

Undermining Mothers: A Content Analysis of the Representation of Mothers in Magazines

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Mother wars, the pitting of at-home and employed mothers against each other, dominate public discourse. Mother roles are contested and, as a result, mothers are inundated with contradictory messages that affirm a particular mother role and simultaneously condemn a mother for achieving it. This content analysis explores 4 maternal contradictions in contemporary women's magazines: (a) mothers are selfish/selfless; (b) mothers should foster independence/dependence in children; (c) mothers who succeed/fail in the domestic sphere, fail/succeed in the public sphere; and (d) mothers are natural, instinctive, intuitive/need expert help. The messages, and the characterization of these contradictions as double binds, have implications on the empowerment of mothers and the perpetuation of patriarchal systems.

Buxton (1998) and Maushart (1999) contended that we are living in a historically and culturally unprecedented era of contested mother roles and ideologies. Mothers have choices in how to define their mother role, but with choice comes conflict. Maternal feminism has risen slowly in the wake of the feminist movement (Gimenez, 1980; Graglia, 1998). Feminist theory neglects to recognize women's desires to be both mothers and feminists (Allen, 1983; Fox-Genovese, 1996). Caregiving and feminism together are constructed as an oxymoron, and caregiving has been condemned for embroiling women in dependent and powerless family roles (Graglia, 1998). Studies of third-wave feminism reveal that an increasing number of young women resent the feminist movement for neglecting family roles (Fox-Genovese, 1996; Peters, 2001).

At this point in history, *mother wars*—the pitting of at-home and employed mothers against each other (Buxton, 1998)—dominate public discourse. Contemporary mothers are living in the culture's zone of contested identities (Hall, 1996). According to Hall:

Identity ... is a matter of considerable political significance, and is only likely to be advanced when both the necessity and the "impossibility" of identities, and the suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged. (p. 16)

Bakhtin (1934–1935/1981) further described the importance of discourse to this process: "Individual consciousnesses ... come together and fight it out on the territory of the utterance" (p. 360). Grossberg (1996), discussing the paradox of how a person can be both the cause and effect, both the subject and the subjected, contended that the task is to locate the "machinery" by which identification and belonging are produced and assimilated into structures of individuality (p. 98). The purpose of this study is to explore the prevalence of maternal identity contradictions in the public discourse of women's magazines.

MATERNAL DOUBLE BINDS

The mother wars are fueled by contradictory messages that affirm particular aspects of mother identity but sanction others (Buxton, 1998). When expectations and condemnations are tied in such a way that to achieve the expectation is to invite the condemnation, a double bind is present (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Double binds have the effect of undermining confidence and engendering feelings of guilt and inadequacy (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick et al., 1967). In a cultural context in which motherhood roles and ideologies are hotly contested, the impact of double binds on mothers may be particularly powerful. Interestingly, most research in the communication literature applies double binds to women (Wood & Conrad, 1983).

Double binds are identified according to four criteria (Kuiken & Hill, 1985): (a) a receiver motivated to discern a message to enact appropriate behavior; (b) a message promoting two mutually exclusive self-presentations, or a self-presentation combined with a metamessage that disqualifies the advocated self-presentation; (c) implicit content in one or both parts of the incompatible message, making it difficult for the receiver to address the contradiction; and (d) a receiver who is unwilling or unable to avoid the double bind.

Mothers live the double bind of professional woman versus good mother. Despite increases in the number of employed mothers, these two identities remain culturally constructed as mutually exclusive. This double bind is evident in the

popular press, in which Hewlett (2002) noted the trend of professional women to delay or forego children, and Schlessinger (2000) advised career women to get a parakeet, not a baby. The *good mother* is constructed as selfless, interdependent with children, naturally endowed for nurturing, and successful in the domestic sphere. The *good professional* is constructed as promoting self, demonstrating independence, lacking in natural mothering qualities, and fulfilling her potential in the public sphere.

The existence of discursively constructed myths and contradictions of motherhood was first identified by pioneering maternal scholars Ruddick (1983) and Rich (1976). A survey of more recent qualitative narrative research (Hays, 1996; Maushart, 1999; McMahan, 1995; Williams 2000) and critical research (Ruddick, 1989; Thurer, 1995; Trebilcot, 1983) suggests four maternal contradictions.

Selfish/selfless double-bind messages tell mothers who forsake an identity outside the mother role that they are good, self-sacrificing mothers but implicitly condemned for being powerless women. Conversely, mothers who seek an independent public-sphere identity are powerful women but implicitly condemned for being bad and selfish mothers (cf. Weingarten, 1997). Ideals of maternal selfishness and selflessness are reflected in the underlying motivations in messages to mothers. For example, are mothers primarily encouraged to be good mothers, good wives, good employees, good to themselves, or some combination of these? Maternal selflessness and selfishness are also reflected in portrayals of mothers' identities. For example, are mothers' identities defined independently of others or only through their relationship with others?

Mother-child independence/dependence double-bind messages condemn stay-at-home mothers for being overly enmeshed in their children's lives, and employed mothers for jeopardizing attachment (cf. Eyer, 1992). Messages may promote mother-child dependence through expressing an exaggerated need for connection between mother and child, or independence through promoting rigid boundaries and strategies for separation of mother and child.

Success/failure double-bind messages assert that employment leads to success in the public sphere but failure in the domestic sphere, and staying home leads to success in the domestic sphere but failure in the public sphere (cf. Orenstein, 2000; Peters, 1997). Success/failure double binds are reflected in portrayals of mothers' competence in the domestic and public spheres, messages that promote and value success in one sphere over another, and messages recognizing work/family tension. Work/family tension messages may suggest that success in the two spheres is mutually exclusive or suggest strategies for transcending work/family tension.

