Masculinities and Fatherhood in Parenting Discourses

An Ethnographic Content Analysis of Polish Childcare Magazines for Fathers.

Claes Thunstedt
Abstract

The aim of this paper is to understand how orthodox masculinities relate to ideals of involved fatherhood in journals aimed for (new) fathers. With the use of Ethnographic Content Analysis, polish parenting magazines are studied. The Polish case is interesting due to its different historical context, compared to the Western Europe and North America, and it offers an opportunity to study involved fatherhood in a setting marked by a relatively conservative masculinity. The study applies a relational approach to gender, in which men and masculinities are best understood in relation to women and femininities. The findings suggest that there is a discourse of involved fatherhood, but it contains some reservations. Fathers are often depicted as uninformed and the mother is emphasized as the most important parent. There is also a discourse of dichotomy between mothers and fathers. Men and women are described as having different functions in parenting. In this discourse, it is also possible to see how these distinctions between the sexes rely on sexist stereotypes. This has caused the author of this study to conclude that the attempts of encouraging fathers to become more involved in childcare, sometimes risk reinforcing an, already, unequal gender structure.

Keywords

Fatherhood, parent’s magazines, masculinities, orthodox masculinity, Poland, involved fatherhood, traditional fatherhood.
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Introduction

In the summer of 2013 a new policy for parental leave was introduced in Poland. This new policy supposedly would make it easier for fathers to stay home with children. In the year that followed two different magazines on childcare, aimed at fathers, were launched. These two events could be a sign of a more involved fatherhood gaining ground in Poland. It might of course just be pieces of circumstantial evidence, but it was enough to catch my attention, and it was the spark that started this qualitative study of representations of parenthood in Polish childcare magazines for fathers.

I find the Polish case interesting for mainly two reasons. First, the polish history differs quite a lot from the western European and North American contexts, where most research on fatherhood have been conducted. It differs not least due to the years of communist rule that fell apart in a peaceful manner in 1989 (see Davies, 2001 for an account of polish history). Second, it is interesting because the newly introduced magazines were directed at fathers. Parenting magazines are often published with mothers, or parents as the intended readers. The new magazines directed to fathers give me an opportunity to examine a sphere in which fathers are encouraged to be involved in parenting and thereby take on a less traditional role.

Turning to the first point, over 40 years of communism of course have left marks in the polish society. During this period, the ‘dual earner model’ was widely promoted by the regimes in Poland and other Central East European countries (from now on CEE). The CEE countries were superficially comparable to Scandinavian countries regarding women’s high participation in the labor market and a quite small gender gap in wages. However, women continued to have the main responsibility for children and household labor (Heinen & Wator, 2006; Pascall & Lewis, 2004; Pascall & Kwak, 2005). In Western Europe, the family structures have more or less been marked by a process called defamilization. This process refers to the tendency of individuals becoming less dependent on the family, and to be more specific, mothers are becoming less dependent on their spouses. This is made possible, for example, by changes in social policy, such as parental leave, and through a more equal labor market (Lister, 1994). Since the 1989 collapse of communism, some scholars claim that a process called “retraditionalization”, or
“refamiliazation” has been taking place in Poland and the CEE countries. Refamiliazation is a process in which traditional family values, predating the communist regime, are desired and aimed for (Glass & Kawachi, 2001; Hantrais, 2004). Saxonberg and Szelewa (2007) discuss some explanations for why such a process occurred. First, a concept such as “equality” has bad connotations due to the communist use of the word and feminist theorists’ use of a Marxist vocabulary evokes unpleasant memories. The family was one of the last outposts of resistance against the communist regime, and reforms aimed at changing its dynamics are not happily welcomed (Ibid.). Second, the strong position of the Roman Catholic Church is also emphasized as a reason for more conservative attitudes towards gender equality (Heinen & Portret, 2010; Saxonberg & Szelewa, 2007). In this framework, it can be meaningful to turn to Poland’s specific context. During polish history, a mythologized image of the mother has evolved, the so called “Matka Polka” [Mother Poland]. Matka Polka has been both the symbol of Poland itself during the times of its different partitions, as well as a vision of the ideal mother, a strong woman, giving up everything for her family (Tieszen, 2007; Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005). During times of communism equality was proclaimed from state officials, but the reality for polish women was another. From an analysis of a Polish women’s magazine from 1974, the researchers write: “There are only two salient roles in which women are portrayed – employee and mother. Women’s social identity is most often described as wife, mother, worker, citizen, and breadwinner” (Marody & Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000, p. 156). Mothers then had to be workers, take care of children and perform housework, a phenomenon framed as “the double burden”, since the fathers only had to be workers and was not as engaged in parenting (Siemienska, 1994). Now, the myth of the strong mother can be drawn upon in processes of refamiliazation.

Poland, however, seems to take cautious steps towards increased gender equality, this has raised the curiosity to further explore polish fatherhood ideals. This study will treat the articles of parenting magazines as documents that represent social meanings. The study of these documents is a way of understanding culture, and the shared social reality of ideals of fatherhood in Poland. This is done under the guidance of a method called Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

**Purpose and research questions**

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of ideals of involved fatherhood in a context of strong orthodox masculinities. Involved fatherhood refers to a family model in
which fathers are involved in the daily care of their children, sharing the parental responsibilities with the mothers. The magazines chosen for analysis are directed at fathers and with the explicit goal to get them more involved in parenting. This means that the magazines in this study are used as an “arena” of involved fatherhood. Orthodox masculinities are archetypes of a traditionalist view, in which men are risk-takers, explicitly heterosexual and distinctly different from women (Anderson, 2009). As I will argue, Poland is a society characterized by orthodox masculinities, which is the reason for studying polish magazines.

With the purpose of this study in mind, the main research question is:

-Do orthodox masculinities permeate the discursive representations of ideals of involved fatherhood in the magazines? In that case, how is this manifested?

To be able to get an understanding of fatherhood it’s also necessary to see how the discourses relates to motherhood, which has prompted the following, more specific, question:

-How are the relational aspects of gender manifested in the studied articles? That is, how do fathers and fatherhood relate to mothers and motherhood?

These research questions are influenced by theoretical concepts that will be further discussed and explained in the theory section.

In the theory section of this paper, a gender framework and theories on masculinities will be presented. Important concepts that will be discussed are orthodox masculinity and involved fatherhood and the chapter will end with a presentation of more discourse analytical studies of fatherhood and parenting.

In the method chapter, the foundation of Ethnographic Content Analysis is discussed and the methodological pillars of this study are described. An account of the 12-step research procedure used in this paper will also be provided. A brief description of the studied magazines, Super tatą w wielkim mieście [Super dad in the Big City] and Tato, to Ja [Dad, it’s me], will also be given, as well as more detailed information of articles chosen for closer examination.

