

The Rise of #GirlDad in a #BoyMom World: Exploring Instagram’s Role in Influencing Performative Parenthood

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Following the death of Kobe Bryant on January 26, 2020, an interview clip where Kobe described himself as a proud “girl dad” gained traction online as a way for dads around the world to share their fatherly pride. It also increased visibility for dads in the digital “mamasphere” of Instagram, paving the way for a comparative hashtag to the already popular #BoyMom. This visual and textual analysis explored the use of #GirlDad and #BoyMom on Instagram in order to examine how posts using these hashtags portray the roles of fatherhood and motherhood as well as the narratives related to the non-traditional parent-child dyads (father-daughter and mother-son

relationships). Results revealed that fathers expressed more emotion in their #GirlDad posts than traditionally associated with masculinity, but there was still pressure on women to perform through #BoyMom with posed photos and discussions of motherhood. This study also supports previous research on gender stereotypes, finding that the men were portrayed more often as playmates rather than caregivers.

Keywords: performative parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood, Instagram, identity theory

Following the death of Kobe Bryant on January 26, 2020, public figures and fans took to social media to express condolences, shock, and memories of the late basketball legend. ESPN SportsCenter anchor Elle Duncan reminisced about meeting Bryant and how he described himself as a “girl dad.” The clip of Duncan talking about that memory was shared 31,000 times on Twitter, garnered around 148,000 likes, and just over 1,000 comments in the first 48 hours. Although #GirlDad emerged as a tribute to Kobe Bryant and his love for his daughters, it gained traction on Instagram as a way for dads around the world to share their fatherly pride — celebrating

their role as fathers and embracing their daughters — and has been used more than 2.2 million times since January 2020.

While this number pales in comparison to its mother-centric counterpart #BoyMom with more than 16.7 million tags, the continued use of #GirlDad is more than just a sweet gesture from fathers to daughters. It also suggests increased visibility for dads in the digital “mamasphere” of Instagram (Friedman, 2013), a platform widely used for performative parenting (Leckart, 2012). While academic literature related to #BoyMom and #GirlDad are currently non-existent, it could be argued that these hashtags are a jumping off point for larger conversations about gender stereotypes in parenting — particularly counteracting sexist attitudes related to limitations and lack of satisfaction surrounding dads having daughters versus sons as well as mothers having sons versus daughters.

As a result, this study sought to examine these two hashtags, which both focus on a child or children with a parent of the opposite sex, in relation to each other to determine whether typical gender norms and roles were upheld. Specifically, through a visual and content analysis of the photos and captions displayed on Instagram posts using #GirlDad or #BoyMom, this study explores how parents using these hashtags are portraying their roles as fathers and mothers, what narratives are present for these non-traditional parent-child dyads, and whether the photos and captions dismantle inequalities often used to limit girls versus boys.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Parenthood is a socially constructed concept that aligns with identity framework because society conceptually defines roles, behaviors, and perceptions of what it means and looks like to be a mother and a father (Adamsons, 2010). The identity of motherhood has been more well-established, embedded into societal conversations, and more heavily researched, but fatherhood’s role continues to become more developed (Pleck, 2010). This study continues to understand how those parental roles are presented, both similarly and differently, within identity theory as parenthood on social media is performative (Cast, 2004).

Stryker (1968) suggested that identity theory is more of a framework because it is rooted in structural symbolic interactionism. The simple concept is that society shapes the self and then shapes social behavior (Mead, 1934), which these days is often displayed online through social media. Identity is symbolic because it doesn't inherently have meaning, so identity theory suggests that human behavior is dependent on two factors: (1) how social structures impact the self and how the self influences social structures, as well as (2) how the internal dynamics of self-processes affect social behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Where these concepts meet is behavior that expresses identity, and behavioral-identity development is often a product of interacting with others — either in-person or online (McCall & Simmons, 1966).

Identity theory posits that social roles are expectations, and these expectations are attached to positions or roles, such as mother and father, which also come with internalized role expectations (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The desire to perform parenthood in a socially desirable way online is critical to this study because identity theory aligns with Burke's (1997) concept of identity verification, which suggests interactions with others can confirm or disconfirm identities and whether they are enacted. Cast (2004) found that mothers and fathers verify their parental identities within parent-child and interparental interactions. Verification can increase salience of role performance, which could result in parents working harder to maintain that identity and, thus, could create more embedded and gendered mother versus father stereotypes or could enhance the importance and role of fatherhood societally.

Identity theory is a useful theoretical framework for this study because it can explain mothers' and fathers' behaviors, attitudes, expectations of themselves as parents, and potentially how they present themselves on social media to align with characteristics of each gender's socially defined parental identity (Burke, 1991). It is important to note that a role is the product of external expectations from social structure, and identity is internal, which suggests a level of agency. However, it could be argued that internal agency is still a result of social structure. Stryker has referred to the internalization and acceptance of a role as identity salience, and that identity salience represents commitment to the role relationship that requires that identity because without it the network could be lost (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Parenthood, particularly motherhood, online has become a space for women to come together and form a network of support (Choi & Lewallen, 2018; Friedman, 2013; Weatherill, 2018). Connectedness can increase salience, and that connectedness is a product of adhering to the social structure and its expectations (e.g. being a good caregiver means taking the child to the doctor and cleaning up when they are sick, while being a provider means making the money needed to support a family) (Burke & Stets, 2009). Nuttbrock and Freudiger (1991) found that salience in the identity of mother by first-time mothers suggests accepting the burdens and sacrifice of being a mother.