Natural/unnatural maternal double-bind messages maintain that women are natural mothers and men are incapable of mothering, yet simultaneously tell mothers they need a cadre of (typically male) experts—from an operating team to deliver a baby to a bookshelf of books to monitor development—to mother successfully (cf. Kedgley, 1996). Messages reflecting this double bind suggest women either natu-

rally possess mothering qualities or need professional and expert assistance to be good mothers. Recognition of mothers' innate mothering qualities is also reflected in messages that value mothers' insights and contributions to the public discourse on child care, child development, education, and child welfare. Denial of mothers' innate mothering qualities is suggested in messages reflecting a unidimensional flow of information from public-sphere experts to the domestic sphere.

Research indicates that mothers construct different mothering ideologies according to employment or at-home status (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). Ideologies define who is in and who is out. Johnston and Swanson explored, for example, how the at-home mother ideology of the self-sacrificing mother excludes employed mothers who are perceived as putting their own needs ahead of their children's. It follows that maternal double binds are likely to be perceived differently depending on mothers' employment status.

One source of maternal double-bind messages is women's magazines. We need barely look beyond the cover of popular magazines to see that the magazine industry has perfected double-bind messages (e.g., "Look thin" and "Be healthy"; "Satisfy your male" and "Be a secure sexual being"). Modeling one's own mothers is not the only or obvious choice for mothers today, and in a cultural context of mother wars that pit women against each other, there are few models for maternal identity construction (Gerson, 1985). A number of scholars note the impact of women's magazines on establishing expectations of womanhood (Murphy, 1994; Seidel, 1990; Shevelov, 1989; Wolfe, 1991).

Although there are a number of studies that explore the representation of women in media (e.g., Barthel, 1988; Scott, 1993) and in magazines in particular (e.g., Andreason & Steves, 1983; Busby & Leichty, 1993; Demarest & Garner, 1992; Murphy, 1994; Prusank, Duran, & DeLillo, 1993; Walsh, 1999), there is little empirical research focusing on the depiction of mothers.

Kaplan's (1990, 1992) psychoanalytic feminist analysis of mothers in 1980s popular culture found that the representation of mothers perpetuates patriarchal norms by separating female sexuality, work, and motherhood into distinct spheres: Female sexuality and work are still constructed as threats to the construction of the ideal mother. Kaplan (1992) found support for discursive themes of neglectful mothers—supermom career mother, selfish nonmother, absent mother/nurturing father, and self-fulfilled mother—in her analysis. Mothers are validated for seeking self-fulfillment through mothering or turning to motherhood after career, but they are not validated for combining employment and mothering or choosing career over motherhood. Kaplan (1992) also noted the contradictory expectations embedded in maternal representations. Her informal selection of popular culture images of mothers in the 1980s informs our more empirical content analysis of maternal images in the 2000s.

Keller's (1994) qualitative analysis of mothering ideologies across 3 decades—one of the only studies assessing the representation of mothers in women's

magazines—also ended in the 1980s. Keller identified the 1960s traditionalist, the 1970s feminist, and the 1980s neotraditionalist and economic-nurturer images of motherhood.

The purpose of this study is to explore the prevalence of double-bind messages targeting employed and at-home mothers in current women's magazines. The social construction of the good mother as selfless, overly enmeshed with her child, and uniquely and biologically determined to bear and nurture children was analyzed by Chodorow (1978), Hays (1996), Maushart (1999), McMahon (1995), Rich (1976), Ruddick (1983, 1989), Trebilcot (1983), and Thurer (1995). The social construction of the working mother as a success in the public sphere but a failure in the home and family sphere was explored by Gerson (1985) and Williams (2000) among others. Although these contradictory maternal themes are pervasive in the motherhood research literature, there is no single source that articulates a number of the themes, and there is no research that discusses these contradictions in terms of double binds. There is also no statistical study that assesses the prevalence of maternal contradictions in recent media, or the relative prevalence of contradictions directed toward employed and nonemployed mothers. This leads us to ask the following research questions:

- RQ1: How prevalent are selfish/selfless, mother-child independence/dependence, success/failure, and natural/unnatural themes in representations of mothers in women's family-oriented magazines?
- RQ2: How does the focus of double-bind themes differ in representations associated with at-home mothers and employed mothers?
- RQ3: How does the prevalence of double-bind themes differ across different types of family-oriented women's magazines?

METHOD

Magazines were selected based on Mediamark Research (1999) magazine audience estimates. The two highest subscription magazines for women of childbearing age are *Good Housekeeping* and *Family Circle*. *Parents' Magazine* is the highest subscription parenting magazine. Although *Family Fun* and *Working Mother* could not compete with the subscription rates of the traditional women's magazines, they were included in the sample because they are the top magazines ranked by composition of employed mothers. The selected magazines represent the highest subscription traditional women's magazines, the highest subscription parenting magazine, and the magazines with the highest composition of working mothers.

Four issues of each magazine were selected to represent one issue per quarter over the 12-month period of the study (September 1998, December 1998, March 1999, and June 1999). The nonrandom sample included the same months from

each publication to control for timely public issues that might influence the editorial content of a given month within the publication year and to avoid May and August issues with potential Mother's Day and back-to-school foci that might overrepresent mother-related content.

