealed that, although boys and girls exhibit slight difference in activities and behavior, the depictions of children tend to be gender egalitarian. In contrast, parenting roles are gender disparate. Fathers are vastly underrepresented, and the magazines resort to conventional definitions of mothering (nurturance, care) and fathering (direction, playfulness) in the photographs. A post hoc qualitative study of fathering depictions reveals that fathers adopt the traditional feminine roles of expressing affection and showing care, but maintain stereotypical male inclinations to be their children's teacher and playmate.