The results are presented according to two major themes: reserved involvement and orthodox
dichotomy. The two themes represent discourses of involved fatherhood, and discourses on orthodox masculinities. These themes will be exemplified with translations from polish, with the quotes in original language provided in footnotes.

The final discussion will consist of a summary of this paper, as well as a discussion of the findings and other considerations.

Theory

Gender, masculinity and fatherhood

A common starting point in sociological discussions is that gender, as well as masculinities and fatherhood, are socially constructed. This means that social institutions, such as “family” and “fatherhood”, are mutually agreed upon and defined; they are not entities with a given essence. (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In line with this, portrayals of fathers and fatherhood in the parenting magazines, in other words the findings of this study, will be understood as socially constructed.

West and Zimmerman (1987) distinguish between sex, sex category and gender. Sex is the biological difference between men and women, such as differences in chromosomes, hormones, anatomy or reproductive organs. The principles for being classified as a certain sex are socially agreed upon. In everyday life, inclusion in a sex category “is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category” (Ibid. p. 127). Sex and sex category don’t necessarily correlate. We can rarely see the biological sex of an individual, rather we observe different traits (hair style, clothes, looks) and code these traits according to a sex category. Gender then, is something that is done in trying to act accordingly to accepted norms depending on one’s sex category (Ibid.). As Connell (2005) puts it: “Gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does not determine the social” (p. 71, italics in original). The focus on gender as an activity is the main message of West and Zimmerman’s influential article, “Doing Gender” (1987), and this is how gender will be treated.

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1 All translations of the empirical material are done by me.
in this paper as well.

However, biology shouldn’t be lightly dismissed when dealing with parenting. It is important to remember that some practices of parenting are tightly connected to the female body, for example breast-feeding and giving birth. This of course opens the field for more biologically inclined explanations. Giving birth is indeed a practice performed by a female body, but parenting is not necessarily performed by the same body that gave birth. Breast-feeding are often (as in the Polish fathering magazines) explained to be important for the child’s development, but not all children are breast-fed. Indeed, the breast-feeding practice is biological, but it is emerged in ideals, and discourses that chisel out these ideals of the importance of breast-feeding. These discourses may as well be found in our common knowledge, or they can be placed within the realm of science.

Another important aspect of gender is the plurality of gender practices. Differences among men and among women, can be larger than differences between men and women. Hence to speak of masculinity and femininity is not enough to capture the diversity. It is better to discuss gender in terms of masculinities and femininities, in the plural sense. Sex (male or female) may vary very little, but gender (femininities and masculinities) vary enormously (Kimmel, 2013; Connell, 2005). This plurality is important to keep in mind when encountering different, and sometimes conflicting discourses on fatherhood.

To capture the diversity of gender practices, it is crucial to have the appropriate theoretical tools. Connell’s (2005) very influential theory of hegemonic masculinity can serve as a suitable point of departure. Connell treats masculinities as a part of a wider gender structure, and as relational to femininities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 2005). Connell (2005) writes: “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of women” (p. 77). There are other forms of masculinities, such as subordinated, complicit, and marginalized masculinities. Most men are unable to fully live up to the hegemonic masculinity, but still benefit from the patriarchal subordination of women (Ibid.). However, when considering fathering in relation to mothering, it is necessary to problematize the subordination of women. When turning to the actual field of parenting, mothers will more often be treated as experts, and fathers as novices, which makes power relations more intricate. Thus, it will be interesting to
see, in the case of fathering, if and how hegemonic masculinity interacts with parental practices traditionally associated with mothers.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been very influential, but also attracted a great deal of criticism, which eventually sparked a reformulation of the concept (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Eric Anderson (2009) departs from a critique of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, when formulating his theoretical framework of inclusive masculinity. Indeed, Anderson admits, the concept has been proven very productive and relevant in the analysis of plural masculinities in the nineties, but argues that the model with one hegemonic position is losing its role. He also clarifies that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is a *theoretical* concept that refers to the masculinity that holds a hegemonic position at a specific time and in a specific historical context, and it is not an archetype, or a model of a certain conservative masculinity. To avoid the confusion of also naming the traditional archetype “hegemonic masculinity”, Anderson suggests that such an archetype instead should be referred to as “orthodox masculinity”, which also is one of the key concepts in his inclusive masculinity theory. To make the same distinction in his own work, he separates the name of the theory “inclusive masculinity” from his archetype “inclusive masculinities”.

In periods of what Anderson (2009) calls high homohysteria, the leeway for masculine practice is restricted. During these periods, one could say that an orthodox form of masculinity holds a hegemonic position. Men who “overstep” will meet sanctions and be considered deprived of their masculinity. In times when homohysteria is in decline, orthodox masculinities will remain a main gender practice for some men, while other men will engage in inclusive forms of masculinities. There will be two prominent masculinities, but neither will hold a hegemonic position. Some characteristics of orthodox masculinities are: to not behave or show resemblance to a woman; patriarchy, and; to practice heterosexuality. But these forms of masculinities come with a price. Men are restricted in what they can do, in what they emotionally can express (Anderson, 2009). In the study of the fatherhood magazines it will be interesting to see if it is possible to identify one hegemonic, or several prominent, but non-hegemonic, discourses on fatherhood ideals, especially considering that the outspoken goal of these magazines is to motivate fathers to be more involved with their children.

The similarities between traditional fatherhood and orthodox masculinity, and, on the other hand involved fatherhood and inclusive masculinities are evident. The condition of socially
accepted masculinity practices will also imbue what kinds of fathering is possible. In a traditional fatherhood model, the father (in a heterosexual relationship) functions as a breadwinner, whereas the mother is taking care of children and housework. Continuing to follow the analogy of Anderson's (2009) orthodox masculinity, the father is, in this view, diametrically different from the mother. A traditional father can be an authoritative figure, who often is distant whilst the mother stands for closeness and is the parent who conveys emotions. The ideal typical traditional family model was dominant in the 1950s in North America and Western Europe, and predominantly among white families. It is important to remember this historical fact about the concept of “traditional fatherhood” since it may give false connotations of a long prevalent model (Hobson & Morgan, 2004). When turning to the literature on fatherhood it seems difficult to find a contemporary society that fully would qualify as being dominated by traditional fatherhood. Rather, it is a matter of degree of how prevalent orthodox practices and certain traits of the traditional model are in different contemporary societies.