The entire content of each publication was analyzed for mother representations. A *text unit* was defined as an article, advertisement, shortie (i.e., short take-out box or an article less than a full page), letter or testimonial, or question-and-answer column. The unit of analysis was defined at the unit level, not the entire publication, because we were interested in an in-depth analysis of the meaning of individual messages. Twenty percent of the sample was used to assess unitizing reliability. Three coders, working independently, achieved high unitizing reliability ($r = .99$) for what constituted a text unit (Guetzkow, 1950).

The analysis of the 20 issues in the sample for this study yielded 1,139 text units with mother representations. In addition, advertisements representing nonmothers ($n = 240$) were coded to allow comparisons of the representation of mothers and nonmothers. Unless otherwise noted, the analyses reported are based on the original sample of 1,139 mother representations in magazine text units. The analysis of nonmothers in advertisements was only used for follow-up analyses comparing mothers and nonmothers in advertising ($n = 692$).

Text units were coded for themes reflecting maternal contradictions: (a) Mothers are selfish/selfless; (b) mothers should foster independence/dependence in children; (c) mothers fail/succeed in public/private spheres; and (d) mothers are natural mothers/in need of expert help. Each text unit was coded for the presence or absence of either anchor of the double-bind theme (e.g., selfish or selfless). Both anchors defining a double bind did not need to be explicitly present in the same editorial unit, as we were interested in the cumulative effect of editorial content in perpetuating these contradictions at a sociocultural level. Text units were coded for themes reflecting potential maternal double binds. Kuiken and Hill (1985) acknowledged how the defining features of double binds are often defined by their implicit content. The determination of whether these themes cumulatively operate as a double bind is addressed in the discussion of results, not at the level of coding.

The coding categories were derived from a *Q*-sorting technique using editorial units from magazines not included in the sample. Text units with themes reflecting each of the four broadly defined double binds were identified. Five coders independently sorted the text units into piles reflecting their similarities and differences according to each double-bind theme. Consistent piles were used to construct coding variables for each double bind and mutually exclusive and exhaustive foils for each variable. For each variable, *no reference to double-bind theme* and *other* foils were included. The coding variables and foils derived from this procedure are outlined in Table 1.

Twenty percent of the total text units were used to assess intercoder reliability across three independent coders: Scott's $\pi = .86$ averaged over 37 variables

(Krippendorf, 1970). Group discussion with the coders and primary investigators resolved discrepancies. The validity of the coding system was also reflected by the low frequency in other category foils.

Selfish/Selfless

The selfish/selfless theme was assessed by two variables: self-motivation and self-identity. Self-motivation reflects whether the justification for a proposed belief, attitude, or behavior was to be a good mother, to be good to self and family, or to be good to self. An example of *good mom motivations* follows:

I used to tell my mother that I didn't want to be anything like her, because she lived for her children. Now I realize that to be like my mother is the greatest thing that could ever happen to me. (Frankel, *Good Housekeeping*, April, 1998)

In contrast, *good-to-self and family* motivations qualified the self-sacrificing theme of the good mom motivations. For example, a Campbell's soup advertisement read: "If dinner has to be in the oven by 6, you better make darn sure you're home by 5:55" (© Campbell Soup Company, 1998). The good-to-self motivations often transcended the selfish/selfless double bind by reframing self-care as other-care: "I model for my children that a woman can have several important roles in her life and still carve out the time to honor her own needs" ("Your Turn" column, *Working Mother*, September, 1998). There were no good-to-self messages targeted to mothers that unabashedly promoted a mother's self-interest.

Text units were also coded for whether a mother's self-identity was portrayed as independent or relationally defined through others. A mother was coded as having an identity *independent of others* if there was any reference to roles, interests, hobbies, or other aspects of her identity, separate from her mother role. For example, an advertisement for Chase Manhattan Corporation read: "Erica Dahar—wife, mother of two, fundraiser, community supporter, New Yorker, job sharer (and Chase banker). Working at Chase makes being a working mother work" (© The Chase Manhattan Corp., 1998). A mother was coded as having an identity *relationally defined through serving others* if the mother's identity was unidimensional and focused exclusively on caretaking of family members. For example, a magazine advertisement states: "After countless trips to the store, ump-teen hours of car pooling, all those visits to Grandma's house, all those times hearing, 'Are we there yet?'" (© Hanes, 1998). Mother representations were coded as incorporating *both relational and independent identity* when mother role and independent identity were integrated, such that a mother's independent role was justified or rationalized by evidence that she was still a good mother: "Saturday at noon, I am a soccer mom. It's not Saturday. It's not noon" (© GM Corp., 1999).

TABLE 1
Coding Foils and Frequencies for Maternal Double Binds

<i>Double Bind</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Foils</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>	<i>n^a</i>	
Selfish/selfless	Self-motivation	Good mother	62	706	
		Good to self and family	24	273	
		Good to self	4	49	
		Good wife and mother	3	37	
		Good employee/juggler	3	34	
		Other (good wife or traditional female)	1	11	
		No reference to self-motivation	3	29	
	Self-identity	Independent identity	3	31	
		Identity defined through relationship	56	635	
		Identity independent and relationally defined	14	158	
Independence/dependence	Mother-child relationship	Normative care	59	668	
		Mother-child independence promoted	5	55	
		Mother-child dependence promoted	6	67	
		Exaggerated need for mother-child connection	11	127	
		No reference to mother-child relationship	19	222	
Success/failure	Competency	Competent in domestic sphere	28	318	
		Incompetent in domestic sphere	15	169	
		Competence in both spheres	9	104	
		Incompetence in both, mixed competence, competence, or incompetence in public	1	17	
		No reference to competence	47	531	
	Motivation for success	Do this for public success	2	23	
		Do this for domestic success	77	877	
		Do this for both public and domestic success	8	91	
		No reference to success	13	148	
	Work/family tension	Work/family tension recognized	5	57	
		No reference to work/family tension	95	1,082	
	Natural/unnatural	Mother role	Mother role natural	33	374
			Mother role in need of help/assistance	39	447
No reference to natural/unnatural mother role			28	318	
Flow of information	Flow of information	Public to domestic sphere	35	402	
		Domestic to public sphere	2	18	
		No reference to information flow	63	719	

Note. "Other" foils were employed for each category. If "other" category had a frequency of 0, it was deleted in the table.