By using the parenthood specific hashtags in their posts, Instagram users are acknowledging their identity as a mom or dad, suggesting salience, and their identification may reflect the content they post in order to be seen as performing a role that aligns with social norms and standards for identity verification. Furthermore, using #GirlDad provides a network of other fathers who are wanting to tout their father-daughter bond and may provide added support that leads to salience of the dad identity and changes in social role perceptions of men. Hashtags are searchable, so by using the hashtags they are self-categorizing themselves into their parental group, maybe for support but also maybe for follows. These are critical elements of identity theory, and the publicness of using these hashtag identifiers could be seen as confirming or rejecting the social norms of parenthood and the negotiation, particularly for fathers whose familial roles have been less defined in the past, of the respective parenting identities.

Normative vs. Changing Roles of Parenthood

Parenthood is typically viewed through the lens of motherhood, and it could be argued that normative parenting is primarily mothering. Popular media, such as magazines, movies, and TV shows, have shaped the perceptions that mothers are the primary caregivers, while fathers act as the secondary caregivers – discussing men’s role as the breadwinner for the family, playmate for child, and other stereotypes that avoid the day-to-day care giving roles (Greve Spees & Zimmerman, 2003; Ranson, 2012; Sunderland, 2000). Furthermore, mothers are encouraged to be sacrificial to their children’s needs, and they are made to feel guilty when they express needing time to themselves or attending to their own needs (Warner, 2012). These stereotypes are rooted in the good mother identity (Heisler & Ellis, 2008).

Good mother identity focuses on women's role as the primary caregiver to children (Boris, 1994). Traditionally, a good mother was reflected through a woman staying home with her children, but in modern times when dual-income households are more prominent, the good mother identity is focused more on characteristics and behaviors, such as being highly communal (Boris, 1994; Russo, 1979). Highly communal individuals are seen as selfless and show high concern for others, and it is seen as central to being feminine (Spence & Helmrich, 1979). This type of mothering can also be considered intensive because it suggests women are to be absorbed by the demands of protecting, nurturing, and socializing their children (Newman & Henderson, 2014).

While fathers are increasing their involvement in parenting, they are still not expected to participate in intensive parenting to the level of women (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005). Selflessness and sacrificial behavior have traditionally been associated with mothering and femininity, more broadly (Warner, 2012). Beyond household labor, women are responsible for emotional work (Erickson, 2005). Emotional work is providing emotional support to ensure the emotional well-being of others, which can be to a spouse or to a child, but emotional work can also include advocacy for their children (Erickson, 1993; DeVault, 1999). Women are also responsible for the health and well-being of the child, which is one reason why there is pressure on women to breastfeed. Breast is defined as best for baby, even when it is not the best for mothers mentally or physically because of potential body image issues or past trauma (Wall, 2010).

Media are partially to blame for the construction and reinforcement of stereotypical roles and behaviors of mothers and fathers. American literature has relied on depictions of fathers as absent or extreme disciplinarians (Armengol-Carrera, 2008). When fathers are in magazines, they are often in auxiliary roles to provide a break to mothers (Milkie & Denny, 2014; Sunderland, 2006). On television fathers often play a dual role to showcase them as integral to teaching children life lessons, while also depicting them as being clumsy or foolish (the bumbling dad) (Pehlke et al., 2009). The depictions of men as part-time caregivers instead of as a partner in parenting is demeaning to men and the importance of their role in parenting.

Research around fatherhood shows a shift or restructuring of the roles of fathers, specifically an increased emphasis on fathers being more expressive and nurturing

caregivers to children in addition to the traditional financial support of children (Summers et al., 2006). Chesley (2011) argued a decade ago that more involvement by men in parenting had the potential to alter the unbalanced gender roles within a family. In order for that shift to happen, however, men need to be receptive to redefining fatherhood. The changing role of men as more emotional and caring is at odds with the tenants of hegemonic masculinity that have been a mainstay not only within gender stereotypes in the real world but also in the media, which can negatively reinforce gender roles. Hegemonic masculinity impacts the view and role of men as individuals, spouses, and fathers (Dienhart, 1998; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 1997).

In line with identity theory, fathers have been working to shape their own definitions of fatherhood in order to create their fatherhood identity through “detraditionalization” (Williams, 2008). This process is where men deconstruct and reconstruct what it means to be a father (based on their experiences) in an effort to improve upon past generations of fathering and develop their own parenting strategy or model (Williams, 2008). Beyond economically providing for their family, more modern fatherhood includes supporting children through emotional nurturing and acting as a positive role model through mentoring, bonding, and teaching (Summers et al., 2006). The increase of stay-at-home dads, though still less common than stay-at-home moms, is also reconstructing stereotypical gendered expectations in parenting roles (Chesley, 2011).

Parenthood and the roles of mothers versus fathers have continued to shift in the 21st century, and even just in the past decade because of greater father involvement, more acceptance of LGBTQ+ couples getting married and having/adopting children, the delay in marriage or cohabitating, starting a family outside of marriage, and advances in reproductive technology. However, there is also evidence that despite changes in fathering practices, there may still be disparities between the roles of mothers and fathers (Craig, 2006; Dienhart, 1998). Historically women have reduced their paid labor after having a child (Paull, 2008), and in 2020, women left the workforce in higher numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic to care for children who were unable to attend school in person. On the other hand, men either remained stable or increased work hours (Kashen et al., 2020).

