

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN SHAPING CHILDREN'S VIEWS OF FATHERS

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Abstract: The mass media—comprising television, film, social media, advertising, and digital platforms—plays a significant role in shaping children's perceptions of social roles, including conceptions of fatherhood. This article explores how media influences children's views of fathers, drawing from social learning theory, cultivation theory, and developmental psychology. Media representations can either reinforce traditional stereotypes or provide diverse models of fatherhood, affecting children's understanding of gender roles, emotional expression, and family responsibilities. The study synthesizes findings from theoretical and empirical literature to identify common themes in media portrayals of fathers and analyzes the potential developmental outcomes of these portrayals for children. Findings suggest that while media often portrays fathers in stereotypical ways—either as absent, comically inept, or secondary caregivers—positive depictions of engaged, nurturing fathers are increasing. These portrayals significantly impact children's internalization of fathering norms and expectations. The article concludes with suggestions for media producers, educators, and parents to promote more balanced and diverse representations of fatherhood that support healthy social and emotional development in children.

Keywords: : Media Influence; Children's Perceptions; Fatherhood; Gender Roles; Social Learning Theory; Cultivation Theory; Media Representations

BOLALARNING OTALAR HAQIDAGI QARASHLARINI SHAKLLANTIRISHDA OMMAVIY AXBOROT VOSITALARINING O'RNI

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada televideniye, kino, ijtimoiy tarmoqlar, reklama va raqamli platformalarni o'z ichiga olgan ommaviy axborot vositalarining bolalarning ijtimoiy rollar, xususan, otalik haqidagi tasavvurlarini shakllantirishdagi roli tahlil qilinadi. Ijtimoiy o'rganish nazariyasi, kultivatsiya nazariyasi hamda rivojlanish psixologiyasi doirasida OAVdagi otalar obrazlari (an'anaviy stereotiplar, chetda qolgan yoki yo'q otalar, parvarish va tarbiyada faol ishtirok etuvchi otalar) bolalarning gender rollari, hissiy ifodalilik va oilaviy mas'uliyat haqidagi qarashlariga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatishi ko'rib chiqiladi. Adabiyotlar sharhi OAVda stereotipik tasvirlar saqlanib qolayotgan bo'lsa-da, ijobiy va g'amxo'r ota modeli ham tobora ko'proq uchrayotganini ko'rsatadi. Maqolada OAV yaratuvchilari, pedagoglar va ota-onalar uchun otalikning muvozanatli va xilma-xil tasvirlarini targ'ib etish bo'yicha tavsiyalar beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: OAV ta'siri; bolalar tasavvurlari; otalik; gender rollari; ijtimoiy o'rganish nazariyasi; kultivatsiya nazariyasi; otalar obrazlari

РОЛЬ СМИ В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЙ ДЕТЕЙ ОБ ОТЦАХ

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Аннотация: В статье анализируется роль средств массовой информации (телевидение, кино, социальные сети, реклама и цифровые платформы) в формировании представлений детей о социальных ролях, в частности об отцовстве. На основе теории социального научения, теории культивации и подходов психологии развития рассматривается, как медийные образы отцов (традиционные стереотипы, отсутствующие или маргинальные фигуры, вовлечённые и заботливые отцы) влияют на понимание детьми гендерных ролей, эмоциональной выразительности и семейной ответственности. Обзор литературы показывает, что, хотя стереотипные изображения отцов по-прежнему распространены, позитивные и поддерживающие модели отцовства встречаются всё чаще. В заключение предложены рекомендации для медиа-производителей, педагогов и родителей по продвижению более сбалансированных и разнообразных репрезентаций отцовства, поддерживающих здоровое социально-эмоциональное развитие детей.

Ключевые слова: влияние медиа; представления детей; отцовство; гендерные роли; теория социального научения; теория культивации; медийные репрезентации

INTRODUCTION

Children form their understanding of the social world through multiple agents of socialization, including family, school, peers, and media. Among these, the media exerts a powerful influence by providing repeated images, narratives, and messages that inform children's conceptions of social roles (Bandura, 2001). One particularly important role that media shapes is that of the father. The figure of the father has undergone significant cultural change over recent decades, shifting from traditional breadwinner stereotypes toward more involved and emotionally expressive roles (Pleck, 2010). However, media representations do not always capture this diversity.

Research shows that children are active meaning-makers who construct their understanding of social roles by internalizing messages from media content (Buckingham, 2000). Television programs, films, and increasingly social media platforms serve as sources of symbolic models, presenting children with examples of what fathers do, how they behave, and how they are valued in society. These depictions influence children's expectations of paternal involvement, emotional closeness, and even future parenting aspirations.

Understanding how media shapes children's views of fathers is important because these perceptions have implications for gender role development, family relations, and children's socio-emotional growth. The purpose of this article is to provide a theoretical analysis of media's role in shaping these perceptions. Drawing on established communication and developmental theories, the article examines the nature of media portrayals of fathers and how children interpret these portrayals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article employs a theoretical and integrative review methodology. Rather than collecting primary data, it synthesizes existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies on

media influence, children's development, and representations of fathers. This approach is useful for identifying patterns across diverse studies and integrating insights from multiple disciplines, such as psychology, media studies, and gender studies.

