Free Play versus Structured Childhood:

A Content Analysis of Childrearing Practices in *Parents* Magazine

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ABSTRACT

The presence of media gives parents the ability to access expert advice related to childrearing. Parents are able to use various forms of media, such as *Parents* magazine, in order to make sure that they are parenting "the right way" according to the experts. This study uses a content analysis in order to examine the way that two childrearing practices, concerted cultivation and natural growth, are constructed in *Parents* magazine, and what change has occurred over time. The findings suggest that parenting trends emphasized in *Parents* reflect greater society during the time that they are written. This study argues that childrearing advice in *Parents* has changed over time and that cultural change in parenting reflects a phenomenon of fear; this fear develops due to the media broadcasting extreme events, such as child abductions, and as a result parents are fearful of allowing their children to engage themselves in unsupervised activities.

Many parents turn to "how-to" parenting books when they found out that they are expecting. The responsibilities of a baby can be overwhelming for some parents, so they turn to expert advice in order to gain knowledge about the topic of childrearing and parenting. Magazines also serve as a way for parents to gain access to expert advice about childrearing trends and suggestions that may help parents approach certain situations they experience with their children as they grow and develop. The leading parenting magazine *Parents*, which has a circulation of 2.2 million and a total readership of over 13.7 million, helps parents feel like they are parenting the "right" way (Meredith Corporation, 2013). With a readership this large, *Parents* is giving people access to the expert advice in order to raise "happy and healthy children." But, what exactly are these advice articles suggesting to parents?

Results of many different studies indicate that parents read magazines as a way to access expert childrearing advice. Carlson and Crase's (1983) survey of 253 families found that 71 percent of mothers and 50 percent of fathers use parenting magazines as a source to gain information about childrearing (p. 223). According to Lareau (2003), there are two conflicting forms of parenting styles found within the content of parenting magazines: concerted cultivation and natural growth. Concerted cultivation refers to parenting styles that is focused on structured activity and a scheduled lifestyle with significant parental involvement. Natural growth differs in that it promotes the importance of free play and creativity by allowing children the freedom to participate in activities when they choose to do so.

Parenting magazines provide an easily accessible method to receive advice related to all aspects of child development and parenthood. These magazines also provide a discrete way for parents to determine that they are parenting the "right" way. By analyzing this format of media overtime, insight can be drawn about how trends of parenting have changed or remained the

same in different historical eras. This paper argues that advice in *Parents* emphasizes particular

parenting styles, specifically concerted cultivation and natural growth, based on the historical era

that the articles were written and published. Overall, this study finds that *Parents* is directed

toward a specific audience that consists of the white, middle-class parents and that target

audience has remained constant regardless of the era.

Social Construction Theory

Starting in the later part of the 20th century, theorists began to view reality as a social

construct; reality is what individuals and social groups interpreted "real." Berger and Luckmann

(1966) and Hall (1980) focus on various models of communication used to interpret reality, and

they discuss how one's personal identity can affect the way that he or she interprets messages

about social reality produced by the media, which provides insight on how magazines shape

parents' identity.

The Social Construction of Reality

In *The Social Construction of Reality* Berger and Luckmann (1966) contend that the way

a person views reality is dependent on how he or she is socialized by various agents of

socialization, including mass media. Through the socialization process, a person develops an

understanding of what is considered or socially valuable in a particular setting. This means that

what one person may find to be valuable and necessary in life can be different from a person

with an entirely different background. Berger and Luckmann (1966) state, "The 'knowledge' of

a criminal differs from the 'knowledge' of the criminologist" (p. 15). There will always be

conflicting views about what is considered to be valued in society due to individual's different

socializations.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) identify two types of socialization used to construct social reality: primary socialization and secondary socialization. Primary socialization occurs during early childhood and this shapes a person into members of a society. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), primary socialization is the most important aspect of socialization. Secondary socialization refers to how an already socialized member of society is inducted into other parts of the social world, such as the socialization that occurs when a child first begins his or her formal education in a school setting. Berger and Luckmann (1996) explain that one does not typically question reality unless a conflict arises during secondary socialization. For example, a conflict about social reality may occur if a child from a fundamentalist family learns about evolution for the first time during a science class in a school setting. Secondary socialization exposes a person to other social realities that had not been previously viewed as having value to him or her.