^a*N* = 1,139.

Independence/Dependence

The independent/dependent theme was assessed by one variable—the characterization of the mother–child relationship as independent or dependent. The mother–child interactions portrayed in text units were coded as promoting normative caretaking, mother–child independence, mother–child dependence, or an exaggerated need for mother–child connection. Normative caretaking portrayed mothers providing food, shelter, clothing, education, health care, or affection to children. Mother–child independence was exemplified in the message, “The more you indulge her fears, the more fearful she’ll be” (*Parents*, September, 1998). Mother–child dependence was demonstrated in the ad, “When he can’t breathe I can’t either” (Air Watch Asthma Monitor, Enact Health Management Systems, 1998). An example of an exaggerated need for connection was found in this ad: “You have housework to do. But, he wants you to watch him color” (*Family Circle*, June, 1999).

Success/Failure

The success/failure double bind was assessed by three variables: competence in domestic and public spheres, motivation for success in public and domestic spheres, and acknowledgment of work/family tension. Mother representations were coded for displays of competence or incompetence in the domestic sphere, public sphere, or both. Competence in the domestic sphere was exemplified in the sidebar: “I assembled the geodesic dome from your special crafts issue. ... Two weeks later, the dome is still up and still the most exciting spot in the house” (*Family Fun*, June/July, 1999). Examples of incompetence in the domestic sphere included: “I had slipped the new diaper on without removing the old one. She’d been sitting in the same soggy diaper for hours” (magazine article), and “I got up to put the bottle into the warmer ... I put the phone into the warmer instead” (“From Our Readers” column, *Parents*, December, 1998). Competence in the public sphere included representations of mothers in the workforce or in volunteerism.

The underlying success motivation for a product, idea, or article thesis was coded as motivation for public-sphere success, domestic success, or both public and domestic success. Public-sphere success motivations were exemplified in the article, “Whatever you do, don’t call a meeting: How to plan a fund-raiser” (*Family Circle*, September, 1998). An example of domestic-sphere success appeared in the advertisement, “Nothing brings a family together like a home cooked meal” (Stouffer’s Lasagna advertisement, © 1998, Nestlé USA–Food Division). An example of both public and domestic success was apparent in a secret-to-success series that included articles about kids involved in “random acts of kindness campaigns” and “Operation Cheer Up” (*Family Circle*, September, 1998). The mothers’ public success was achieved through raising children who were caring social activists.

Content was also coded for tension between desire to provide family care and desire to make contributions in the public sphere. An example of work/family ten-

sion was found in an article about Maria Shriver, NBC news correspondent and mother of four:

Shriver ... negotiated a deal with NBC to scale back her workload and set up an office at home. ... Work inevitably takes the couple [Maria and Arnold Schwarzenegger] in separate directions. ... When that happens, Shriver assumes a more traditional role, for the good of the children. (Powell, *Good Housekeeping*, 1999).

When work/family tension is addressed in magazine content, it is often associated with celebrities who are mothers. There were so few references to work/family tension that the theme was coded only for presence or absence.

Natural/Unnatural

The natural/unnatural theme was assessed by two variables: The first involved the mother role of natural/in need of help, and the second involved the flow of information between public and private spheres. Mother representations were coded for whether the mother was presented as naturally qualified to fulfill the mother role or in need of expert help. One magazine article depicted a frazzled mother holding a crying baby while folding laundry and talking on the phone: "Whether you're a new mom or a seasoned pro, the sooner you learn to ask for it, the better. HELP!" (A. Murphy, *Parents*, March, 1999). Another article provided expert advice instructing mothers in basic care—to keep their children home from school when they have a fever, tummy ache, sneezy or runny nose, sore throat, cough, earache, or rash. Examples of mothers as natural caretakers were found in reader response segments: "It worked for me! Parents share their tried-and-true tips and wise advice" (*Parents*, October, 1998) and "My great idea" (*Family Fun*).

The directional flow of information to and from mothers was also coded. Examples of the public-to-domestic information flow were pervasive in magazine features: "What your child wants most: An expert asked them, and their answers may surprise you"; "When a preschooler's behavior turns ugly, experts find a surprising cause"; and "Can you spot the warning signs of kindergarten stress?" Although scarce, an example of the domestic-sphere informing the public sphere was the advertisement for Ford: "At Ford, we always listen to our mothers ... 30 of the Windstar Product Development Team members happen to be moms" (© Ford Motors, Co., 1998).

RESULTS

The content analysis of mother representations in women's family-oriented magazines provides empirical support for the presence of the themes associated with the four maternal contradictions. Seventy-three percent of the total mother-related text units include references to mothers' identity as independent or relationally de-

fined. Eighty-one percent include references to mothers fostering dependence or independence in children. Fifty-three percent include representations of mothers' competence in the domestic sphere. Seventy-two percent include representations of mothers as natural or in need of expert help.

