

What It Takes to Be a Good Mother: Representations of Motherhood in Two Canadian Parenting Magazines

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Abstract :

This paper explores how motherhood is discursively constructed in *Enfants Quebec* and *Today's Parent*, the two main parenting magazines in Quebec and Canada. Despite their name, parenting magazines are mainly written for mothers, who remain the primary target of advertisements and articles. Mirroring women's magazines, they present perfect babies, smiling parents, a can-do philosophy, as well as ideals of perfection (Gill 2010). The pleasurable nature of these magazines is also coupled with a practical side, as they offer surviving skills for the struggling mothers in an «Age of Anxiety» (Warner 2005). Using a critical discourse analysis perspective, three key discursive repertoires emerged from the analysis of 68 issues published between January 2009 and March 2013: Performing a domestic motherhood, kid-ology, and pampered moms. Performing a domestic motherhood is based on a business-derived language, and offers life-simplifying tips for balancing life and work. The basic theme is that if you get organized you will succeed. Kid-ology is structured on experts' and pseudo-experts' discourses helping mothers cope with the challenges of raising and educating their kids. These articles generally focus on “dos and don'ts”, on “how to” do this and that, and on what you need to know to keep your child happy and safe. Finally, there is the pampered moms' repertoire, which focuses on taking care of your body. This paper thus discusses how these repertoires work together to offer a specific representation of motherhood, highlighting tensions and silences conveyed by these discourses.

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Motherhood: An Object of Study and Discourses

The contradictory discourses about motherhood and activities related to it seem to be normal these days in the context of mommy wars, over increasing popularity of baby-bump watching (with the proliferation of websites such as celebritybabyscoop.comⁱ), and mommy blogging. For Douglas and Michaels (2004), “Motherhood became one of the biggest media obsessions of the last three decades, exploding especially in the mid 1980s and continuing unabated to the present” (p. 7). This fascination brings Hall and Bishop (2009b) to argue that there is “cultural anxiety” over motherhood, which is depicted in the representations produced in traditional and online news and entertainment. We now live in a world of “Perfect Madness” causing mothers to live in constant anxiety (Warner, 2005).

This situation brings Douglas and Michaels (2004) to unravel *The Mommy Myth*, by exposing the “new momism” ideology as “a set of ideas, norms, and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgates standards of perfection that are beyond your reach” (p. 4-5). The idea of “choice” is central to new momism, which is a product of post-feminist discourses and ideologyⁱⁱ. It is based on “the feminist insistence that women have choices, that they are active agents in control of their own destiny, that they have autonomy” (p. 5). The new momism is in direct relation to Hays’ (1996) ethos of “intensive mothering”, where mothers must develop expert skills in order to be therapists,

pediatricians, teachers, for their children. One of the key tenets of new momism is the idea that motherhood is an individual and solitary achievement, making successes and failures your own and not the ones of the societyⁱⁱⁱ in which you live. In order to better understand new momism, Douglas and Michaels (2004) are particularly interested in the role of mass media in producing this new momism, as “the media are the major dispenser[s] of the ideals and norms surrounding motherhood: Millions of us have gone to the media for nuts-and-bolts child-rearing advice. Many of us, in fact, preferred media advice to the advice our mothers gave us” (p. 11).

In line with these writings, we also want to reflect on motherhood and on the many ways the media construct its representations. More specifically, this paper explores how motherhood is discursively constructed in *Enfants Québec* and *Today's Parent*, the two main parenting magazines in French-speaking Quebec and in the English-speaking provinces of Canada. Despite their names, parenting magazines are mainly written for mothers who remain the primary target of advertisements and articles. Mirroring women's magazines, parenting magazines present beautiful babies, smiling parents, a can-do philosophy, as well as ideals of perfection (Gill, 2009). The pleasurable nature of these magazines is also coupled with a practical side, as they offer survival skills for the struggling mothers in an “Age of Anxiety” (Warner, 2005). Using a critical discourse analysis perspective, three key discursive repertoires emerged from the analysis of 68 issues published between January 2009 and March 2013: performing domestic motherhood, kid-ology, and pampered moms.