Berger and Luckmann argue that everything a person does is impacted by social realities, and these social realities also influences one's own imagination and experiences. Berger and Luckmann (1966) recognize that all individuals "know that others have a perspective on this common world that is not identical with mine" (p. 37). Even though people are constantly interacting with one another, this does not mean that one person's "here and now" will be the same as the next person's. People simply exist in their own realities without necessarily recognizing that others have a different reality. Berger and Luckmann (1996) discuss the challenges of adopting this sociological framework in which a reality does not simply exist but is socially constructed.

The way that people choose to define their everyday social realities is partially based on socially constructed views that appear to be a reality or a truth. Berger and Luckmann (1996) explain that realities differ from person to person due to an individual's status within society.

People with power view society differently than people without power, and people at the top of a social hierarchy view reality differently than most people at the bottom. Berger and Luckmann (1996) examine how various groups of people come to develop knowledge and normative beliefs so that their reality matches others, and one place this occurs is through mass media.

Encoding and Decoding Model of Communication

Stuart Hall (1980) also is interested in how people's understanding of social reality develops. Hall discusses how people interpret media messages, or the presentation of social reality, based on the cultural context and personal background. Hall (1980) identifies both the encoding and decoding aspect of communication, which includes the person who actually produces (encodes) a message and then how that message is interpreted (decoded) by a person receiving that message. Hall suggests that because each person has different views of what is important or valuable in a message, an encoder writes a message based on his or her individual views and the decoder interprets that same message based on his or her individual views, which may or may not be the encoder's intended meaning. Therefore, according to Hall (1980), people do not always see messages in the same way

Miscommunication can occur because the receiver may interpret a certain message in a different way that the sender intended. Hall (1980) contends that the level of miscommunication indicates "the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the 'personification', encoder-producer and decoder-receiver," (p. 131). Misunderstanding often occurs when there is a "*lack of equivalence* between the two sides in the communicative exchange" (Hall, 1980, p. 131). These misunderstandings can be seen in face-to-face interactions. For example, when a parent disciplines a child and the child receiving the

punishment misinterprets the intended message of the parent as anger. Miscommunications can also occur in the mass media between the producers, or broadcasters, and the audience.

Although each person may decode messages differently, encoding does affect the degree within which decoding occurs. For example, decoders recognize the general meaning of certain words used by encoders, such as "child" would not include a person who is age 30, or that "parent" means a person who has a biological or adopted child. Hall (1980) contends that, "No doubt some of these misunderstandings of this kind do exist. But the vast majority range must contain *some* degree of reciprocity between encoding and decoding moments, otherwise we could not speak of an effective communicative exchange at all" (p. 136). The encoder, however, cannot assume that every person decoding the message will fully understand the point he or she is trying to make. Thus, Hall is pointing out that perfect communication is not a reality. Hall (1980) argues that the level of understanding between the encoder and decoder is not precise, but it is socially constructed based on one's social realities.

Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of the social construction of reality and Hall's (1980) theory of encoding and decoding both provide a framework to understand how parenting magazines' social construction of parenthood may shape the readers views as "good" parenting practices. Together Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Hall (1980) provide a theoretical frame for understanding how people's backgrounds and different realities have an influence on the way that they produce messages in the media, which applies to the research here on the portrayal of childrearing practices in popular parenting magazines.