The results follow the three research questions for each of the four maternal contradictions: (a) the prevalence of the double-bind themes, (b) differences in the association of double-bind themes with at-home and employed mothers, and (c) differences in the prevalence of double-bind themes by magazine.

Selfish/Selfless

One aspect of this double bind—that mothers who stay home with their children are self-sacrificing and that selflessness is a maternal virtue—is prevalent in magazines. The other side of the double bind—that employed mothers are purely selfish—is not portrayed in the magazines analyzed. Mother messages most frequently reflect the motivation to stay home to be a good mother (62%, $n = 706$) or to be good to self and family (24%, $n = 273$; Table 1).

There are significant differences in motives by mothers' work status (Table 2). Employed mothers are most frequently encouraged to be good to self and family, good employees/jugglers, and good moms. At-home mothers are primarily encouraged to be good moms and secondarily encouraged to be good to self and family.

There are also significant differences in self-motives by magazine, $\chi^2(36, N = 1139) = 157.19, p = .000$. A comparison of standardized residuals reveals that *Parents' Magazine* is significantly more likely to present good mom motivations than are the traditional women's magazines, *Good Housekeeping* and *Family Circle* (Table 3). *Family Fun* and *Working Mother* are significantly more likely to present good-to-self and family motivations than is *Parents' Magazine*. It is important to note that even the magazines targeting employed mothers do not present significantly more good-to-self motivations than do the traditional women's and parents' magazines.

Selflessness was also analyzed by coding whether mothers' identities were depicted as independent of others, relationally defined through serving others, or both independent and relational. Mothers are most frequently depicted with identities defined solely through relationship with others; mothers with an independent identity are rarely presented (Table 1).

There are significant differences in the ways employed and at-home mothers' identities are depicted, $\chi^2(3, N = 1139) = 557.23, p < .000$. Employed mothers are most frequently portrayed with both relational and independent identities (70%, $n = 97$, of all employed mother portrayals), and at-home mothers are most frequently portrayed with identities defined relationally through serving others (62%, $n = 610$, of all at-home mother portrayals). Although independent identity

TABLE 2
Self-Motives by Mothers' Work Status

	<i>Employed Mother^a (%)</i>	<i>At-Home Mother^b (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Good mom (<i>n</i> = 706)			
Row	4	96	100
Column	20	70	
Good to self and family (<i>n</i> = 269)			
Row	22	78	100
Column	42	21	
Good to self (<i>n</i> = 49)			
Row	33	67	100
Column	12	3	
Good wife and mom (<i>n</i> = 38)			
Row	8	92	100
Column	2	4	
Good employee and juggler (<i>n</i> = 37)			
Row	84	16	100
Column	23	1	
Other (<i>n</i> = 14)			
Row	0	100	100
Column	0	1	
Total	100	100	

Note. Twenty-nine (3%) text units had no motive in message. $\chi^2(6, N = 1113) = 265.51, \eta^2 = .483, p < .001$.

^a*n* = 137, ^b*n* = 976.

portrayals are infrequent for all mothers, employed mothers are presented with independent identities more frequently than are at-home mothers (15%, *n* = 21, and <1%, *n* = 69, respectively). At-home mothers are presented with no self-identity information more frequently than employed mothers (31%, *n* = 331, and 3%, *n* = 10, respectively). In text units with no self-identity information, mothers are presented superficially with no relational identity other than motherhood; no reference is made to character, interests, personality, abilities, or even duties and responsibilities.

There are significant differences in the presentation of self-identity across magazines, $\chi^2(12, N = 1139) = 89.39, p = .000$. An analysis of standardized chi-square residuals (Table 3) indicates that *Working Mother* is more likely to present mothers with independent and relational and independent identities and less likely to represent mothers as relationally defined through serving others. *Family Circle* also presents mothers with integrated relational and independent identities. Interestingly, the parenting magazines present mothers less frequently with independent identities than do the traditional women's magazines.

TABLE 3
Chi-Square Cell Standardized Residuals for All Variables by Magazine

<i>Double-Bind Variables</i>	<i>GH</i>	<i>FC</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>FF</i>	<i>WM</i>
Selfish/selfless					
Self-motivations ^a					
Good mom	-4.3	-3.4	4.3	1.5	-1.8
Good to self and family	0.2	-0.1	-3.7	2.7	3.0
Self-identity					
Relational and independent	0.8	2.3	-1.9	-3.0	4.7
Through serving others	0.1	-1.4	1.6	0.7	-2.7
Independent identity	1.1	0.0	-2.6	-1.0	4.8
Independence/dependence ^a					
Normative caretaking	-1.4	-1.7	-0.4	2.8	-0.5
Exaggerated need connection	0.4	0.3	3.0	-3.6	-1.3
Independence fostered	0.6	2.2	-1.8	-1.7	3.1
Success/failure					
Competence					
Competent in domestic	-1.7	5.3	-0.2	5.3	-3.4
Incompetent in domestic	3.6	-4.6	2.9	-4.6	-0.3
Competent in public	-0.7	-0.9	-1.3	-0.9	3.2
Incompetent in public	0.7	-1.0	-1.1	-1.0	0.8
Competent in both	2.1	-2.9	-2.8	-2.9	5.4
Natural/need expert help					
Need experts	0.4	0.0	3.3	-4.4	-0.6
Natural	-0.3	1.1	-2.5	3.9	-1.2
Protect/prepare children					
Prepare for public sphere	-0.8	1.9	-0.3	-1.7	2.0
Protect from public sphere	2.9	-0.5	0.8	-2.4	-0.4

Note. GH = *Good Housekeeping*; FC = *Family Circle*; P = *Parents' Magazine*; FF = *Family Fun*; WM = *Working Mother*. Standardized residuals are used to determine the location and magnitude of variance within a significant chi-square table with numerous cells (Kennedy, 1992). Standardized residuals can function as *z* statistics with a residual greater than 1.96 reflecting a significant source of variance (Kennedy, 1992, pp. 63–64).