Scholars working on the question of motherhood focus their attention on diverse issues. Kaplan's (1992) *Motherhood and Representations: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* offered a psychoanalytic account of discourses in film from the nineteenth

century to the 1990s. Bringing together scholars with numerous theoretical perspectives, books such as *Representations of Motherhood* (Bassin, Honey and Kaplan, 1994), *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture* (Hall and Bishop, 2009), and *Mediating Moms: Mothers in Popular Culture* (Podniek 2012) offer a complex and multi-dimensional understanding of motherhood representations, as well as accounts of maternal subjectivity construction. While reading these works, we navigate through questions of race, class and feminism along with the ways mothers are portrayed in popular culture. Following many of these authors (and others like Glenn, 1994, Johnston and Swanson 2003a, 2003b), we envision motherhood as a socio-historical construction and not as biological or socially ascribed.

Motherhood in Parenting Magazines

Discourses about motherhood are everywhere^{iv}; our focus is on media discourses, including “parenting” magazines. This is important since the role of media in the construction of motherhood ideologies has received little attention (Johnston and Swanson, 2003a). Moreover, in mass-communication research, magazines are surprisingly understudied (Mahart, 2012). Likewise, nursing studies do not pay attention to these discourses and their possible effects on motherhood practices. These discourses could then be in conflict.

Research on women’s magazines is more widespread than on parenting magazines. Feminist scholars study women’s magazines and mainly offer critical analysis of their content. As summed up by Gill (2009), feminist scholars envision women’s magazines as a “key site (or even source) of cultural ideas about women, men and gender relations” (p. 346). Magazines are seen as cultural texts promoting femininity and norms of how to be a

woman. Since parenting magazines mirror women's magazines, it is not surprising that they also advocate how to be a woman, how to be a mother and that they are more gender-stereotypical than gender-neutral (Greve and Zimmerman, 2003). In this sense, these magazines can be seen as both creating and relieving guilt (Keller, 1994; des Rivières-Pigeon, Gagné et Vincent 2012) for the targeted audience in need of orientation or escape. Considering that people are in constant need of identity management and orientation, women could be reading magazines to confirm their worldviews and values. Magazines promote a "can-do philosophy in which women are represented as able to achieve anything if they work hard enough (and follow the advice, 'cheats' and helpful hints the magazine offers" (Gill, 2009: 199). Our aim is to shed light on the contradictions and ambiguities presented in magazines (Van Zoonen, 1994), in order to better understand their power. Being "open texts", they can be read and interpreted differently (Mahart, 2012: 854). Their influence is not absolute (Odland, 2010), as researchers like Hermes (1995) showed the agency of the readership in her famous study of women's magazines.

Let us not forget the fact that magazines are a major part of the media landscape fuelled by powerful commercial organizations (Ibid, p. 180). They are an enduring popular medium, and most people read a magazine on a fairly regular basis. In fact, they accompany us from (just out of) the cradle all the way to the grave (Ibid). Parenting magazines are easily accessible in doctors' waiting rooms and on electronic devices. They also are the perfect complement to child-rearing books for parents in need of advice.

Likewise, we can see society's struggles and socio-cultural transformations through studying magazines. This was the aim of Keller's (1994) analysis of a variety of women's magazines in the United States. She studied *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Parents*, *Good*

Housekeeping, and *McCall's* from 1950 to 1990. She pointed out the fact that with every decade came new representations of the woman's place, a place reinforced with expert discourses from psychologists or pediatricians. Comparably, magazines were also used to get a historical account of motherhood. For instance, the discourses from 1833 to 1848 in *The Mother's Magazine*, one of the first periodicals for women published in the United States, were studied to document the evolution of moral regulation practices during that period (Schertz, 2009). Odland (2010) showed how in 1946, *Ladies' Home Journal* offered an ambivalent portrayal of domesticity in the transition from wartime to peacetime. Other scholars conducted a content analysis of articles and advertisements about infant feeding in *Parents' Magazine* between 1971 and 1999. Foss and Southwell (2006) proved that there is a relationship between media content on infant feeding and breastfeeding rates in the United States during that time period. Pierce (2008) highlights the conflicting nature of discourses about motherhood and activism in *Good Housekeeping*, *Women's Journal*, and *Women Citizen* magazines following the 1921 Maternity and Infancy Act in the United States.