Men are also not engaging in the intensive parenting to the level that women are. Mothering is still seen as more active rather than passive involvement with children. This

ranges from feeding to playing with children but not in a way that is considered relaxing or even recreational. For mothers, especially working mothers, leisure time is less often a restorative time away from paid work and more of a continuation of attentive parenting (Craig, 2006). On the other hand, men are able to protect their leisure time for themselves (Silver, 2000). Research has found that men see family time as an opportunity to “be with” their family and enjoying time together – often with the mom present – versus women who see family time as “being there” for the children and able to respond to a need when it arises (Such, 2006). This may play into the supported perception of fathers as playmates and mothers as caregivers (Grossman et al., 2008).

Even though things are changing for fathers and mothers, because the normative roles are still so prevalent and engrained, parents are expected to post using #BoyMom and #GirlDad following these traditional values, as suggested by the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Motherhood displayed in #BoyMom posts represents traditional feminine/mothering stereotypes.

Hypothesis 1b: Fatherhood displayed in #GirlDad posts represents traditional masculine/fathering stereotypes.

Parent-Child Dyads

These normative parenting roles also affect the interactions both mothers and fathers have with their children. Because mothers typically act as the primary caretaker, while fathers act as the breadwinners, mothers’ interactions with children are substantially higher. Specifically, even as fathers have become more involved, moms still spend double or triple the amount of time on average engaging in direct one-on-one interactions with their kids than dads do. As a result, mothers usually have a greater understanding of their children’s needs and often display a higher level of sensitivity to those needs (Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014). Fathers still play an important role in their children’s socialization (Lamb, 2004), but they tend to choose what those interactions look like (e.g. choosing what to play with their kids, instead of letting them choose). In other words, they often take a more controlling approach (Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014).

The child’s gender also influences the quality of interaction they have with their mothers and fathers, and research suggests that moms and dads parent their sons and daughters differently (Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014). For example, both parents tend to

show more sensitivity and comfort to their daughters than sons (Fagot, 1978; Lovas, 2005). They are also more tolerant of aggressive and self-assertive behavior from sons than daughters (Block, 1983; Martin & Ross, 2005; Mills & Rubin, 1990). Even the type of play is different. Father-child play tends to be more physical, while mothers engage in more pretend play with children. All of these things influence children's gender role development, which is why research shows boys tend to engage in more physical play and girls in pretend play. Also, boys tend to use direct commands to influence their peers, while girls often use polite suggestions and display more accommodating behavior (Lindsey et al., 1997).

These interactions and effects are magnified when looking at traditional parent-child dyads, as in mother-daughter and father-son relationship dynamics. More specifically, mothers show the most sensitivity to daughters (Lovas, 2005), while fathers show the least amount of sensitivity and most control with sons (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004). This makes the father-son relationship the least optimal parent-child dyad (Lovas, 2005). In this particular study, however, #GirlDad and #BoyMom are about a parent's relationship with a child of the opposite sex. Highlighting the relationship of moms with their sons using #BoyMom has been a movement for a while. Mothers have used it as a tool to show they can join their sons' world and do fun things with them, counter to the father-son relationship. Alternatively, #GirlDad emerged with Kobe and became the product of a social trend. It just has the added benefit of giving fathers a space to show more adoration of their daughters.

Even though the #GirlDad trend is sweet on the surface, the history of traditional parent-child dyads, as discussed in previous literature, runs deep. As a result, in the cases of both #GirlDad and #BoyMom, the boys are likely to be dominant in the narrative since mothers often try to meet children (regardless of their gender) where they are at, while fathers typically try to bring their kids into their world by choosing what activity to play or what their interactions look like (Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014), thus prompting the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Mothers uphold their son's masculinity in #BoyMom posts.

Hypothesis 2b: Fathers uphold their own masculinity in #GirlDad posts.

Performative Parenting on Social Media

Mothers and fathers posting images of their families and parenting styles on social media platforms may be perceived as a harmless approach to sharing their family life online; however, it is possible these parents are unconsciously participating in performative parenting through their representation of their individual child-rearing styles. Performative parenting gathers two important aspects of family life, the internet and parenting, and creates a platform to emphasize singular aspects of parenthood while amplifying these traits online (Woolard, 2015). These specific qualities of parenthood are further intensified by the sea of hashtags available on social media, creating an opportunity for other users to comment on these shared qualities of childcare. The majority of parenting is performed within the walls of a family home, oftentimes leaving motherhood and fatherhood unrecognized in the public eye. Performative parenting grants parents, mostly mothers, a tool to endorse their personal idea of parenthood, which is further reinforced by the positive interactions they receive on social media.

Positive reinforcement and communication have the ability to shape the parental identities of mothers and fathers, altering the reality of what they believe is authentic parenting (Kennedy, 2019). As an extension of this phenomenon, it is important to further develop ideas regarding gender-neutral parenting in the context of sharing online, namely “sharenting.” The gender-neutral term “sharenting” is defined as a virtual self-representation of an individual’s sharing of parenthood on their personal social media platforms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2017). Sharenting is uniquely present on social media sites due to the two-way communication between the poster and viewer. Maaranen and Tienari (2020) suggest social media platforms give users the resources to manipulate both the production of content and how the public views this content through aspects like comments.