Literature Review

Concerted Cultivation and Natural Growth

Top-selling parenting magazines flood the shelves of bookstores and libraries nationwide making advice written by "parenting experts" easily accessible. *Parents* magazine, which, according to Kakinuma (1993), was founded in the 1920s in order to discuss the latest information on child rearing practices, sells over 2.2 million copies per issue (Meredith Corporation, 2013). Carlson et al (1983) says that within these magazines "experts," such as medical doctors and child development specialists, give advice and suggestions for what are considered to be the "best" parenting techniques and practices.

Lareau (2002) identifies two distinct parenting practices, whose terms and meanings are credited are known as "concerted cultivation" and "natural growth," and these parenting practices influence the way that a child develops socially. Concerted cultivation practices are based on structured schedules and planned activities in a child's everyday life. Redford et al. (2009) reiterate Lareau's definition of concerted cultivation stating that "parents who 'concertedly cultivate' their children take an active role in assessing and building their children's skills, talents and opinions as well as actively volunteering, intervening and participating in their children's educational activities" (p. 27). Parents who practice concerted cultivation believe that little unstructured activity is needed.

In contrast to concerted cultivation, the natural growth perspective focuses on the importance of autonomy and free play. Using the "accomplishment of natural growth" method of parenting, "the child is not looked at as a project to be developed and catered to; rather the parent's primary responsibility is to provide a safe place where the child can naturally grow into his/her own person" (Redford et al, 2009, p. 28). Natural growth practices are unstructured and

more focused on the child's freedom to act with autonomy. Lareau (2003) states that both

concerted cultivation and natural growth have positive and negative aspects on childrearing and

child development.

Lareau (2002) finds that parenting styles of concerted cultivation and natural growth are

associated with social class. From a study of 88 children, Lareau (2002) found that middle-class

children participated in an average of 4.9 organized activities, working-class children averaged

2.5, and poor children averaged 1.5. Chin and Phillips (2004) found that the reason working-

class children do not participate in structured activities is simply because parents do not have the

resources. While organized activities are financially possible among middle to upper-middle

class Americans, these activities are not always feasible for the lower classes. These findings

suggest that children from working class families spend a majority of their free time in informal

play while middle-class children are involved in various organized extracurricular activities, but

will the same parenting practices be found in the media's representation of parenting?

Messages the Media Conveys about Parenting

Francis-Connolly (2013) found that gender roles portrayed in popular parenting

magazines reinforce gender differences expected by men and women in terms of parenting.

Francis-Connolly (2013) found that the content of parenting magazines related to childcare was

directed toward women, while the articles about having fun and enjoying leisure time was

directed toward men.

Similarly to Francis-Connolly's study, Luke (1994) noticed how infrequently male

parenting and fatherhood was discussed within popular parenting magazines, and that the small

number of featured men were stereotyped as disengaged from domestic work and any childcare.

Luke (1994) points out that the term "mothering" is associated with the social function of

childcare, while "fatherhood" is exclusively based on the biological function of producing a

child. Luke's (1994) study of the construction of childhood and parenting in *Parents* magazine

found a total of 133 adults in individual and group shots with children and other adults. Of that

total, 104 were women and 29 were men. Out of the 29 images of the men, only six showed the

men actually engaging with children, and only five were actively engaged in parenting activities.

Tsal and Shumow (2011) had similar findings in a study of American advertisement's

representation of men in a "family context;" in national commercials men are shown as only

playing with children and having fun, while the women were the sole performers of domestic

tasks.

Previous research has also analyzed the conflicting images of motherhood portrayed in

the media. Johnson and Swanson (2003) found that women are caught between images of

"Superwoman and "Earth Mother," meaning that they are trying to find balance between

structuring their child's lives, while also allowing a child to develop naturally. In a content

analysis of representations of motherhood in popular magazines, Johnston and Swanson (2003)

found that women's magazines portrayed contradictory messages about mothers; employed

mothers are successful and confident in their work roles, but they cannot successfully navigate

both motherhood and their employment. Johnston and Swanson (2003) argue that if mothers

were empowered by the media culture they would feel less need to justify the decisions they

make as a mother.