Critical Discourse Analysis, Rhetorical Processes and Interpretative Repertoires

Like these studies, we offer a critical analysis of discourses of parenting magazines, as they are powerful cultural objects producing specific representations of motherhood. In the next section, we will explain what critical discourse analysis is, why rhetorical processes are at stake in our analysis, and how we identified the three interpretative repertoires central to our analysis. In agreement with Fairclough (1995) and Page (2003), we view news stories as cultural artefacts that play an active role in constructing social reality. They also are barometers of socio-cultural changes. Likewise, we are interested in the socially

constitutive nature of discourses, which are considered as socio-cultural practices with a rhetorical organization. This led us to study the linguistic features of discourses, paying close attention to vocabulary choices and to patterns in texts (for example, the use of metaphors). By highlighting the properties of these discourses, we hope to emphasize the points of tension where forces of social reproduction and contestation are played out (Lazar, 2005a). In this sense, our aim is not just descriptive; we also want to address the silences in their discursive aspects (Fairclough, 2010).

With this in mind, we do not aim to assess whether the representations constructed by and through the discourses are true or pertinent. Rather we want to highlight the way issues linked to motherhood are presented in parenting magazines. To do so, we focus on how these discourses are organized. Our attention is more specifically centered on rhetorical processes and on argumentative figures, since they have an important organizing purpose and play a role in persuasion. For example, metaphors, by condensing significations, offer an interpretation of the situation discussed (Mazzotti, 2002). By paying attention to the rhetorical processes and argumentative figures, by studying recurrent metaphors or tropes, and by focusing the attention on the terms used when characterizing actions, events, and other phenomena, we are able to identify several “interpretative repertoires”. What are interpretative repertoires? They are “building blocks that people use for constructing a mental version of actions, cognitive processes, and other phenomena in their discourse” (Potter, McKinlay et Wetherell, 1993: 147). Following Gill (2009), we also see repertoires as analytical tools allowing “scholars to go beyond texts, and to connect these to wider contexts and social formations” (p. 351). They are useful to identify patterns and the ways

ideology and power work in and through discourses. “In practice, of course, repertoires intermingle and coexist in any text and context” (Gill, 2009: 361).

Analytic Processes

We began by reading the articles and paying close attention to the way they present issues concerning motherhood and the way mothers were portrayed. We then identified recurrent themes, narratives, metaphors, and rhetorical figures. We tried to establish which rhetorical processes and figures were used to inform, convince and promote action. We were astonished by how heavily magazines rely on experts. Experts or “rhetorical authority” are useful for vulgarisation purposes (Perelman and Olberchts-Tyteca, 2008: 410-411).

There were mainly three different types of authorities in these publications: the accepted authority, the relative authority, and the unanimous opinion (des Rivières-Pigeon, Gagné and Vincent 2012: 63-67). First, the accepted authority is often a respected one, like a specialist, whose competences and knowledge of the field adds to his or her authority. Pediatricians, psychologists, doctors, or lawyers are part of that category, as are scientific researchers. For example, stating that many studies showed a link between children having better grades in school and breastfeeding goes into the accepted authority category. Second, the relative authority gathers people or organizations who are competent in their field and have experience or skills in a certain area. For instance, a parent or a parenting organization like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the Association of Parents of Disabled Children, the Federation of Adopting Parents of Quebec, as well as mommy bloggers, are part of that type of expertise. Finally, authority can also take the form of the “unanimous opinion” based on consensus of a common knowledge. Usually taking more abstract forms

such as “It seems like...”, “Everybody knows that...”, these affirmations are persuasive because they are difficult to contest.

Corpus and Unit of Analysis

We analyzed all the issues of *Today's Parent* and *Enfants Québec* published between January 2009 and March 2013. A total of 68 magazine issues were analyzed. *Today's Parent* is part of the Rogers publication group, and *Enfants Québec* is a part of Éditions Transcontinental. Both are big Canadian media conglomerates. There are advertisements^v in every issue. Usually ads are about baby products (e.g., diapers or food), women's products (e.g., shampoo and creams).

Parenting magazines offer standard types of articles:

- 1) the “ask an expert” article
- 2) the “how to” article (e.g., how to cook, sew, and educate your children)
- 3) the chronicle written by a personality
- 4) the first-person article about parenting
- 5) short news pieces about health, nutrition, kids' activities and products

Our focus was mainly on articles and chronicles (1, 2, and 5 depending on the issues and the recurrent themes in the magazines). Our unit of analysis was the “thematic segment”, which could be a word, a group of words, a sentence, a group of sentences, or even a complete paragraph. The importance was the unity of the theme conveyed (des Rivières-Pigeon, Gagné and Vincent 2012: 79).