Users of social media further control how they are perceived online through the use of hashtags. Not only do hashtags have the ability to add defining characteristics to the posts on platforms like Instagram, but they alter the content users are fed through the ever-changing algorithms. Moreover, Castro et al. (2020) suggest that users of social platforms are unwillingly participating in epistemic bubbles. They define the term as unintentional filtering of specific content to individual social media accounts and

“ferreting out our preferences” based on the account’s previous digital interactions and adapting to them. Not only do individuals put themselves in these situations by following likeminded people on social media, leading to an overabundance of similar ideals, but the algorithm serves as a means to reinforce this bubble by design. For example, #GirlDad may introduce a steady flow of masculine traits among dads online leading those who put themselves in this epistemic bubble to be reinforced with similar ideals from the posts they are shown on their timelines.

The expectations of masculinity in society are prevalent on social media platforms, pressuring and shaping how men portray themselves as fathers online. Vulnerability is a trait oftentimes associated with femininity, thereby restricting what men can share on social media while continuing to maintain their masculine identities. The Bem Sex Role Inventory, initially proposed as a way to measure androgyny through a feminist psychological lens, serves as a basis for defining feminine and masculine attributes. For example, the BSRI’s list of male traits include: dominance, assertiveness, possessing leadership abilities, and maintaining strong personalities. On the other hand, traditional female personality traits include: being affectionate, sympathetic, compassionate, sensitive, and — specifically — loving children. In the age of technology, these attributes are replicated in the digital space, forcing men and women to portray themselves online using these traits (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017).

These societal expectations of what it means to be feminine and masculine can shape what mothers and fathers share on social platforms. For women, it could mean they talk about their roles as mothers, as expected in the below hypothesis. For men, it might prevent them from posting any form of vulnerability, or by speaking admirably about their daughters, fathers may distance themselves from unwanted masculine characteristics by highlighting accepted vulnerable traits that accompany femininity, as examined through this research question:

Hypothesis 3: Mothers use #BoyMom posts to talk about their roles as mothers.

Research Question 1: Will fathers use #GirlDad to talk about their roles as fathers?

METHODS

Research Design and Sample

To examine these hypotheses and research question, a content and visual analysis of Instagram posts, including both captions and photos, was conducted. The decision to use Instagram was a combination of its role as a parenting community and as a digital, social, and informal family album. Beyond Instagram's visual appeal, research has shown that these digital snapshots can confirm the concept of good parenting and be a channel for support and information gathering (Gibson & Hanson, 2013; Gye, 2007; Lee, 2014). While Instagram has previously been more heavily dominated by women and mothers, #GirlDad continues to be tagged and demonstrates that more men are posting about their families.

Posts were selected by searching #GirlDad and #BoyMom. These hashtags were chosen because of the emergence and continued growth of #GirlDad after the death of Kobe Bryant, and the already existent counterpart was #BoyMom. Beyond the use of one of the two hashtags, the sample was limited to posts that had a photo of the posting parent with his or her child(ren). Photos that had a photo but no caption or had one of the two hashtags as the only text were eliminated from the sample because we wanted to examine both visuals and text to understand how parents were telling their family's story — for example, how or if parents talk about themselves and their relationship with their children — in its entirety.

Fifty posts from each hashtag were pulled each day, starting on March 16, 2021. This week was chosen not only because it coincided with this study's data collection timeline but also because it did not include any holidays since holidays are a time when people may post more often than usual or post content outside their normal routine. The posts were pulled at the same time of day (5 p.m. Central/3 p.m. Pacific) for consistency. There were a few days where 50 posts were not yet available at that time, so the gatherer would go back later in the day to collect more. Once any duplicate posts and posts that didn't fit the criteria were eliminated, the final sample ($N = 631$) of posts was coded based on the following measures.

Measures

Motherhood Versus Fatherhood Characteristics. To assess how parenthood was displayed in Instagram posts using #GirlDad or #BoyMom, each post's photo was coded for

either the traditional mother as caregiver stereotype or traditional father as playmate stereotype. Coders looked for the presence of caregiving tasks (e.g. feeding/cooking, comforting, chore-enforcing, changing, teaching, dressing, etc.) versus playful interactions (e.g. participating in hobbies, outings, and shared experiences with children) in each image and coded them as parenting or playing. This was used to test H1a and H1b, which focused on the presence or absence of gender-specific stereotypes by the posting parenting.

Masculine Versus Feminine Activities. Beyond focusing on stereotypes among parenting roles, the study explored (through H2a and H2b) how parents upheld or rejected the traditional stereotypes of the gender of their child. To examine this, each post was coded as masculine, feminine, or neutral. More specifically, coders assessed whether the posting parent was engaging in traditional “girly” activities (e.g. dressing up as princesses, playing tea party and/or with dolls, cooking/baking together, etc.) or boy activities (e.g. dressing up as superheroes or playing with action figures, trucks/cars, video games, etc.) with their child(ren). If neither, the image was coded as neutral.