^aOnly categories with one or more significant residuals are reported.

Independence/Dependence

The contradictions inherent in the second double bind, that mothers foster too much dependence and independence in their children, are present in magazines, but the frequency of independence/dependence messages is not high (Table 1).

Mothers are typically portrayed in normative caretaking roles (Table 1). Fifty percent ($n = 70$) of all employed mother representations and 61% ($n = 599$) of all at-home mother representations depict normative caretaking. There are, however, small but significant differences in the promotion of dependence and independence by work status (Table 4). Although exaggerated needs for connection only

TABLE 4
Independence/Dependence of Children by Mothers' Work Status

	<i>Employed Mother^a (%)</i>	<i>At-Home Mother^b (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Normative caretaking (<i>n</i> = 669)			
Row	10	90	100
Column	65	75	
Exaggerated need for connection (<i>n</i> = 125)			
Row	6	94	100
Column	8	15	
Mother-child independence (<i>n</i> = 51)			
Row	31	69	100
Column	15	5	
Mother-child dependence (<i>n</i> = 65)			
Row	20	80	100
Column	12	6	
Total	100	100	

Note. Two hundred twenty-two (19%) text units contained no independence/dependence information. $\chi^2(3, N = 910) = 27.71, \eta^2 = .174, p < .000$.

^a*n* = 107. ^b*n* = 803.

constituted 11% (*n* = 127) of all text units, when it did occur, it was more likely to be associated with at-home mothers. Both edges of the double bind are associated with employed mothers: Text units depicting the fostering of mother-child independence and text units presenting mother-child dependence are both more likely to be associated with employed mothers.

Representations of independence/dependence varied by magazine, $\chi^2(16, N = 1139) = 73.55, p = .000$. Residual analysis (Table 3) reveals that *Working Mother* and *Family Circle* more frequently present mothers fostering children's independence, whereas *Parents' Magazine* is most likely to present an exaggerated need for connection between mothers and children. *Family Fun* is least likely to present an exaggerated need for connection and is most likely of all magazines to present mothers in normative caretaking roles.

Success/Failure

The third double bind is that employment outside the home leads to failure in the domestic sphere, and staying at home with children condemns one to failure in the public sphere. Mothers were presented as competent more frequently than incompetent in the domestic sphere. Representations of competence in both the public and domestic spheres were represented in less than 10% (*n* = 104) of all mother representations, and representations of competence in the public sphere alone was negligible (Table 1).

There are significant differences in competence portrayals of employed and at-home mothers (Table 5). Employed mothers are presented as competent in both public and domestic spheres. Not surprisingly, at-home mothers are most often depicted as competent in the domestic sphere. However, at-home mothers are also frequently depicted as incompetent in the domestic sphere. This is a dramatic contrast to employed mothers who are seldom depicted as incompetent in the domestic sphere.

The portrayals of incompetence in the domestic sphere are targeted specifically toward the at-home mother. A separate analysis of magazine advertisements was conducted to compare mothers and nonmothers. A cross-tabulation of mothers' work status by competence in magazine ads reveals significant differences in the way mothers and nonmothers are portrayed, $\chi^2(15, N = 692) = 338.93, p < .000$. Seven percent ($n = 9$) of nonemployed nonmothers are presented as incompetent in the domestic sphere compared to 21% ($n = 28$) of at-home mothers. Employed women (mothers and nonmothers) are never presented as incompetent in the domestic sphere in advertisements ($n = 0$).

Representations of mothers' competence varied by magazine, $\chi^2(12, N = 1139) = 99.41, p = .000$ (Table 3). *Working Mother* is most likely to present mothers as competent in the public sphere, *Family Fun* and *Family Circle* are most likely to present mothers as competent in the domestic sphere, and *Working Mother* and

TABLE 5
Competence in Public and Private Sphere by Mothers' Work Status

	<i>Employed Mother</i> ^a (%)	<i>At-Home Mother</i> ^b (%)	Total (%)
Competence in domestic sphere ($n = 318$)			
Row	5	95	100
Column	12	63	
Incompetence in domestic sphere ($n = 169$)			
Row	3	97	100
Column	4	34	
Competence in both domestic and public spheres ($n = 104$)			
Row	89	11	100
Column	74	2	
Competence in public, incompetence in public; incompetence in both; or competence in one sphere and incompetence in the other ($n = 17$)			
Row	71	29	100
Column	10	1	
Total	100	100	

Note. Five hundred thirty (47%) text units made no reference to competence. $\chi^2(4, N = 608) = 411.72, \eta^2 = .791, p < .000$.

^a $n = 125$. ^b $n = 483$.

Good Housekeeping are most likely to present mothers as competent in both domestic and public spheres. *Good Housekeeping* and *Parents' Magazine* are most likely to present mothers as incompetent in the domestic sphere.

Text units were also coded for underlying motivations for domestic or public success. Motivations for domestic success dominate these publications (Table 1). There are significant differences in success motivations by mothers' work status, $\chi^2(3, N = 1139) = 207.52, p < .000$. At-home mothers are targeted with domestic success motivations in 91% ($n = 907$) of their representations compared to employed mothers who are targeted with domestic success motivations in 49% ($n = 69$) of their representations. Only 4% ($n = 5$) of employed mother representations and less than 1% ($n = 8$) of at-home mother representations promote public-sphere success.