ANALYSIS

Three interpretative repertoires emerged from our analysis: performing domestic motherhood, kid-ology, and pampered moms. We will explain and offer an interpretation of each repertoire in the following part of the article. Before presenting them, we would like to call attention to the fact that we do not claim these discourses are all bad and dangerous. We desire to highlight part of their functioning to illustrate their role in motherhood in the age of anxiety because they create tensions, unrealistic expectations, and contradictory messages. These discourses mostly constructed around experts—nutritionists, psychologists, pediatricians, doctors, mothers and fathers—offer advice on the challenges of everyday life and may be the source of more concern and fear than reassurance for some mothers. Moreover, by often presenting situations as being not as they think they really are, they can create insecurities about the mother's ability to be a great parent. Writers establish a relationship with readers that might be one of dependability because of the self-doubt created by the magazine's discourses. Angst-ridden mothers insecure with their performances at home, with their kids, and in the way they manage their bodies might read these magazines seeking reassurance but find more reasons to worry. By unraveling the rhetorical processes in these magazines, we hope to offer a better understanding of some of the anxieties in a mother's life.

Performing Domestic Motherhood: The Joys of the Mother in Control

First, the magazines mostly present mothers in domestic settings. The question of work is seldom brought up, as if these mothers do not work outside the home (or at least it is not specified). The help and advice given to women follows the themes of the seasons: Christmas, Easter, Back-to-school, etc. Each season brings new reasons and ways to perform. This is why the first repertoire is called **performing domestic motherhood** or

how to simplify your life while being a good mother. The modern mom is one in need of more time. Magazines respond to this need by offering quick and easy answers to everyday life challenges: cooking, housework, kids' birthdays, and holiday festivities (Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day). The key to success is getting organized and having control over one's life. In this repertoire, everything revolves around family life and the household.

Easy as 1-2-3: Breezing Through Life Chores and Controlling the Anxiety

In the performing domestic motherhood repertoire, the language emphasizes simplicity and the effortlessness of the magazine's propositions. On the cover and in almost every issue, the word "easy" is present. These articles include appealing pictures of simple recipes presented along with images of parents and kids preparing the meal together or children eating and smiling. For example:

"Make your own snacks. Skip the added sugar and fat in ready-made treats with these healthy **(and easy!)** homemade cookies" (TP¹, April, 2012: 110).

"Do-it yourself baby food. **It's easier than you think**" (TP, September, 2010: 151-156).

"Spring chicken. Five fresh, **easy ways** with this family-dinner standby" (TP, May, 2010: 136).

The tips offered by the magazines might be welcomed by mothers. Nevertheless, we can ask ourselves how these discourses could also trigger feelings of guilt when there is not enough time or energy to prepare these easy, appealing dishes for the kids.

¹ In our examples, TP refers to *Today's Parent* and EQ to *Enfants Quebec*.

Simple solutions are also presented for decorating projects like updating a girl's room (TP, March, 2011: 96-106). Similarly, with every season, mothers are presented with uncomplicated dishes and do-it-yourself (DIY) projects to prepare with or without their kids for Easter, Valentine's Day, Christmas, and Halloween. This particular celebration of Halloween comes with suggestions for "simple" costumes that a crafty mother could make for her children. With some sewing and some artistic experience, a costume could be made in less than two hours (EQ, October, 2010: 67).

The question of organization is amplified with the back-to-school issues. There are errands to run and routines to re-establish and here again the experts come to the rescue. A nutritionist explains "how to **attack** the back-to-school schedule beginning in the kitchen and how to lift our spirits by doing so" (EQ, September, 2012: 59 – our translation). Parents also learn "how to get organized in order to **survive** when returning to class after the summer holidays" (EQ, September, 2010).

In this repertoire, mothers are represented as having to perform on the domestic scene. According to these articles, mothers are in need of advice, their life seems difficult, and having kids is a heavy burden to carry. Facing these responsibilities is demanding. Mothers are presented as trying to survive their new schedule while constantly racing against the clock. Most of these articles revolve around day-to-day life and chores. They seldomly address matters related to other spheres of life with kids, such as how to run a household, save money, or plan for the future. The content underlines the preconceived propositions of these magazines' discourses: women know how to cook, how to sew, and how to operate in the domestic sphere.