Framing of Parental Roles in Captions. The final dependent variable in this study to analyze H3 and RQ1 was the framing of parental roles in photo captions — in other words, examining what the posting parents were using the caption to communicate about themselves, their spouses/partners, or their children. Since moms on social media have been studied more robustly, frames previously used in motherhood research were coded as well as frames directly observed in Instagram captions during early development of this study. The frames coded were: adoration of child(ren), adoration of self as a parent, adoration of self as a person, adoration of spouse/partner as a parent, adoration of spouse/partner as a person, the pain points of parenting, the joys of parenting, advice giving to other parents, advice giving to child(ren), noting similarity between parent and child(ren), describing the activity present in the photo (e.g. first day of school, snow day, etc.), and using the caption to sell a product.

Intercoder Reliability

The research team included two primary researchers and one undergraduate researcher. The primary researchers trained the undergraduate researcher in two sessions. After the first session, the codebook was updated to increase clarity and improve intercoder reliability. Then after the second session, intercoder reliability was assessed by

systematically selecting 10% of the sample data before coding the remaining cases. For the latent dependent variables, Fleiss's Kappa was used to assess intercoder reliability; the analysis showed strong levels of agreement for the variables. The agreement levels for all variables studied were between 84% and 97% with the exception of frames, which had an agreement of 73%.

RESULTS

To test H1a and H1b, which suspected that #BoyMom posts would uphold traditional mothering stereotypes (e.g. mother as caregiver) while #GirlDad posts would support traditional fathering stereotypes (e.g. father as playmate), two chi-squares for independence were run. The first chi-square test revealed that #BoyMom posts ($n = 50$, 11.5%) did feature mothers parenting in the photos more often than dads in #GirlDad posts ($n = 24$, 9.1%), but in most cases neither moms nor dads were shown parenting in their Instagram photos. Therefore, these results were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = .983$, $p = .322$), and Hypothesis 1a was not supported. However, the second chi-square test showed that #GirlDad posts ($n = 132$, 50%) did portray fathers playing with their child(ren) at a higher percentage than moms in #BoyMom posts ($n = 162$, 37.2%). These results were statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 11.136$, $p < .001$) and supported Hypothesis 1b. See Figures 1 and 2 for more detail.

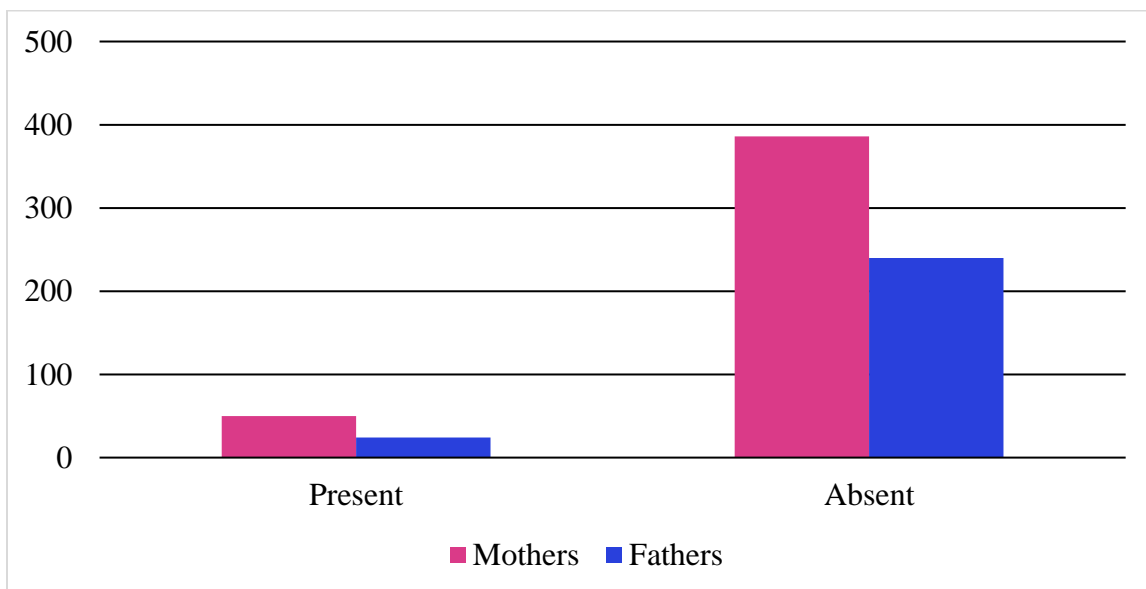


Figure 1. Number of Instagram photos that show the mother or father parenting their child(ren)