As indicated earlier, involved fatherhood is tightly related to the concept of inclusive masculinities. This model of fatherhood refers to fathers who are caring and committed to their children, often in contrast to the authoritative father figures. There is evidence that the traditional fatherhood model is being challenged by an inclusive fatherhood model in Western European and North American societies, as well as in Poland (Arcimowicz, 2010; Brandth & Kvande, 1998; Budrowska, 2008; Coltrane, 1996; Johansson & Klinth, 2008; Kwiatkowska & Nowakowska, 2006). In a study conducted in Sweden, Johansson and Klinth (2008) discuss fathers’ involvement with their children in Swedish everyday life and comment on the current situation: ”Today, the notion that fathers should get involved with their children, stay at home, and help care for infants seems to be met with complete acceptance and is almost the predominant figure of thought” (Johansson & Klinth, 2008, p. 58). This statement underlines the ongoing change of model towards involved fatherhood, even though Sweden in some respects may be viewed as an outlier.

The two pairs of concepts have also been used in analogy in a previous study, where orthodox masculinities are expected to correlate with traditional fatherhood, and inclusive masculinities with involved fatherhood (Suwada & Plantin, 2014). However, discourses of orthodox masculinities can sometimes be drawn upon when trying to convince fathers to become more involved in their children. Because of this, both pairs of concepts will be utilized in this study with a focus on how they are intertwined, which hopefully will enable a better understanding
of the discourses of fatherhood and masculinities. Since the fatherhood models are merely theoretical models it is not surprising to find aspects of them intersecting when turning to the discourses of fatherhood. The clash between new ideals of fatherhood and current norms of (more orthodox) masculinities are also found in other studies (Colthart & Henwood, 2012; Finn & Henwood, 2009; Magaraggia, 2013).

The notion of the mother as primarily responsible for the children is common even when more involved fatherhood is on the agenda. Fathers are then rather referred to as supportive, assistants or helpers to the mothers. The option for the father to be an assistant, rather than an equally responsible parent, is possible as men more often have a choice to father (or not to father). This kind of choice would be almost unthinkable when considering mothers. The father’s breadwinner role can also be used as an ‘alibi’ for them not being involved in childcare (Brannen & Nielsen, 2006; Chesley, 2011; Doucet, 2004; Miller, 2011; Magaraggia, 2013). The provider role of the father is also well recognized in Polish studies (Chmura-Rutkowska & Ostrouch, 2008; Dzwonkowska, 2011a; Suwada & Plantin, 2014; Wojnicka, 2011). Not only are mothers perceived as the parent with the main responsibilities, they also function as mediators, guiding the fathers in their parenting, and encouraging them to evolve into fathers (Magaraggia, 2013; Vuori, 2009). In the analysis of fathering magazines, it will be interesting to gain understanding of how this mediation is reflected. The relational approach of this study will hopefully show how this mediation is reflected in the discourses on fathers in relation to mothers, as well as the relation the journalists in the magazines take towards the presumed readers.

To sum up, the case of polish fatherhood ideal does not differ immensely from the Western European and North American one. In Poland, traces of change towards a more “caring” fatherhood model is visible. However, orthodox views are still strong and the idea that a father should provide for his family is still prominent. Suwada & Plantin (2014) find that there is a tension between being a nurturing father and a “real man” which can lead the fathers to compensate in other ways. As an example, one of the participating Polish fathers in their study claims that he was worried about being seen in public with a stroller. His solution to this was to buy a “cool pram”. One could say that the pram then functioned as a tool to secure his masculinity when appearing in public while performing “non-masculine” tasks. It will be interesting to see how these tensions between involved fatherhood ideals and norms of orthodox masculinities are expressed in the competing discourses in the examined magazines.
Fatherhood discourses

This section presents a few discourse analytical studies previously conducted on parenting magazines and advisory parenting texts.

Jane Sunderland have conducted a number of discourse analytical studies on texts about childcare (Sunderland 2000; 2004; 2006). In her study, Baby entertainer, bumbling assistant and line manager: discourses of fatherhood in parentcraft texts (2000), she studies texts written by professionals aiming for parents; mothers, fathers or both. The analyzed material was chosen according to two specific social practices: practices associated with breast feeding, and practices of what fathers are supposed to do. The analysis is using a critical discourse analytical approach. It is critical in the way that Sunderland tries to depict how discourses are presented and compare them to what could have been, if opportunities among men and women were equal. In critical discourse analysis, there is a focus on what is left out, on what’s vague or in the background. In fact, Sunderland finds that fathers are often backgrounded. One central finding in her study is the discourse called “Part-time father/Mother as main parent.” Within this discourse fathers are framed as absent and secondary, whereas mothers are described as the main parents (Sunderland, 2000, p. 257). This is expressed in discourses of fathers “stepping in” or “helping”, ironically even when the phrase “share” is being used in relation to parenting (Sunderland, 2006, p. 523). This is also confirmed in another discourse analytical study conducted by Glenda Wall and Stephanie Arnold (2007). They have studied a year-long series in a Canadian newspaper addressing parental issues, in which they found that mothers are still the parent presented as worried, as having guilt over not being good enough a parent, and above all, having the main responsibility. Fathers are still often depicted in a supporting role, rather than sharing the parental activity. Similar discourses on fathers as secondary are also found in Polish magazines (Dzwonkowska-Godula, 2011b). This of course aligns with the results from the qualitative studies presented above.

Method

This study is taking on a qualitative approach and the method used is Ethnographic Content
Analysis (ECA), or Qualitative Document Analysis as it sometimes is called. ECA is a merging of tools from content analysis into an ethnographic frame (Altheide, 1987; Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese & Schneider, 2008; Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

ECA is a form of qualitative content analysis that must be distinguished from quantitative content analysis. In the quantitative take on content analysis research is based on a positivist pillar, and the aim is mostly to deductively verify a hypothesis by examining the frequency or the spread of a certain textual phenomenon. (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). A quantitative approach often employs the use of statistical computer programs, enabling analysis of enormous amounts of empirical data. However, a quantitative model wouldn’t allow for a more exploratory approach, where the aim is to understand meaning of certain social phenomena. Regarding the idea behind formulating ECA, Altheide and Schneider (2013) write:

Our aim is to help researchers understand culture, social discourse, and social change. We seek to attain this goal by studying documents as representations of social meanings and institutional relations. Documents are studied to understand culture—or the process and the array of objects, symbols, and meanings that make up the social reality shared by members of a society (p. 5).

In this study, the polish parenting magazines are the documents of choice.

ECA builds upon a methodological stance called analytic realism (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Analytic realism is “based on the view that the social world is an interpreted world, not a literal world, always under symbolic construction (even everyday life is informed by social contexts and uses of evidence)” (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, p. 489). If the research is to be ethnographic it is necessary, that the researcher describes the research process and reflects upon his/her own position in this process. In addition, Altheide and Johnson (1994) present a few key issues that they mean are broadly corresponding to a symbolic interactionist perspective, and that are necessary to deal with as a researcher within this methodological stance. I will here present a selection of them, based on relevance for this study.