Kid- ology^{vi} or Advice to the “Clueless” Mother

Our second repertoire is called **kid-ology** and is organized around paradoxical discourses where tips and tricks are presented along with dos and don'ts. Kid-ology covers what you need to know to fit the parenting norm, and to raise happy and well-behaved kids. Advice is presented as vital knowledge in a guidebook. The vocabulary used explains what to do and revolves around the idea of having the right tools to cope with every situation. Both magazines offer countless professionals' advice. They mobilize experts, both accepted and relative ones, on a variety of subjects in order to guide parents in what seems to be a difficult journey through parenthood. This instrumentalization of advice is central in the repertoire, as kid-ology reveals incomplete knowledge and deconstructs previous assumptions about day-to-day situations. Things are not always as they seem, so mothers must be wary of the many hazards they may encounter in their parenting journey.

Protecting Their Health: How Nothing About Motherhood is Simple

The idea of danger is central to the kid-ology repertoire, so safety then becomes an important topic. Parents must learn how to keep their child safe from choking (TP, September, 2010: 45), from being hurt while in their car seat (TP, January, 2010: 69), when crossing the road (TP, May, 2010: 115-120), or using the Internet (TP, September, 2010: 131-138). Parents can even take a quiz and learn how to be “street smart” (TP, May, 2010: 115-120). After this quiz, they will be “armed with the information [they] need to help [their] kids stay safe (and stay calm) when [they are] not with them” (ibid). The use of military vocabulary suggests the serious concern of danger lurking outside the home, away from the protection of a parent. If you need to be “armed,” you need to be prepared for the

worst and ready to defend yourself from possible enemies. This could contribute to anxiety and aligns with the intensive motherhood ideology as we will discuss later in the article. An example of this ideology is the need for mothers to protect their children from the many dangers of the sun.

“Sunscreen is the superhero of skin everywhere, protecting against UV radiation with a single application. But like many masked marvels, sunscreen doesn’t always get its due, despite the seriousness of UV overexposure. How **serious? According to the Canadian Dermatology Association (CDA)**, the main cause of skin **cancer** (the most common cancer in the world) is too much UV **radiation**. Despite our best intentions, most of this UV exposure happens early in life. **“Some data** shows parents are good at protecting their kids in the first years of life, but then it dwindles after that,” explains Cheryl Rosen, National directors of CDA’s Sun Awareness Program. ‘We need to continue to think about sun protection as kids grow’ (TP, June, 2010: 41).

The analogy with sunscreen being a superhero serves the purpose of the argument: UV exposure is very dangerous (so dangerous you need a superhero!). The gravity of the danger is enhanced by the quoted expert’s status as an accepted authority. The use of words like “serious,” “radiation,” and “cancer” increases the gravity of the situation. The significance of the mother’s act of applying sunscreen or not is magnified by the threat of early life exposure. Though the “some data shows” seems less significant, the fact that the quote relies on “data” adds to the persuasive impact of the statement, as research is also an accepted authority. An incessant effort must be made by mothers to protect their children at any age, especially in the early stages of their life. At any cost, she must, like a superhero,

or with the help of one, save them not only from harmful exposure to the sun, but also from other dangers.

Parents must also be the guardians of their children's health by watching what they eat. Kid-ology is also about the knowledge you need to have concerning kids, hence the necessity to look to experts such as pediatricians and nutritionists. Parents are urged to "[f]orget what you thought you knew about nutrition – our experts take a fresh look at feeding time" (TP, March, 2011: 56-62). Mothers have to follow the "[t]he 4 cereal commandments" (TP, February, 2010: 34-38). With its biblical connotation, the importance of following these rules seems un-circumventable. In another article, an expert recognized for being a parenting guru and pediatrician discusses how parents must "[f]eed [their] child's head", since "how much and how often kids eat is key not only to their health, but also to their behaviour and their ability to learn" (TP, February, 2010: 67-70). The kid-ology repertoire focuses on the control and surveillance of the parents' actions in relation to their kid's health. Magazines are providing up-to-date information related to that subject.