Globally, mothers may feel pressure to live up to the mainstream images of parenting

given by experts within a specific cultural context. Kakinuma (1993) analyzed the expert advice

given in Japanese and American popular parenting magazines. Kakinuma (1993) found that

Japanese mothers look for advice from other mothers, while American mothers tend to rely on

professional experts advice on child rearing. Similarly, Rutherford (2011) found that most

mothers, regardless of background, said they read magazines in order to make sure they were

parenting similarly to mainstream culture. Kakinuma (1993) points out that even the title of

American magazines related to parenting, such as *Working Mothers,* reflects mothers'

expectations, and women use these magazines as a guide or reference to reinforce decisions

regarding their children.

As Lareau (2002, 2003) points out, social class influences parenting techniques and this

is evident in parenting magazines. Rutherford (2009) states that the media primarily supports the

concept of concerted cultivation, particularly for those within the middle-class. Rutherford

(2009) explains experts support the idea that children should be involved in year-round activities

supervised by adults. Thus, middle-class children have little time for free play, or natural growth

because their lives are constantly structured and organized. Chin and Phillips (2004) found that

these organized activities are an advantage for those able to afford the lifestyle of concerted

cultivation, and parents believe that concerted cultivation provides children with the skills they

need for successful social development. In research focused on how parents encounter expert

advice, Rutherford (2011) found that women from the working-class relied on parenting

magazines just as much, if not more, than women from the middle-class. However, those who

do not have the resources to involve their children in these organized activities may feel

discouraged as parents.

Expert advice provided by the media has continued to change over time. Rutherford

(2011) examined how advice regarding parenting in magazines and other media during the 20th

century has been constructed, and found that parents relied on professional advice, such as

advice from doctors, until the 1960s. By 1970, people began receiving advice from "child

rearing experts" writing for magazines. In a content analysis of *Parents* magazine, Carlson and Crase (1983) found advice came from professionals in the area of children and parenting, and that the topics covered in these magazines ranged from solving problems of being parents to monitoring a child's school progress. Hoffman's (2009) study of popular parenting magazine found that the articles mainly focused on parental involvement with their children's emotional needs and that parents need to teach their children to express themselves. Hoffman's study suggest that the advice in popular parenting magazines focuses on adult intervention rather than giving children the autonomy to express emotions on their own terms, and concludes that parents reading these magazines have the ability to be available for their children. Parental intervention is similar to concerted cultivation in that every moment of a child's life is structured and organized by parents.

Parenting magazines today continue to teach parents about "normalized" parenting techniques, while also giving a reader the ability to interpret this information within his or her own life. By looking at the type of parenting styles most reflected within the media, this study may provide a better understanding as to why parents choose particular parenting techniques. Both social class and gender can affect parenting styles, but does the media play a role as well? The media's representation of what is "best" for people is constantly changing. Looking at the content within popular parenting magazines over time, this study builds upon prior research and shows how the image of parenting has changed in media, and it considers how media images influence the ways that parents choose to parent their children both in the past and today.

Methodology

This study employs a content analysis of *Parents* magazine articles in order to distinguish the types of parenting methods portrayed in this magazine and how to determine if the content in the articles has developed over time. *Parents* was first published in October 1926 and it has since remained a mass media source offering parenting advice and by featuring articles on a wide variety of topics to help mothers and fathers navigate everyday aspects and situations of parenting. *Parents* has a circulation of 2.2 million and a total readership of over 13.7 million, and it is the dominant parenting magazine on the shelves (Meredith Corporation, 2013).

This analysis of *Parents* focuses on four articles from each of the following years: 1930, 1950, 1970, and 2010. The researcher planned on analyzing four articles from 1990, as well; however, this publication is not available. The total sample size is sixteen articles. Four issues per year were analyzed in order to find each of the four articles: January, April, July, and October. One article per issue was selected for analysis based on a nonrandom sample.