First, the observed findings need to be put in to a larger cultural, historical, and organizational context (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Altheide & Schneider, 2013). The parenting magazines for fathers are a minority among mother/parents’ magazines, and they are published against the backdrop of a polish society marked by patriarchy and a historic context that differs from many of the western societies, where similar research have been conducted. This element will mainly be dealt with in the analysis, were results are discussed against the background of previous
Second, it is necessary to describe how the researcher, the researched and the setting are connected (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Altheide & Schneider, 2013). As the studied document, that is magazines, so to say already are put into press, they won’t be affected by the presence of a researcher, which is one of the advantages of studying documents (Bowen, 2009). However, the interpretation will still be affected by my previous knowledge. I am influenced by my studies in sociology, which will help me see certain things – for example be sensitive to gendered representations, whereas I will probably be blind for other aspects. I have also lived and studied in Poland a total of one and a half year. During this period, I mostly spent time with people of my own age which indeed has created a certain bias based on certain experienced ideals. On the other hand, this first-hand encounter with the polish society can also function as a widener of perspectives, where the experienced differences (and unexpected similarities) from my own daily life in Sweden may have created a bigger “sensitivity” for the study of masculinities in Poland. Another aspect that pre-eminently will have an influence on the analysis of this study, is the relation between the researcher and the Polish language. Apart from the one and a half year spent in Poland, I have also studied four semesters of Polish at the Stockholm University. These studies have created an understanding for Polish grammar and they have also been helpful in building a vocabulary. However, there are still a risk that idiomatic expressions, fine-tuned nuances may get lost in translation.

The third element that is put forward by Altheide and Johnson (1994) is the importance of the perspective of the researcher when making interpretations in the analysis. Here I would like to refer to the general theoretical framework of gender and masculinities, presented in the theory section, as the point of departure for my interpretations and my analysis.

There would of course have been possible to approach the research problems in other ways. There are previous studies on parenting magazines that use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), such as studies by Sunderland (2000; 2004; 2006) and Wall and Arnold (2007) that are previously referred to in this paper. CDA, often associated with Norman Fairclough (Bergström, Ekström & Boréus, 2017; Fairclough, 2010), offers tools to unfold power relations in the use of small linguistic differences. To employ CDA, it would however be necessary to fine tune the theoretical tools to be able to analyze the Polish grammar, which differs quite a bit from English.
The CDA perspective is also associated with the use of a narrow, linguistic, definition of discourse, in contrast to a broader understanding, where discourse is extended to social practice (Bergström, Ekström & Boréus, 2017). This study will make use of this broader understanding of discourse.

The magazines

The sample of interest for this analysis will be 6 issues of Supertata w wielkim mieście (from now on referred to as Supertata), and two issues of Tato, to ja, all published during 2014. The selected period, the year of 2014, was chosen mainly because the magazines directed at fathers occurred in the beginning of 2014, and to follow the entire year allows me to get a variety in themes included in the magazines.

Supertata is a “spin-off” of a magazine called Supermama w wielkim mieście [Super mom in the big city]. It is electronically published, free of cost, and in 2014, 6 issues were released. It gives advice of practical child-care, mixed up with tests of commercial products, and commercials. According to their own statistics (or ISSUU, were the magazine can be read online), the first issue of Supertata had 19929 readers (Supertata, website, n.d).

Tato, to ja [Dad, it’s me] also came as a “sibling” of a magazine for mothers, Mamo, to ja, and two issues were published in 2014. It costed 4,99 PLN and has a similar profile as Supertata. Unfortunately, there are no statistics on the amount of readers. It could however be added that this magazine continued to be published in 2016, which suggests at least some success. Supertata on the other hand was not published after 2014.

In the initial drafting of a data protocol, all articles and separate content were assigned with id-numbers. In total 239 separate items was included in the study. 17 of them were so called “shorties”. A shorty is mostly just a short notice, often inside a colored square. They were found in the beginning of both numbers of Tato to Ja. The rest of the content was articles. The length of the articles varied. Most often they were around 1 - 1,5 pages long, sometimes as short as half a page and occasionally four pages long. However, among them were a few copies of articles. For example, the whole issue of Supertata (2014, no 6) consisted of copies already

2 1.12 EURO 2016-12-15 (https://www.finansportalen.se/valutakurser/?gclid=CM3G3MmR9tACFROJsgodG8cFtg).
published in earlier issues. The total number of copied articles was estimated to 17 in all issues.³

The research procedure

This section will be devoted to the procedure of Ethnographic Content Analysis, which follows a 12-step pattern. After that specific details about the research process of this study will be discussed in order to contribute to transparency.

The process of analysis follows a 12-step procedure (See Altheide & Schneider, 2013, p. 19 for visual overview).

1. Choose a topic.
2. Review the field of study.
3. Analyze a few documents
4. Make a draft of a data protocol.
5. Examine more documents using the data protocol.
6. Revise the data protocol.
7. Make a theoretical sampling of documents for further study.
8. Collect data from the sampled documents.
9. Code the data and refine the concepts.
10. Compare and contrast findings within coded categories.
11. Choose cases to represent themes.
12. Report

(Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Due to the emphasis on process, the research procedure goes through a few of these steps repeatedly, which allows for themes to gradually emerge. In practice this means, that the data protocol, which is a set of instructions of how to categorize the investigated material, is

³It was a bit problematic to determine what a copy was. Sometimes an article was republished with the same content, but with a new title. And sometimes the same article was republished with just a little bit altered, extended or shorted content.
constantly revised and refined. The data protocol in this study was redrafted four times before the final themes presented in this study was finally defined. All of the articles published in the two journals in 2014 were included in the initial drafting of the data protocol (total of 239 articles). In the following procedure, a theoretical sampling was made to ensure a relational aspect of gender. That means, included articles were chosen on the criteria that they had an explicit reference to fathers, in relation to; mothers, or; to children or childcare. This could include articles using terms such as “parents”, “mother and father” and articles differentiating between fathers and mothers. The total of articles included for this coding step were 84.

The circular refinement of the data protocol interacted with the sharpening of the research questions. At the same time as the categories in the data protocol were molded from general to more specific, the research questions were specified throughout the research procedure. This intertwined process is probably the result of the researcher’s (me) sense of novelty in relation to the research field, and, the novelty of fatherhood research in Poland itself. A downside to this procedure is that another researcher might have stressed other research questions.