Fixing Oneself or How to Avoid the Many Pitfalls of Discipline and Education

Similarly, the kid-ology repertoire focuses on the rules and norms of our society so kids' behaviour inside and outside the home will be adequate. If kids behave well, it is part of their parents' achievement. Kids must be a success. In order to have successful kids, if you are a parent, you need the help and wisdom of experts to improve yourself and "[f]ix your discipline fallbacks" (TP, April 2012, p. 89) in order to improve your child's behaviour over the long haul. You must "[n]ix your knee-jerk reactions" (TP, September, 2010: 113-118), avoid the "[p]otty [p]itfalls" (TP, May, 2010: 71-76) and learn "how to manage temper" (TP,

May, 2011: 75-78). The magazines also offer tips about education, again with the help of experts. Parents can learn “how to get your kids excited about reading” (TP, May, 2010: 51), how to help their child love math (TP, March, 2011: 51), how to practice attachment parenting (TP, July, 2010: 79-84). Here again, the idea of a right and a wrong way of doing things is presented as a given, which could lead parents to feel inadequate and fuel their anxiety.

Mommy Time: Taking Care/Control of Your Body in Order to Be a Pampered Mom

In direct line with post-feminist discourses, where femininity is a bodily propriety (Gill, 2007b), the bodies of mother-readers are scrutinized and must be meticulously well-maintained. Women are exhorted to take care of themselves in sections of the magazines called “mom time”, “express fashion and beauty”, and “pregnant, sexy, and beautiful”. These propagate the idea that a scrub, a makeover, or a new hairstyle will help keep them, and consequently the children, happy. The idea of “getting your body back”^{vii} after the birth of a baby is also present. The question of control continues in this repertoire: mothers have to set goals, acknowledge their achievements, and be actively involved in taking care of themselves. Here again, the voice of experts is central. Aestheticians, hairstylists, and make-up artists suggest easy solutions for mothers with little time. Sometimes real mothers share how they did it. The discourse is also one of empowerment since “they can do it”. It is in direct line with the post-feminist media culture (Gill, 2007b) where:

“The body is presented simultaneously as women’s source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgments of female

attractiveness. Indeed, surveillance of women's bodies constitutes perhaps the largest type of media content across all genres and media forms" (Gill, 2007b: 149).

Mothers must be attractive and enjoy making themselves pretty, and each season's articles present what they need to do. In the summer, feet must be pedicured and legs must be silky smooth. Surveillance of and control over body hair, belly fat, and hair roots is crucial but presented as easy. Many do-it-yourself (DIY) solutions are offered to readers, as can be seen in the examples below.

"Bare essentials. **Make sure your gams (as well as underarms and bikini line) are summer ready** with these hair removal **tips**. GET SILKY SMOOTH SKIN FROM THE COMFORT of home this season. 'DIY options are better than ever and there is something that will work for everyone – [...] says Toronto aesthetician" (TP, July, 2012: 32).

"The Midas touch. Get a natural-looking summer glow in just a few minutes with at-home tips from a makeup pro. Nothing says swimsuits-and-ice-cream weather like sun-kissed skin. 'It's a fresh, natural look for the season' says global makeup artist from Elizabeth Arden. But, it's one that should be achieved at your bathroom mirror, not from your lawn chair. As we all know, sun exposure can cause premature aging and skin cancer, so a **faux-glow is a must**. Whether you have two minutes or 20, we have the right fuss-free bronzing routine for you" (TP, August, 2012: 32).

These quotes demonstrate the simplicity of the task of making oneself pretty and fashionable (a must). However since the lack of time is central in the pampered mom repertoire, she should invest her little spare time in quick activities and simple solutions.

Taking care of your body is presented as a fun, pleasurable activity, as well as a form of self-indulgence: mom time. These processes are all related to post-feminism ideology (Gill, 2007b), where dominance of a makeover paradigm is central. Following this line of thought, mothers can witness a step-by-step “momover” in some issues. In the introduction of the article, they can read, “In preparation for her return to work following maternity leave, we took mom’s beauty routine from barely done to perfectly polished” (TP, May, 2012: 107). The idea of improvement through beauty products, appropriate clothes, and the right haircut is publicized here. Dreaming of a similar metamorphosis, readers may try to refresh their own look with the 10 products (prices ranging from \$5 to \$65) used in the makeover of this lucky mommy (TP, May, 2012: 107). Similarly, the transformative power of makeovers is highlighted in another feature (TP, May, 2010: 62). Hair color is presented as a way to lift the spirits of the mother. Here again, the question of control is emphasized. It has been shown that women internalize these cultural norms rather than critique them, resulting in a logic of self-blame (Dworkin and Wachs, 2004).