Theoretical Frameworks Utilized. 1. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) – Suggests that children learn behaviors and social roles by observing and imitating models portrayed in their environment, including media characters.

2. Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) – Proposes that long-term exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions of social reality, aligning their views with the world presented in media.

3. Developmental Psychology (Kohlberg, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978) – Offers insights into how children process and internalize social information based on age and cognitive development stages.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria. The review draws upon peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and media studies that examine: Media representations of fathers in television, film, and digital media. The influence of media on children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. Theoretical analyses of gender roles and family portrayals. Sources were selected based on relevance, theoretical rigor, and recency.

RESULTS

Media depictions of fathers vary widely, but several predominant themes emerge:

1. Traditional Stereotypes – Fathers as breadwinners, emotionally distant, or incompetent caregivers (e.g., sitcom fathers who are buffoonish or disengaged).

2. Absentee or Marginal Figures – Fathers portrayed as absent due to work, separation, or neglect, reinforcing the notion of fathers as peripheral to family life.

3. Engaged and Nurturing Fathers – Increasingly, media portrayals include fathers who are emotionally available, actively involved in caregiving, and supportive (e.g., contemporary dramas and children's programming).

Children's Interpretation and Internalization. Children do not passively receive media messages; they interpret them through cognitive and emotional filters. Younger children may take representations at face value, while older children can contextualize portrayals but still internalize underlying norms (Piaget, 1952). Repeated exposure to consistent media themes cultivates a sense of what is "typical" or "normal" in fathering.

Influence on Gender Role Expectations. Media imagery contributes to the formation of gender role expectations. When fathers are shown as nurturing and involved, children develop a more egalitarian view of caregiving responsibilities. Conversely, stereotypical portrayals reinforce rigid gender norms, potentially limiting children's understanding of emotional expressiveness and caregiving flexibility.

DISCUSSION

Analysis. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory posits that children learn behaviors and social roles by observing models. Media characters function as social models: children observe how fathers behave in various situations and internalize these behaviors as normative. For example, a child who frequently watches a television father who struggles with discipline may internalize the notion that fathers are ineffective caregivers, even if this contrasts with their lived experience.

This theory also highlights reinforcement and imitation — behaviors that appear rewarded in media (e.g., humor from father's mistakes) are more likely to be imitated. When media

consistently rewards stereotypical father behavior (e.g., being bumbling but lovable), children may adopt similar attitudes toward paternal roles.

Cultivation Theory and Long-Term Exposure. Cultivation theory suggests that the media environment cultivates long-term perceptions of social reality. Children who are heavy media consumers may come to believe that the media's representation of fathers reflects reality. If the prevailing media image is of the absentee father, children may perceive father absence as normal or expected, irrespective of their personal experiences.

Cultivation effects are cumulative: the more hours children spend with media content that conveys consistent messages about fatherhood, the more these messages shape their worldview.

Developmental Considerations. Developmental psychologists emphasize that children's cognitive abilities evolve with age. Younger children rely on concrete thinking and may accept media portrayals literally. Older children and adolescents develop more sophisticated, abstract reasoning and may integrate media messages with other information sources, such as school and family experiences. However, even older children internalize societal norms through narrative media, as stories provide emotional hooks that make social roles memorable.

Media as Cultural Narrative. Media narratives also serve as cultural scripts that define what it means to be a father. Stories in popular culture reflect and shape societal values. For example, the rise of "super-dad" archetypes in contemporary media — fathers who balance career with caregiving — mirrors broader cultural shifts toward more egalitarian parenting expectations.

However, media also lags behind or resists change. Some genres rely heavily on stereotypes for humor or simplicity, perpetuating outdated images of fatherhood.

The findings of this review indicate that the media plays a profound role in shaping children's views of fathers through repeated portrayals, narrative framing, and symbolic models. Media representations do not operate in isolation but interact with children's family experiences and social environments. Nevertheless, media can powerfully reinforce or challenge societal norms.

Impacts on Children's Development.

1. **Gender Role Socialization:** Media contributes to children's understanding of gender roles by illustrating what fathers "should" do. When fathers are depicted primarily as secondary caregivers or incompetent figures, children may internalize narrow views of gendered responsibilities.

2. **Emotional Development:** Positive portrayals of emotionally expressive fathers can foster children's understanding of emotional regulation and interpersonal communication. Conversely, persistent images of emotionally distant fathers may limit children's belief in the importance of paternal emotional support.

3. **Expectations for Future Parenting:** Children internalize narrative models that shape their future expectations. A child repeatedly exposed to media depicting nurturing fathers may be more inclined toward egalitarian parenting roles in adulthood.

Media Responsibility and Opportunities. Media producers wield significant cultural influence and therefore have a responsibility to present balanced portrayals. The increasing diversity of father figures in media—from single fathers to stay-at-home dads, adoptive fathers, and fathers with non-traditional roles—can provide children with a broader range of models for healthy family dynamics.

CONCLUSION

The media plays a substantial role in shaping children's views of fathers by providing accessible, repeated images and narratives that children incorporate into their social understanding. While media can reinforce traditional stereotypes, it also offers opportunities to portray diverse and positive models of fatherhood. Understanding these dynamics is essential for parents, educators, and media producers committed to supporting children's healthy development and promoting equitable conceptions of gender roles.

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