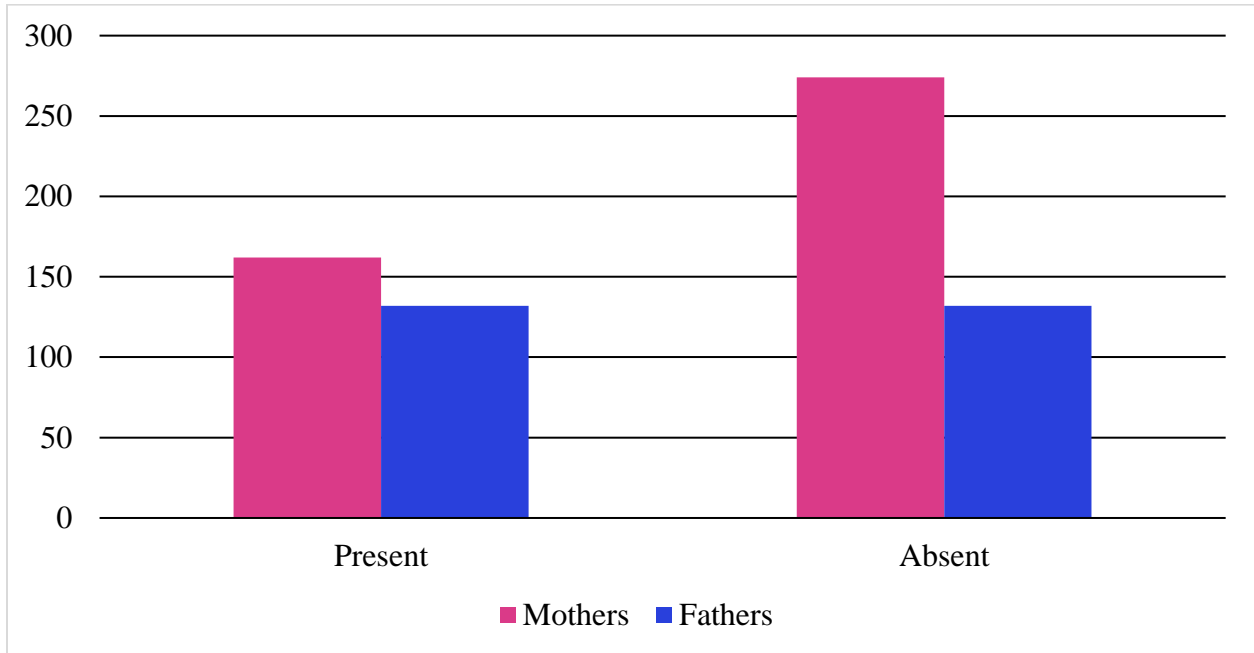


Figure 2. Number of Instagram photos that show the parent playing with their child(ren)

To test if mothers upheld their son's masculinity in #BoyMom posts and fathers upheld their own masculinity, as suspected H2a and H2b, another chi-square test was run. Results in this case were statistically significant ($\chi^2(3) = 7.930, p = .047$) but did not support either hypothesis. Mothers using #BoyMom did portray themselves as participating in masculine activities with their sons slightly more often ($n = 58, 13.3\%$) than feminine activities ($n = 23, 5.3\%$). Fathers using #GirlDad also engaged in more masculine ($n = 40, 15.2\%$) than feminine ($n = 26, 9.8\%$) activities with their daughters. However, the majority of both #GirlDad and #BoyMom posts were gender neutral. See Figure 3 for more information.

The last hypothesis in this study posited that women would use the photo caption with #BoyMom to discuss their roles as mothers. In this case, chi-square results were statistically significant ($\chi^2(12) = 62.167, p < .001$), but they only partially supported H3. Women did talk about motherhood, including the pain points ($n = 36, 8.3\%$) and joys of parenting ($n = 26, 6.0\%$). However, the captions mostly provided a basic description of what was happening in the photo ($n = 140, 32.2\%$), or the mother used it to express how much they love their child(ren) ($n = 95, 21.8\%$), which is why H3 was only partially supported.