Discussion and Conclusion: On a Normative View of Parenting

Our aim was to understand how motherhood is represented in parenting magazines. Even if the goal of magazines is not scientific, these kinds of popular culture writings provide women with discourses about their practices and the right and wrong way of being a mother, of educating her children, and of being a woman and a wife. We showed that these

discourses rely heavily on experts in all three repertoires, performing domestic motherhood, kid-ology, and pampered moms. We argue that these repertoires are part of the *Intensive motherhood* ideology, which is dominant in United States (Hays, 1996), and is also present in Canada (Butler, 2010). This ideology states that there is one socially appropriate way of child rearing: where mothers are the primary caregivers. It is “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays, 1996: 8). It also falls in line with the Canadian “investing-in-children” ideology (Jenson, 2004), where the government creates policies and incentives in the interests of children. As seen in kid-ology, “[b]eing a ‘good mother’ means acting in a prescribed way that others recognize as indicative of good parenting” (Butler, 2010: 247). Motherhood and parenting become a science that you need to master with the help of many experts.

The contradictory expectations, for example, being an expert in child rearing at the same time as being a pampered mom, can create double binds for mothers. For Johnston and Swanson (2003a: 31), “[d]ouble binds, in turn, generate feelings of guilt and inadequacy”. Magazines could be part of the double-bind discourses as they promote stereotypical representations about women and femininity – for example the stereotype of the stay-at-home soccer mom as well as the sexy-wife (Van Zoonen, 1994; des Rivières-Pigeon, Gagné et Vincent 2012). But let us not forget that these magazines present highly appealing images and discourses about the cultural expectations of women’s maternal roles - “needing” to be a mom AND being sexy at the same time (Johnston and Swanson, 2003a: 24). As Gill (2009) wrote, “the contradictoriness of women’s magazines may in fact be a central part of the coherence of their ideological message” (p. 347).

We argue that the discourses of the magazines are directly linked to the “new momism” ideology (Douglas and Michaels, 2004), as there is a celebration of the beauty of motherhood on almost every page of the magazines. We ask ourselves if they are also creating an unattainable standard of perfection at the same time. As explained in the introduction, central to the new momism is the idea of “choice”. Choice is present in two of the repertoires: performing domestic motherhood and pampered moms. The idea of controlling domestic life and the mother’s body is pivotal in these repertoires organized around a “you can do it if you get organized” vocabulary. Families are living within a hurried culture where “quick, easy, DIY solutions” look like promises of happiness.

As for the kid-ology repertoire, it is connected with Hays’ (1996) ethos of “intensive mothering”. Magazines studied attempt to help mothers through their child rearing journey with the help of a variety of professionals to develop their own expert skills in order to nurture, protect, discipline, and educate their children. The representations of motherhood promulgated in the magazines are an individual one, a “solo show”. Hence, mothers alone are responsible for successes and, moreover, failures. This is manifested particularly in the kid-ology repertoire, where discourses focus on dangers and failures. Therefore, the magazines contribute in setting ideals and norms about motherhood. We now want to focus our attention on the representations of motherhood, some of the silences in the articles, and questions that could be further investigated in future studies.

In these magazines’ discourses, mothers are presented as the primary caregivers. Only a few articles in the 68 analyzed discuss fatherhood. These articles discuss the fact that fathers are now more involved in taking care of their children. The representation in the two magazines is positive: “new face of fatherhood”^{viii}. The emphasis is more pronounced in

Enfant Québec, where the mother and father can share the parenting leave. The articles also present images of fathers being affectionate and playing with their children, or performing a task like blow-drying their little girl's hair. As Lazar (2000: 386) notes there seems to be an "unproblematic co-existence of family and career for men, men's careers are represented as positively enriched by family life". The representations of fatherhood in the magazines could then be further investigated. Fathers, heterosexual partnerships, and same-sex partnerships are seldom examined. As other scholars like, Adams, Walker and O'Connell, (2011) have done the place of fathers could be further investigated.