Results

A general overview of the content

Before the primary results of this study will be presented, an overview of the content of the magazines will here be provided. The single largest category, 25 % of the articles, was dedicated to childcare. These articles quite often provided readers with hands-on advice. For example, how to bath an infant, how to dress a baby, or how to put a baby to sleep. Another big bulk of articles, almost 10%, is about different activities, and mainly different ways to travel with children and (most often) with the whole family. Other topics brought up in the magazines are: sex and relationships, the role of the father, preparations before having a baby, and changes in the female body and mind.

Analysis

At least in one of the magazines, there is an explicit ambition to get fathers more involved in parenting, as can be seen in the following fragment, originating from an ‘editorial page’ in one
of the issues of *Tato, to Ja*:

When I was born, my dad changed my diapers, bathed and fed me. […] Among his colleagues, he was an exception. Today the exceptions are the fathers who do not engage in the care of their children, and only fulfill the role of the father by providing for the family. It took just one generation, for one thing to end, and another to begin. As my interviewee, the psychologist Jarek Żyliński, said: "A revolution is taking place before our eyes" (p. 72) [page reference in original]. I am sure that for our children it will bring only good results, and I am glad that in the creation of "Tato, to Ja" I can take a small part in this revolution.4

Here is a discourse of involved fatherhood as prevalent in which the “old” traditional way rapidly is turning obsolete in favour of a “new” involved father. The “old” traditional ways are represented by these other fathers that didn’t take care of their children and who only acted as breadwinners. These ideals may not always correlate with the practice of Polish fathers, but it is an explicit expression of one of the goals of these magazines; getting fathers more involved with their children.

*Hands-on childcare*

Many of the articles are assigned to hands-on childcare, giving instructions on activities such as: carrying and holding the baby; putting the baby to sleep; ways to comfort a crying child; how to dress a child; how to change diapers; and how to bath the child. These are tasks that are most definitely a part of the daily care of a child, and something an involved father would have to engage in. The advice given is very hands-on, often it is step by step instructions paired with illustrations. Fathers are placed in a concrete context of hands-on childcare, which highlights fatherly involvement in the upbringing of children. However, many of the advices are very detailed in ways that raises the suspicion that fathers are expected to be incompetent. For example, in an instruction on how to prepare milk substitute the reader is instructed to “[k]eep to the instructions given on the package of the mixture [of infant formula]”5. Here the importance of following instructions is stressed, which might be a trace of a stereotype that men are careless and not at all used to the ordinary tasks of daily life with a child.

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4 "Kiedy się urodziłam, mój tata przewijał mnie, kąpał i karmił. […] Wśród swoich kolegów był wyjątkiem. Dzisiaj są wyjątkami ci ojcowie, którzy nie angażują się w opiekę nad swoimi dziećmi, a rolę ojca sprowadzają tylko do utrzymywania rodziny. Wystarczyło jedno pokolenie, żeby coś się skończyło, a coś innego zaczęło. Jak to powiedział mój rozmówca, psycholog Jarek Żyliński: „Na naszych oczach odbywa się rewolucja” (str. 72). Jestem pewna, że naszym dzieciom przyniesie ona same dobre skutki, i cieszę się, że współtworząc „Tato, to Ja”, mogę w tej rewolucji choć trochę uczestniczyć” (Niemczyk, 2014c, p. 4).

5 “Trzymaj się do proporcji podanych na opakowaniu mieszanki” (Janko, 2014b, p. 104).
Bonding with the child

The hands-on instructions are also present when the authors are trying to indicate to their readers the importance of being involved in nurturing practices for bonding with their children:

Between the parents and the child an unusual bond is created through touch. Already in the first weeks and months of the baby's life, it gets to know the closest persons and recognizes them. Irreplaceable in creating a bond between father and baby is carrying the child in your arms, stroking it while bathing, putting it to sleep or help with changing diapers.

In this fragment, the daily hands-on care is said to be important to bond with the child. This should probably be seen against the background of a view that Polish fathers are getting involved with their children in a later stage of the children’s lives. This is underlined in an interview with a developmental psychologist:" [The father] must be close to the child. He must, brick by brick, build a bond with the baby, otherwise, when he later enters, he will be as someone from outer space." Becoming a father is here described as a process that requires interest and effort, and the lack of such effort will create a distance between father and child.

Another theme found, that may shed some light on why there is such a focus on the need for fathers to bond with their children, is the discourse on being afraid to show affection: "Don't be afraid to show [the child] love, everything will turn out great if the child feels that you love it, and this will build the child’s sense of self-worth." This fragment also provides an indication of how fathers, in the discourse, are presumed to be afraid of being alone with their children, which further underlines how the view of the mother as the main parent. Another example of this is the following injunction to fathers: "Don’t be afraid to stay alone with your child." These examples can be seen as elements of discourses that contain an assumption that fathers are insecure in face of being close to their children. It should also be noted that most of these cases are found in passages concerning newborns.

6”Między rodzicami a dzieckiem poprzez dotyk buduje się niezwykła więź. Już w pierwszych tygodniach i miesiącach życia maluch poznaje najbliższe mu osoby i rozpoznaje je. Niezastąpione w budowaniu relacji między ojcem a bobasem jest noszenie dziecka na rękach, głaskanie go podczas kąpania, układanie do snu czy pomoc w przewijaniu” (Supertata, 2014d, p. 6).
8”Nie bój się okazywać mu miłości, a wyjdzie to tylko na dobre – jeśli dziecko czuje, że je kochasz, buduje poczucie własnej wartości” (Supertata, 2014d, p. 6).
9”Nie bój się zostawać z dzieckiem sam na sam[.]” (Supertata, 2014a, p. 26).
Sharing the childcare

In the magazines, there are a few examples of how shared parenting can look like in practice, which here will function as another indication of involved fatherhood. One article consists of an interview with a father who works as a Zumba fitness instructor in the evenings and is taking care of his daughter during the time when his partner is at work. The following quote is the answer to a question about where he learned how to take care of his daughter:

Kasia [his partner] tells me a little bit, or sometimes she hands me some articles about child development. My mom also from time to time recalls how it was when she raised us. Anyway, care for a small child is in total logical. When it’s hungry, you feed it, when it has peed itself – change diaper, when it’s tired – put it to sleep. Simple.  

His answer contains the element of advice from his mother as well as from his partner, who leaves him texts to read. This touches upon the concept of mediation of parenthood from women and mothers, in a double sense in this case. The second half of the quote shows how he turns it around, indicating that childcare is rather simple and logical and that there is not too much to learn. In this quite confident answer, one can see a discourse on involved fatherhood in practice. It can be interpreted as an encouragement to fathers to be involved in childcare and not be afraid of it. This is emphasized by the statement of the Zumba fitness instructor, concluding that childcare is simple.