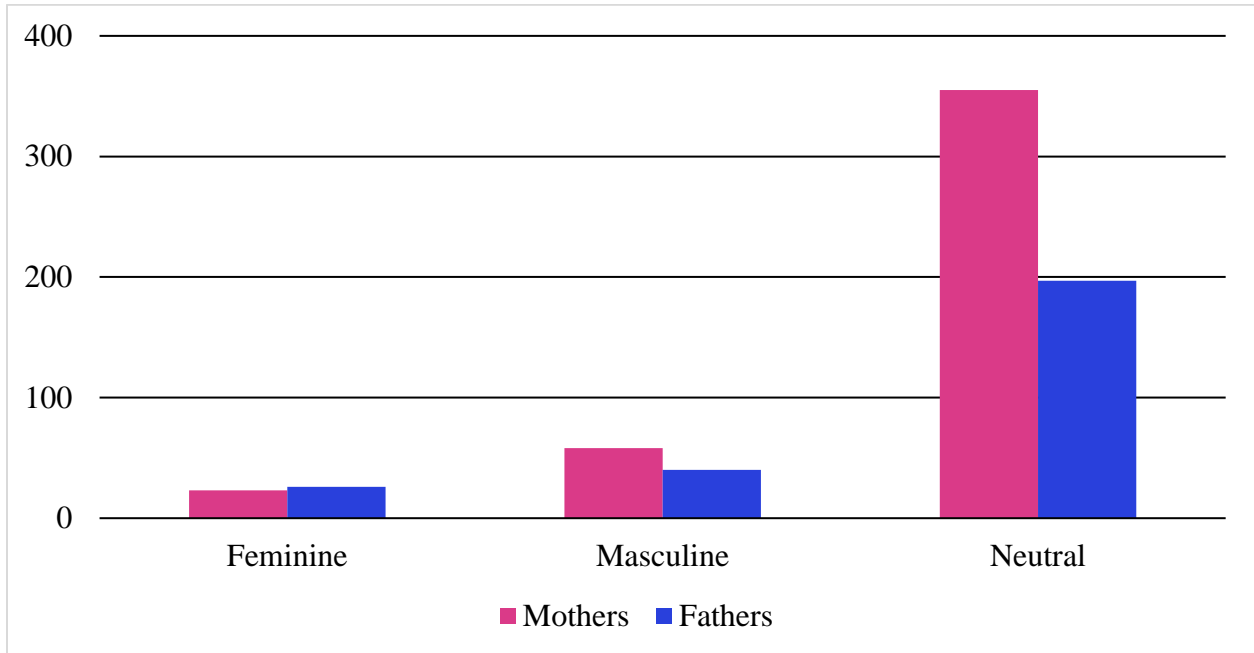


Figure 3. Gender identity displayed in #GirlDad and #BoyMom Instagram photos

These chi-square results were also used to assess RQ1, which asked whether men used the photo caption with #GirlDad to discuss their roles as fathers. Similar to moms, the most common frame dads used in the captions was describing what they were doing with their daughter(s) ($n = 105$, 39.8%), but fathers did show a softer side in the remaining captions — often showing adoration of their daughter(s) ($n = 86$, 32.6%), as well as discussing the joys of parenting ($n = 12$, 4.5%). See Figures 4 and 5 for more detail.

DISCUSSION

Parenthood, but particularly motherhood, has become a form of identity within society with gendered expectations of how it could and should be performed (Pleck, 2010). Identity is more than defining who a person is because it is rooted in social norms (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The inherent in-group and out-group becomes a framework for guiding behavior — whether performative or natural — that can be reflected, reinforced, and perpetuated through social media content creation, sharing, and interaction (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Society has divided moms and dads into separate social identity groups with

their own roles and behaviors. But even within an in-group, multiple iterations of parenthood have developed as a result of stereotypes.