Furthermore, from cooking to choosing a childcare facility, there seem to be few examples of working as a team to raise kids. The relationship of the couple is another topic not often discussed. Aside from some articles that talk about how to please your spouse and how to keep the spark alive, the couple's relationship is rarely addressed. Life choices like being a single parent, staying home to raise kids, or having an unusual work schedule are hardly addressed. In this sense, as in women's lifestyle magazines, gender relations are not problematized (Gill, 2007a) while other subjects are represented only in a medical way, it is the case for breastfeeding (Bayard, 2012), or post-partum depression (Dubriwny, 2010).

The cost of all these "great", "easy" ideas and products offered in the articles is never questioned. The assumption is that if mothers love their children, they will do all these things for them and spend a lot of money on food, activities, costumes, and kids' products. "Mothering is increasingly conceived as an intensive experience where the value of the child is priceless, and good mothers are those who spend considerable time, energy, and money ensuring the healthy development of their children" (Butler, 2010: 249). There are also no

real articles about work or work-life balance in the parenting magazines analyzed. When there are, they are related to issues like taking care of a sick child or a one with special needs like Asperger syndrome (TP, May 2012: 66), or how being a mother has helped women develop competencies useful for work (EQ, April, 2010: 66-69). As Sunderland (2006) highlights in her study of child care magazines, we are aware of the fact that magazine writers are not encouraged to disturb or challenge these norms, that they adopt an extremely cautious editorial approach to their target audience since they also have to please the advertisers that are the main sponsors of these magazines. In this sense, the representations of motherhood constructed in the magazines could differ from the reality of the mothers reading them. The paradoxical nature of these discourses could then be studied, further documented, and problematized to see how they play a part in the construction of the “good mother” representations.

Our analysis focused on the rhetorical part of the discourses of the parenting magazines. The pleasurable nature of reading a magazine comes in large part from the images and glossy pictures offered in them. In the future, we could supplement our investigation by studying the images used in both the editorial content and publicity. We could then learn more about how the magazines and the images they offer participate in the essentialization and the idealization of motherhood or the subordination of women to men as showed by Mager and Helgeson (2011) or Lazar (2005b). It is worth asking if parenting magazines are fueling the cultural anxiety regarding motherhood. How do parents react to these discourses? Do they feel empowered or disturbed by these discourses? Do they feel confident in their abilities and roles as parents, workers, and citizens? We could answer these questions by interviewing readers. This might help us unravel how mothers and

fathers are hailed (Althusser, 1970) by the new momism ideology and the ethos of intensive motherhood, and how they negotiate and challenge the models offered and the prescribed norms.

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Notes:

ⁱ For example, we think of the proliferation of websites such as celebritybabyscoop.com.

ⁱⁱ For Douglas and Michaels (2004), postfeminism revolves around the idea that gender equality has been achieved because of feminism and that we no longer need it. Following Gill (2007b) we conceive of postfeminism as (unclear) and a critical object of study, rather than an analytical perspective.

ⁱⁱⁱ In this sense, Quebec's parenting leave could be seen as a societal choice.

^{iv} On the shelves of libraries and bookstores, along with these books, women will also find other publications documenting maternity and motherhood, sometimes in a hands-on, normative or personal tone^{iv}. Best selling books like *The Conflict. How Modern Motherhood Undermines the Status of Women* (Batinder, 2012), *What to Expect when You are Expecting* (Murkoff, 2012), *The Yummy Mommy* (Williams, 2008), *Knocked Up: Confessions of a Modern Mother-to-be* (Eckler, 2004), a first person account of a pregnancy and becoming a mother,

also find a place on women's nightstands everywhere in America. This portrayal does not take into consideration other cultural sources like blogs, films, children's books, and novels involving mothers.

^v We chose not to analyse the advertisements since they are more linked to consumption rather than to advice and information, though they clearly have an impact on the quantity of articles that are published and also participate in the creation of representations of motherhood.

^{vi} This repertoire was inspired by Gill's (2009) analysis of women's magazines, and by her men-ology repertoire.

^{vii} On that subject, see Dworkin and Wachs's (2004) textual analysis of *Shape Fit Pregnancy*.

^{viii} A dossier was dedicated to that issue in TP (June 2010: 54-62) and in EQ (April 2011: 57-60).