Mothers are the most important parent, fathers are secondary.

As becomes evident, fathers are not depicted as important as mothers, and the arguments for this is quite often related to biology in some sense. This is how an interviewed psychologist puts it:

Although there are many things a father can do just as good or almost as good as a mother, however, for a small baby, no matter how you look at it, security is based on diet – and only a woman can breastfeed.

Other references to biology are, for example, that the mother has more time to prepare for the

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11 “Chociaż jest dużo czynności, które tata może wykonywać równie dobrze albo prawie tak dobrze jak mama; to jednak dla małego ssaka poczucie bezpieczeństwa opiera się, jakkolwiek by na to patrzeć, przede wszystkim na pokarmie – a tylko kobieta może karmić piersią” (Niemczyk, 2014a, p. 72).
changes to come because she is the one who is pregnant. The quote above also contains the notion that a father can be “just as”, or “almost” as good as a mother, but a mother is still the main parent. The following fragment is another example of how the mother is presented as primary, and the father is “invited” to the sphere of parenthood with the formulation of a “but”:

A woman is biologically adapted to take care of a newly born, but also the father can get fully involved in these activities [my italics].\(^\text{12}\)

In my interpretation, this is a way to “invite” fathers to the domain of childcare, but still securing the established dichotomy between masculinities and femininities. This is connected to the concept of orthodox masculinity, where men and women are supposed to be different. However, the traces of orthodoxy in this case, doesn’t necessarily mean falling back on a traditional family model. It should also be considered that we here might be dealing with an exclusive mothering discourse, which is contrasted to a shared parenting discourse (Vuori, 2009). The exclusive mothering discourse stresses the importance of a mother and a father, and that these two are fundamentally different. This discourse implicitly indicates that shared parenting might turn fathers into mothers, and so they will lose their masculinity. This branch of the discourse is strong, and Vuori (2009) finds that the shared parenting proponents feel the need to assure presumed readers that a man sharing parenting, will not lose his masculinity.

The notion that fathers are secondary, compared to mothers, are further established when turning to the competence in child rearing. The following quote is taken from an article, in which a father is home on paternity leave and is describing a regular day, related to the moment when the mother is coming home from work:

You hear the keys rattling in the door. Already? At last! The guardess of the home and family had returned and from that moment, as if by magic, the world was at peace. The baby stopped crying; the stone fell from your heart and now you can rest...soon, soon! Tomorrow is a new day filled with additional challenges.\(^\text{13}\)

Here the anxiety and stress of being alone with his child is put in contrast with the relief he feels when the “knowledgeable” parent is coming home. This is a quite telling indication of a discourse of mothers as the competent parent, and fathers as novices and secondary to the

\(^{12}\)“Kobieta biologicznie przystosowana jest do opieki nad noworodkiem, ale również tata może w pełniangażować się w te zajęcia” (Supertata, 2014a, p. 28).

\(^{13}\)”Słyszysz zgrzytanie kluczy w zamku. To już? W końcu jest! Strażniczka domu i rodziny wróciła i od tej chwili, jak za sprawą czarodziejskiej różdżki, na świecie zapanował spokój. Maluch przestał płakać, tobie spadł kamień z serca i możesz już odpocząć... zaraz, zaraz! Jutro czeka cię dzień pełen kolejnych wyzwań!” (Supertata, 2014b, p. 30).
mothers. In an article that explains different terms associated with parenting, the introductory lines read:

Do you want to understand what the pediatrician, midwife or your own wife is saying to you? Then you must first get accustomed to the fundamental terminology.\textsuperscript{14}

It is taken for granted that the mother is knowledgeable in these areas, the father, however, has to learn. He does not have the knowledge, it is something he needs to acquire. In other cases, the mother is said to be able to mediate this knowledge, and sometimes she is just taken for granted. This is the case in the following example were the instructions to fathers are:

If you don’t understand or if you’re not sure – ask!\textsuperscript{15}

It’s understood that it is the mother who is supposed to be asked. She is not only taken for granted in the sense that she is expected to be present and available, but she is also presumed to know the answer to any questions and to be able to answer them (compare Magaraggia, 2013; Vuori, 2009). To put it short, the mother’s care and knowledge signifies the “gold standard of parenting” (Schmitz, 2016, p. 12). The mother knows best.

\textit{Fathers’ advantages over mothers}

The carving out of distinct functions for fathers and mothers is also formulated in arguments of the father’s advantages over the mother. In an introductory passage to a hands-on instruction on how to carry a baby, the male biology is explained to be advantageous:

They [fathers] don’t give birth, don’t breastfeed, but a man is simply made for carrying the baby. […] Bigger hands, broader chest and stronger back muscles – if you compare the conditions given to men and women by nature, it is at once clear, that it’s you, who were designed to carry and hold a baby.\textsuperscript{16}

Here men are contrasted as stronger than women, and once more the distinction between men and women is established. This can be seen as a way of appealing to orthodox masculine values; a man is supposed to be strong, and by putting emphasize on the necessity of physical strength when carrying a child, it seems as the act of carrying itself is made masculine.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Chcesz rozumieć, co mówi do ciebie pediatra, położna środowiskowa albo twoja własna żona? Musisz najpierw przyswoić podstawową terminologię” (Niemczyk, 2014b, p. 22).
\item „Jeśli ty czegoś nie rozumiesz lub nie jesteś pewien – pytaj” (Supertata, 2014b, p. 30).
\item “Nie urodzi, nie nakarmi piersią, ale noszenia bobasa jest wprost stworzony […] Większe dłonie, szeroka klatka piersiowa I mocniejsze mięśnie pleców – jeśli porównać warunki, jakimi natura obdarzyła kobietę i mężczyznę, od razu widać, że to ty zostałeś przeznaczony do noszenia i bujania dziecka” (Janko, 2014a, p. 24).
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In the next quote, retrieved from an interview with a dentist, it is argued that fathers, instead of mothers, should be the one who takes their children to health care visits:

They [fathers] are more controlled, patient and don't get hysterical. They provide a unique sense of security and support, and if it's needed, they do funny things to draw their attention towards something else after the procedure. That is why fathers in many ways are a better support when going to the dentist. The question of who, and how a baby is introduced to the medical world can affect its health.17

This is an example of a rather sexist discourse on female and masculine stereotypes. Here, a stereotype of women as being hysterical is used as a way of contrasting them to the father. Since a father, in line with the orthodox masculinity, must be different from a mother, this stereotype "helps" in keeping this dichotomy of masculinity and femininity in place. So, when men are portrayed as calm and controlled in opposition to women, the father’s position is strengthened at the mother’s expense. This discursive trait of men as calm, seem to be a recurring theme, even if it is not always explicitly put in contrast to women “being hysterical”. An example of this is seen in the following quote: "Of course, you're not putting your baby against your breast, and you’re not putting the baby to sleep while it is sucking, but you can influence it with your calmness."18 Calmness is a trait that here is coded as masculine and it is promoted as an asset in childcare. It is also interesting that calmness, on a more general scale, is less likely to be related to men. Instead, men are probably more likely to be considered as violent in comparison to women. The notion of calmness as masculine is also somewhat contradicting another discourse, that was showed in a previous example, where the return of the mother gives peace to the father. Here, peace, is associated with the mother, instead of with the father.