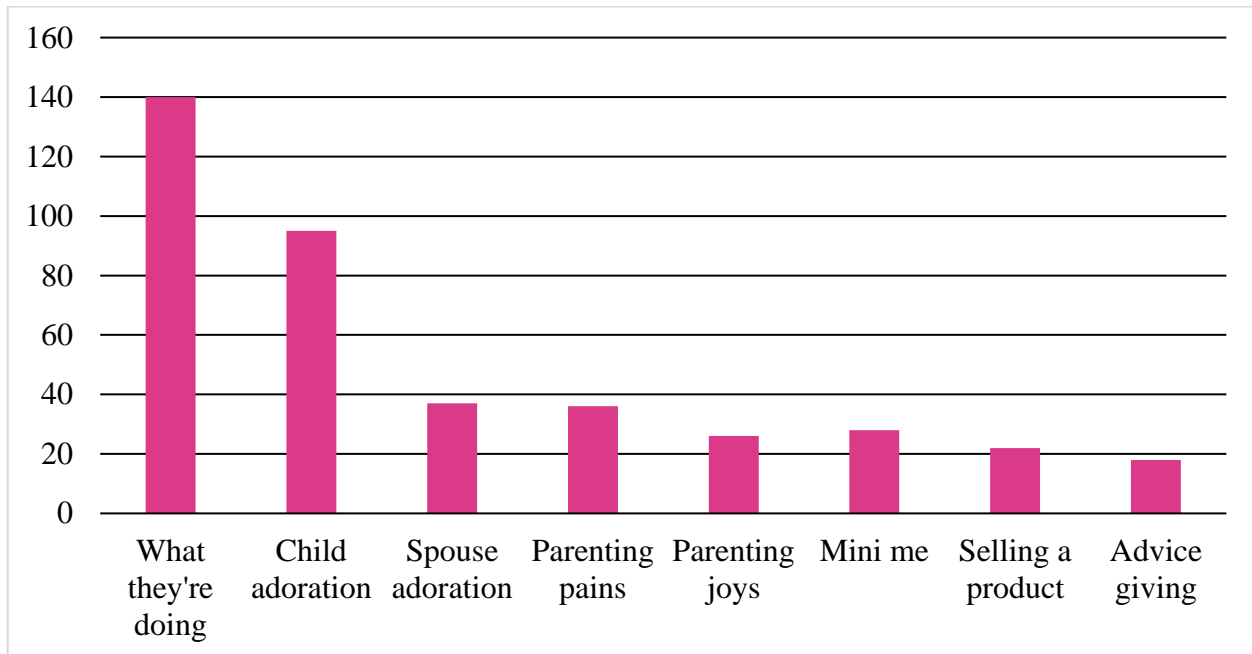


Figure 4. Frames displayed in Instagram captions of #BoyMom posts

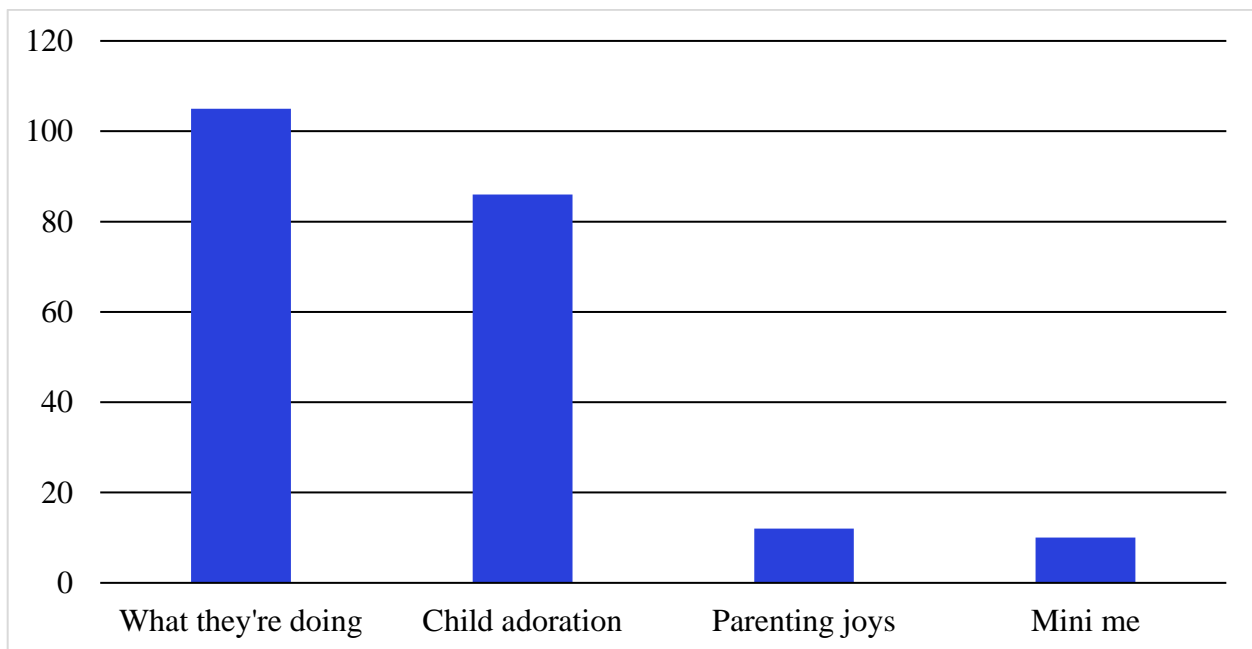


Figure 5. Frames displayed in Instagram captions of #GirlDad posts

#BoyMom is a subgroup of the mom population — forming its own identity related to differences of raising boys versus girls, which is steeped in gendered stereotypes and biological sex-based parental dyads. #GirlDad, which was popularized following Kobe

Bryant's death, is its fatherhood opposite with the potential for both gendered stereotypes and parental dyads. However, it also could underscore patriarchal beliefs that men want sons, not daughters, and that daughters must conform to the male perspective (instead of men to the female perspective) because society values masculine traits more. This study sought to explore how parents who use #BoyMom and #GirlDad on Instagram present their parental role through images and captions. The findings underscore both the similarities and the differences in the framing of how parents tell their stories and represent themselves, while taking into consideration the social impact of representing themselves as "good" parents, which are products of gendered expectations.

Social media has become a place of support for women as they navigate motherhood, providing community, information, and advice (Valtchanov et al., 2016). This study sought to explore the similarities and differences between how mothers and fathers used social media, specifically Instagram, for performing motherhood and fatherhood in relation to having a child of the opposite sex. For mothers, the pictures they chose did uphold traditional mothering stereotypes, just not in the way that was originally anticipated. Instead of showing photos of them parenting their child by engaging in practices like feeding/cooking, comforting, changing/dressing, etc., most of the pictures were posed. While this wasn't the expected result, it still lends support to performative parenthood because the photo of a mother smiling with her children could still signal that mothers should be joyous in taking care of/being with their children above all else. Related to this, while it was not the most dominant frame, mothers still did discuss the pains and joys of parenting within captions.

For dads, the traditional fathering roles were upheld because dads were displayed as playing with children in their Instagram posts more so than moms, which suggests that most of the parenting responsibilities still fall on the mother's shoulders. However, #GirlDad posts did bring out a softer, more vulnerable, and sensitive side that is not typically associated with fathers and their parenting style. While research typically describes fathers as assertive and controlling (Haller-Haalboom et al., 2014), the second most common frame used in the caption for both #BoyMom and #GirlDad was adoration of child(ren). While this is not surprising for moms, it shows fathers are using the hashtag as it started with Kobe. Also, it is creating a forum for dads to show a more vulnerable, loving

side, countering toxic masculinity and leaning into emotions more typically associated with femininity.

Mommy bloggers have been studied previously as well as mothering in general. This study focused on Instagram posts that used one of the two hashtags to better understand how parents post about their role and their children when they have children of the opposite sex from them — thus challenging the parental dyads that are associated with mother- and father-child parenting differences, especially the stereotypes that come from mother-daughter and father-son relationships. The majority of posts from both moms and dads were gender neutral, which seems positive on the surface, but again, this likely resulted from the fact most photos were posed. Outside of those posts, as anticipated, moms were more willing to enter their sons' world by participating in activities like fishing and dirt biking with their boy(s), while dads made more attempts to bring their daughters into their world (e.g. by playing video games, attending athletic events, and working out with their daughters) instead.

Ultimately, the results of this study indicate some positive signs for the breaking down of normative parenting roles and gender stereotypes. The creation of #GirlDad following Kobe Bryant's death, in particular, has provided an opportunity for fathers to be more vulnerable, countering masculine stereotypes. However, to continue that growth, more scholarship needs to be done on the impacts of performative parenthood exhibited by influencers and mimicked by others on Instagram because it is clear from this study that some of those traditional roles and parenting styles are still prevalent. This is especially true for #BoyMom, where the pressure women face to exhibit their motherhood role as an integral part of their social identity is alive and well.

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