When we analyze the representation of women in advertisements to compare mothers and nonmothers, we find that domestic success appears in only 32% ($n = 61$) of all nonemployed nonmothers' representations and in only 38% ($n = 12$) of all employed nonmothers' representations, $\chi^2(9, N = 692) = 379.18, p < .000$. In contrast, 69% ($n = 22$) of employed mothers' representations and 87% ($n = 382$) of at-home mothers' representations focus on domestic success. Magazine portrayals clearly communicate that the success of at-home mothers is found in the home, whereas all other women are portrayed as having broader opportunities for what constitutes success.

Work/family tension is referenced in only 5% ($n = 57$) of all mother representations (Table 1). There are, however, significant differences in the degree to which this tension was associated with employed and at-home mothers, $\chi^2(5, N = 1139) = 268.36, p < .000$. Of all the employed mother depictions, 32% ($n = 44$) reference work/family tension. Of all the at-home mother depictions, less than 1% ($n = 9$) reference work/family tension. Magazine portrayals reflect more work-decision ambivalence for employed mothers than for at-home mothers.

Natural/Unnatural Mothers

The frequency of natural versus in-need-of-help mother representations is comparable (Table 1). Yet, there are significant differences in the ways employed and at-home mothers are portrayed as natural mothers, $\chi^2(2, N = 801) = 61.09, p < .000$. Employed mothers are portrayed as natural mothers in 76% ($n = 91$) of their portrayals and in need of help in only 20% ($n = 29$) of their portrayals. In contrast, at-home mothers are presented as natural mothers in only 41% ($n = 279$) of their portrayals and in need of help to fulfill their mother roles in 58% ($n = 403$) of their portrayals. In the remaining 4% ($n = 5$) of employed mother representations and 1% ($n = 7$) of at-home mother representations, mothers' public roles or combined public-mother roles are presented as in need of expert help.

The presentation of mother roles as natural or in need of expert help varies by magazine, $\chi^2(12, N = 1139) = 69.49, p = .000$ (Table 3). *Parents' Magazine* is most likely to present mothers in need of expert help, and *Family Fun* is most likely to present mothers as natural mothers.

The innate wisdom of mothers is also reflected in the flow of information, with influence most often flowing from the public sphere (e.g., expert knowledge) to the domestic sphere (Table 1). There were no significant differences in flow of information by mothers' work status or by magazine, $\chi^2(2, N = 420) = 14.71, p > .05$ (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results supports the presence of contradictory maternal messages directed toward mothers. This discussion explores each of the four double-bind themes and discusses the prevalence of the themes across different types of magazines.

Selfish/Selfless Themes

The results of this study indicate that selflessness is not presented in magazines as a feminine virtue, but a maternal virtue. This double-bind theme targets at-home mothers: In women's magazines, nonmothers can be good to self, and employed mothers can combine self needs with family needs, but at-home mothers are primarily called to be good moms and are rarely encouraged to be good to self.

Whereas employed mothers are presented in women's magazines with identities that are defined as relational and independent, at-home mothers are defined through serving others or with no self-identity representation whatsoever. The infrequent presentation of mothers with independent identities reinforces a cultural message that mothers' independent roles are a threat to good mothering (cf. Kaplan, 1992). Moreover, the messages to employed mothers to be good to self and family perpetuates cultural expectations that independent roles must be accompanied by assurance that they are still good mothers.

It is important to note that it is entirely possible for magazine content to present at-home mothers with independent interests and identities outside of family responsibilities. Moreover, it is possible to construct advertising or editorial motivations that promote an idea because it is good for a mother *and* her family.

Success/Failure Theme

The actualization of selflessness usurps a woman of her self-identity; she is not a subject but an object valued for her service to others. The at-home mother reading

women's magazines is presented with ideals of domestic success, representations of self as incompetent in achieving this success, and an absence of models in the public sphere to enact changes in the social conditions that bind her. Orenstein (2000) concluded from her interview of 200 mothers that "among women who'd devoted themselves to family, poor self-image was chronic. ... But it's also an inherent risk in following the Good-Mother mandate. ... By midlife it can feel like separate ambitions never existed" (p. 222).

Magazine content addressing work/family issues is infrequent. The lack of discussion of work/family issues or even articles balancing personal interests, volunteerism, or public-sphere issue involvement with the care of children presents an illusion that at-home mothers do not experience the "fundamental ambivalence of motherhood" identified 30 years ago by Rich (1976) and more recently reiterated in popular press books by Wolfe (2001) and Crittenden (2001). Walsh (1999) and Demarest and Garner (1992) noted that the paucity of substantive issues in women's magazines and the limited change in magazines' representations of women's roles over time may be due to the advertising-dependent and consumer-oriented nature of general interest magazines. However, the absence of articles and messages empowering mothers to be involved in public-sphere issues that affect them as women and mothers seems to be less a threat to consumerism than a threat to patriarchy.

Natural/Unnatural Mother Theme

It follows that when at-home mothers are made to feel incompetent, they are more likely to seek expert help and advice. The same women that are lauded in conservative rhetoric for staying home full-time with their children and fulfilling their biologically endowed maternal roles are the targets of messages that disaffirm their natural ability to mother. The paradoxes abound—politically conservative ideology seeks to protect children from the public sphere and presumes proprietary rights over children (Smith, 1983) yet requires mothers' dependence on the public sphere for expert advice. The devaluing of mothers' wisdom is further evidenced by the preponderance of information flowing from the public sphere to the domestic and the relative absence of information flowing from the domestic to the public sphere. In her analysis of 100 years of motherhood, Kedgley (1996) concluded that the crisis of contemporary motherhood is a lack of confidence. Mothers are compelled to comply with expert advice and raise their children according to external standards, in lieu of relying on their own intuitive understanding.