Relationship quality

Carrying out this study, it became evident that the role of a father in case of divorce, or other reasons for not living together with a mother, was rarely discussed. In the magazines, only one article with content touching on divorce was found. This was an article where four polish

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17“Są bardziej opanowani, cierpliwi i nie wpadają w histerię. Dają wyjątkowe poczucie bezpieczeństwa i wsparcia, a jeśli trzeba, robia śmieszne rzeczy, by odwrócić uwagę pociechy od zabiegu. Dlatego właśnie ojcowie o wiele lepiej sprawdzają się jako support podczas wizyty u stomatologa. Kwestia tego, kto i jak wprowadza malucha w medyczny świat, może zaważyć na jego zdrowiu” Supertata, 2014c, p. 40).

18“Oczywiście, nie przystawisz malucha do piersi i nie uśpisz „na ssąco”, ale za to możesz zarazić go swoim spokojem” (Witek, 2014, p. 46).
celebrity fathers discussed the topic ‘what have you learned from being a father?’ The different fathers represented different paths of family life. One was the ‘family man’ having lots of children, another became a father very young, and one polish actor represented the divorced father. But in his case, it was also stated that his son now lives with his mother (Pstrąg, 2014, p. 62).

A related topic that is given more room in the magazines are dedicated to relationship advice, dealing with topics such as sex, what men should expect from their spouses during pregnancy and the potential crisis in the relationship when a baby enters the family. The articles present solutions, such as ‘it is important that you talk to each other’, or that problems can be sorted out if worked on:

Relationship problems can be overcome, but you cannot rely solely on the feelings that you have for each other. To cope with the post-birth crisis, you must arm yourself first of all with patience and understanding, as well as work together on improving your relationship. Mutual respect and conversation is a solid basis for coping during difficult times.19

This example is written in the context of post-birth crisis, but a common tread for the articles on relationship advice is that the subject of crisis seem to be as far as the magazines will go, they do not give advice to divorced parents. The issue of a single father is never, apart from the one exception, addressed (not the single mother either for that matter). A possible interpretation of this, even if one should tread this lightly, is that it’s more or less taken for granted that a mother will take on custody of children in case of divorce.

Based on the theoretical specifications and thematic considerations, I’d like to sum up the findings of this study with the help of two main concepts: orthodox dichotomy and reserved involvement. The concept of orthodox dichotomy links to the archetype of orthodox masculinities (Anderson, 2009), and an inherent dichotomy between men and women where behaving masculine is opposed to behaving feminine. In this discourse, mothers and fathers are presented as fundamentally different. Both parents are needed (even if not to the same extent), but they have various parts to play, as is clearly exemplified in the following quote from an

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19 "Problemy w związku można przezwyciężyć, jednak nie możecie polegać wyłącznie na uczuciu, które was łączy. Aby uporać się z kryzysem poporodowym, musicie uzbroić się przede wszystkim w cierpliwość i wyrozumiałość, a także wspólnie pracować nad polepszeniem wspólnych relacji. Wzajemny szacunek i rozmowa to solidna podstawa do tego, by poradzić sobie w trudnych chwilach" (Supertata, 2014e, p. 15).
interview with a psychologist, published in one of the examined magazines:

The woman has a different base, and the man has a different base. Both can acquire new skills and they can obtain very much, but a father will never be a better mother, and a woman will never be a better father for the child.20

Reserved involvement refers to discourses around cases of involved fatherhood, for example discourse on how fathers are placed in contexts of hands-on childcare, or discourses of the importance of the father’s involvement in his children’s lives. These themes certainly create a basis for the formulation of a concept of fatherly involvement. However, I have provided this concept with the addition of “reserved”. This is a way to underline the reservations that come with the findings of involved fatherhood. In other words, the discourses of involved fatherhood often hold information that somewhat contradicts a “full” involvement, elements of the orthodox masculinity discourses that limit the fatherly involvement in childcare.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore ideals of involved fatherhood in a setting marked by orthodox masculinities. The setting marked by orthodox masculinities are in this study represented by Poland, whereas the ideals of involved fatherhood are explored in Polish parenting magazines for fathers. To fulfil the aim a set of research questions were posed: can orthodox masculinities be found in the context of involved fatherhood in Polish parenting magazines for fathers, and if so, how they are manifested; and how are relational aspects displayed in the studied articles? What is the relation between fatherhood and motherhood or fathers and mothers?

Orthodox masculinity is a concept that refers to archetypes of traditionalist ideals concerning masculinities. According to these ideals men have very little leeway to express emotion, they are supposed to be “invulnerable”, and it is important for men to be distinctively different from women. Orthodox masculinity has a contrasting counterpart called inclusive masculinity, which relates to a situation where men have more room to transcend traditional masculinity ideals.
When formulating the concept of orthodox masculinity, Anderson (2009) takes departure in a critique of Connell’s (2005) notion of hegemonic masculinity. According to this critique, it’s no longer possible to speak of one hegemonic masculinity, but rather of two competing major strands of masculinities, one orthodox, and another inclusive. In the findings of this study, a strong emphasize on the dichotomy between men and women is found. This is a rather orthodox trait. It seems dominant, but not hegemonic, since cases of inclusive masculinities are also encountered.

Involved fatherhood refers to a family model in which both parents are engaged in childcare and committed to the child (Coltrane, 1996; Hobson & Morgan, 2004; Johansson & Klinth, 2008). An important pillar of this study has been the relational approach. This assumes that it is vital to understand masculinities in relation to femininities, and for the specific case of this paper, fathers in relation to mothers (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2013).

Two different Polish parenthood magazines directed at fathers were chosen as empirical material: 6 issues of Supertata w wielkim mieście and 2 numbers of Tato, to ja, all published during 2014. They were selected to represent the ideals of involved fatherhood in a context of orthodox masculinities. The method of this analysis was Ethnographic Content Analysis. This is a method that apply to the study of documents (in this study parental magazines) to achieve understanding of culture, social discourse and social change (Altheide, 1987; Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese & Schneider, 2008; Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Altheide & Schneider, 2013).