Independence/Dependence Theme

Messages promoting mother-child independence, dependence, and exaggerated needs for connection are less frequent than other double-bind themes analyzed in

this study but are still apparent in 40% of all text units. Consistent with cultural stereotypes of at-home mothers being overly enmeshed with their children (Peters, 1997), magazine messages depicting exaggerated needs for connection are most often associated with at-home mothers. Mother representations that promote and enable unhealthy mother–child enmeshment undermine mothers’ ability to be independent of their children. Perhaps to counter negative cultural stereotypes of the employed mother who has failed to form secure attachments with her child (Eyer, 1992), employed mothers are portrayed with healthy mother–child boundaries reflecting both independence and dependence. This suggests some progress from the neglectful mother and absent mother themes Kaplan identified in 1980s popular culture.

Mother-Empowering Magazines

The messages to mothers in *Working Mother* appear consistent with its mission and target audience: Mothers are encouraged to be good to self and family, independent identities are affirmed, the fostering of mother–child independence is encouraged, competence in the public sphere and in both the public and domestic spheres is demonstrated, and mothers are encouraged to prepare children for the public sphere. Of the two traditional women’s magazines, *Family Circle* is more progressive in its portrayals of mothers than is *Good Housekeeping*. *Family Circle* portrays mothers’ identities as both relational and independent, presents mother–child independence, and presents mothers as competent in the domestic sphere.

The two parenting magazines differ in their presentation of mothers. *Parents’ Magazine* is less likely than *Family Fun* to present good-to-self and family motivations and is more likely to present exaggerated needs for connection between mother and child. *Parents’ Magazine* is more likely than *Family Fun* to present mothers as incompetent in the domestic sphere and in need of expert help. In general, *Parents’ Magazine* and *Good Housekeeping* promote the most traditional motherhood portrayals, *Family Circle* and *Family Fun* present somewhat more progressive motherhood representations, and *Working Mother* presents the most varied roles and expectations for motherhood. However, an examination of the standardized residuals comparing the magazines reveals that differences in maternal expectations across the three types of magazines—traditional women’s, parenting, and working mother magazines—are not as great as one might expect.

It should also be noted that although market segmentation may account for some of the domestic success focus found in these magazines, market segmentation does not explain why messages differ by mothers’ work status and by maternal status (i.e., ad hoc advertising analyses). Advertising interest-driving editorial content does not explain why at-home mothers are portrayed as incompetent, void of self-identity, relationally enmeshed with children, and in need of expert help. Pa-

triarchy, as an explanatory force for these findings, holds up better. Undermining at-home mothers and underrepresenting employed mothers perpetuate patriarchal social power.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of magazine texts identified discursive constraints that subjugate women in their roles as mothers and perpetuate patriarchy. Foucault (1978) described how hegemonic power is preserved by the construction of ideals that can be successfully fulfilled by the dominant group but ensure the failure of subordinate groups. Kaplan (1990) described how hierarchical discourses embedded in texts reveal which constructions are privileged and which are excluded. She concluded:

For women, one of the most subordinate and fetishized positions has been that of “mother.” Once this position is opened up as only a part of any specific woman’s subjectivity, not the all-consuming entirety of it; once any specific woman is seen to be constituted “mother” only when interacting with her child; once “mother” is no longer a fixed, essentialized quality, then women may be freed from ... discursive constraints and burdens. (p. 219)

This study identified maternal contradictions in women’s magazines. The results suggest that these contradictions may constitute double-bind communication (Kuiken & Hill, 1985). To determine whether these maternal contradictions operate as double-bind communication, additional research is needed to address the effects of these contradictions on mothers. The results of this study suggest, however, that the maternal contradictions identified in women’s magazines have characteristics of double-bind messages. The women’s magazines analyzed present messages that cumulatively promote particular mother identities and then summarily condemn the promoted identity representation. For example, at-home mothers are targeted in messages promoting domestic-sphere success but are presented as incompetent in the domestic sphere. In their totality, these messages create double binds for at-home mothers: To achieve the qualities of the ideal good mother as depicted in these representations is to effectively construct oneself as powerless. Stripped of self-identity, a means to personal success, independence, and confidence in one’s innate abilities, a mother cannot leave home.

The employed mother fares only slightly better. The only evidence for a double bind for employed mothers is their overall absence in women’s magazines: Employed mothers may be confident and successful, but the message is that there are not many mothers who can make this work. Considering that two of the five magazines have the highest composition of employed mother readers, this is a powerful double-bind message.

This study, reporting the prevalence of messages undermining the self-efficacy of at-home mothers and the absence of messages affirming employed mothers, helps us to understand how we have arrived at the current mother wars (Buxton, 1998). If mothers were empowered by the culture to feel confident in their abilities and roles, they would not be defensive and feel the need to justify their personal decisions by denigrating the choices of others. The lack of change in the representation of mothers' roles revealed by this study suggests that feminists have left mothers behind in their efforts to secure social change (Allen, 1983; Gimenez, 1980). As a result, patriarchy is preserved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by grants from the Hope College Frost Center for Social Science Research and the Ruth M. Peale faculty development fund. We thank three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article, and Elizabeth Anderson, Ann-Marie Campion, and Katie Jen, undergraduate students at Hope College, for their work on the data coding.

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