Poland, in contrast to Western European countries, seems to be characterized by a process of refamiliazation. Since the collapse of communism, the strength of traditional family values appears to be gaining ground (Glass & Kawachi, 2001; Hantrais, 2004; Saxonberg & Szelewa, 2007). Most western societies would be better described as involved in a process of defamiliazation. This concept refers to the tendency that the individual is becoming less economically dependent of the family, either through salary, or through social security policies (Lister, 1994). This could be helpful when trying to grasp why the discourses on dichotomy between fathers and mothers are so prominent. If the role of the “traditional family” is becoming reinforced, it is possible that the ideals of involved fatherhood only can appear in this realm or orthodoxy. The analyzed magazines were chosen because the intended readers are fathers, and thus the magazines have been expected to function as an arena of involved fatherhood, but still
published in a traditional setting marked by orthodox masculinities.

The application of the theoretical concepts of this study has helped to identify two major discourses that correlates to the research questions of this study. They are called reserved involvement and orthodox dichotomy.

The studied magazines have the outspoken aim to encourage fathers to become more involved with their children. Unsurprisingly then, they represent a discourse indicating that the involved fatherhood model is changing. Old traditional ways have been replaced by new modern ideals of fathers who are fully committed to their children and involved in their daily care. A great deal of the content in the studied magazines is dedicated to hands-on advice, where fathers are placed in a context of daily care. However, further analysis has shown that there are elements that are rather derogatory in these discourses. Fathers are not seldom portrayed as incompetent or clueless when it comes to childcare. This is, for example, expressed in the very detailed instructions directed at the fathers. This lack of confidence in fathers is also visible in discourses that encourage fathers “not to be afraid” of spending time with their children, in which they also are informed of the importance of creating a close father-child bond. Another “reservation” against that the involved fatherhood model has prevailed, is that there is a lack of representation of divorced father, which has been interpreted as an indirect indication of that mothers tend to remain responsible for the children in case of a divorce. However, in the journals, we also find traces of a competing discourse in which fathers are seen as competent as mothers and not helpless when it comes to childcare.

Discourses marked by orthodox masculinities have been presented under the title “orthodox dichotomy.” The dichotomy of masculine and feminine is here clear. In parenting, this is mainly expressed through the highlighting of contrasting functions of mothers and fathers. In two of the main discourses mothers are given advantages over fathers. The first discourse contains a notion that mothers are more important than fathers (at least when it comes to infants) due to physiological aspects, such as mothers being able to breastfeed. The other discourse contrasts mothers as by nature more knowledgeable in childcare, whereas fathers are portrayed as novices. Another discourse, also influenced by the dichotomy of the sexes, is regarding fathers’ advantages over mothers. However, this is done while drawing from sexist stereotypes of women, for example by contrasting mothers as hysterical and fathers as calm.
So, the in response to the first research question, yes, orthodox masculinities do permeate the discursive representations of ideals of involved fatherhood. This is manifested in the discourses on fathers as fundamentally different from mothers. The second question asks how fathers and fatherhood relate to mothers and motherhood. Continuing the answer from the first question the distinct functions of mothers and fathers are expressed, even though there is a strong discourse of the importance of fathers. These different functions are sometimes sculptured upon sexist discourses, where the father is elevated at the mother’s expense. If parenting practices weren’t gendered, it would not be necessary to distinguish mothers from fathers. In my interpretation, the intentions of the authors of the studied articles are to make men more inclined to father, but it seems that they at the same time reinforce gender structures, in particular the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. This will, in my opinion, have negative impact on both fathers and mothers. These reinforced gender structures will limit the many possible ways to be a father.

When interpreting the results from this study, it is important to remember that a relational approach was applied. A criterion for articles being chosen for closer study was an inclusion of visible relational elements, put in another way, it was clear that they contained gendered discourses. This may create a bias towards discourses marked by gender dichotomies, which is of course partly was a vital interest of this study, but it is important to remember that the magazines contain much more than the results presented here; the aim has not been to measure quantities of fatherhood or masculinities, rather, the objective has been to get more understanding about them.

When considering the studied magazines with fathers as intended readers it is also important to remember that they are in minority compared to magazines for parents and mothers. So, the results should not be seen as representative for parenting magazines in general. On the other hand, the qualitative stance of this study entails a perspective, from which the main idea is not to generate representative results, but rather explore and understand gendered discourses in general, and especially discourses on Polish fatherhood.

In this study, the Polish parenting magazines for fathers have mainly been contextualized as a small exception within a conservative society (Poland), which in turn has been placed in another historical context compared to Western Europe and North America. It would have been helpful
to know more about the setting where the texts are produced, that is the magazines position in the Polish market, and more information about the authors of the articles. It would of course also be interesting to know something about how these magazines are read. To form at least a vague understanding of this, it can be productive to turn to some related studies. Sunderland (2006) outlines a possible explanation to why the parenting magazines (directed both at mothers and fathers) put fathers in the background. She claims that even if the magazines are explicitly aimed at ‘parents’, they know that the readership mainly consists of mothers, and they are cautious about making them worried or feel inadequate. This should not be the case in the fathers’ magazines, if one considers the fact that they are directed to fathers. This said, fathers are still partly presented as secondary to mothers and fathering is almost always done in the presence of, or mediated by, the mother. This can be seen in the light of how mothers sometimes encourage fathers to learn more about childcare. The statement of one of the participating polish fathers in a study conducted by Chmura-Rutkowska and Ostrouch (2008) shows an example of this: “I learn different things about children from magazines that my wife hands me, she points out where I should read” (p. 212, my translation). Maybe it is in the light of this mediation that the somewhat condescending views on fathers should be understood. If mothers “hands” these magazines to the fathers for reading, and even pointing out were to read, they first have to read the magazines themselves. In following Sunderland’s reasoning, one can wonder whether the publishers of the fathers’ magazines to some extent presuppose also a readership of mothers. Even if the actual existence of the studied magazines can be seen as a sign of upcoming ideals of involved fatherhood, it seems as there is still quite a long way to go for ideals of involved fatherhood to become truly spread. Since 2014, no more issues of Supertato have been published, while Tato, to Ja was published up until 2016. However, the lack of parenting magazines for fathers does not necessary mean that there are no channels for promoting involved fatherhood in Poland, one could suspect that fathers more and more turns to parenting forums on the web. If I were to continue the study of Polish fatherhood, these forums would be a great place to start. Such a study would probably employ a different methodological approach. For example, could Nettography (Kozinets, 2015) be employed to capture the social interaction among fathers that occurs online. It would indeed be interesting to see if there is a discrepancy between what kind of masculinity ideals that are expressed when “experts” are writing about parenting, and when fathers themselves are discussing the topics.
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