The articles were coded in order to distinguish whether the focus was on concerted cultivation or natural growth methods of parenting. Each article was coded using a pre-constructed coding sheet (see Appendix A), which focused on information such as the author's title, the images presented in the article, and the overarching theme (concerted cultivation or natural growth) of the article based on semi-open coding categories. Articles that focused on topics such as parent-assisted activities and adult surveillance were placed into the concerted cultivation category. Articles that were identified as natural growth consisted of topics including free play and independence.

Findings

The results of this content analysis show that *Parents* magazine has maintained similar

patterns over several decades, the most notable is that there is an underrepresentation of people

of color in all four years of the magazines that were analyzed.   Table 1 shows that the race of the

person shown in the image on the front cover and the image of the accompanying articles are

almost all white persons; 95.5% and 97.2% respectively. In both 1930 and 1950, the images

displayed on the covers of every issue in that year and in the article images only white males and

females were pictured. The lack of diversity in both of these years reflects both the time period

and the audience to which the magazine was directed.

Table 1						
Race of People Featured in *Parents* Magazine by Year						
	Cover Images			Article Images		
Year	White	Black	Other	White	Black	Other
1930	17	0	0	10	0	0
1950	20	0	0	15	0	0
1970	13	1	0	7	0	0
2010	13	1	1	3	1	0
Total	63 (95.5%)	2 (3.0%)	1 (1.5%)	35 (97.2%)	1 (2.8%)	0 (0%)

In 1970, out of the fourteen total people displayed on the cover of each issue in the year,

only one was identified as black, while the remaining thirteen were identified as white. The

image of the one child identified as black was featured on the cover of *Parents* in the August

issue of 1970, but two white children were also on the same cover. The most recent year coded,

2010, only one person, out of a total of fifteen people, was identified as black and one was

identified as biracial. In 2010, only 7.3% of the total pictures on *Parents* front cover or

accompanying articles featured a race other than white. The results indicate that there is an

underrepresentation of the various racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Such images

reinforce the hegemonic idea of white, middle-class families as the norm.

        In addition to the racial message the magazine sends, a gendered perspective is also

shown. *Parents* magazine, although titled *Parents,* is directed specifically toward a female

audience. Although the title suggests that it is designed for both fathers and mothers, the content

within the magazine indicates otherwise. In the years 1930, 1950, and 1970 the Table of

Contents made this gender difference clear as different symbols (asterisks or check marks) were

placed next to the articles that would be of "specific interest to fathers." The Table of Contents

in the 1970s added to that sentence stating that "all our articles are of interest to both mothers

and fathers" but those with the check marks might just be of particular interest to fathers.

        Although *Parents* makes this claim that all of the articles are for both mothers and fathers

many featured articles related to female beauty or are otherwise targeted to women, such as

articles titled "A New Year, A New Hairdo—A New You" and "The Beauty Scene." In 2010,

although the symbols indicating articles of "interest to fathers" were removed, the articles are

increasingly directed to women. For example, a content subheading titled "your life" features

articles that are specifically aimed toward female beauty or mothers lives, such as articles

discussing "mom-tuition" and "MOM.com." The data shows that although gender stereotyping is

decreasing over time, mothers are still considered to be the main caretakers of children while

fathers are only expected to be involved in certain aspects of childcare.

        Concerted cultivation and natural growth were the two distinctive parenting styles

analyzed in each article. Concerted cultivation is a method of parenting that on focuses on

everyday structure and schedule in a child's life. The natural growth method of parenting

focuses on the natural development of children while giving children the ability to play freely

and independently. As Table 2 shows, overall 62.5% of the articles coded focused on natural

growth, and 37.5% focused on concerted cultivation. However, there is variation of childrearing

practices overtime. In 1930, 12.5% of the articles coded expressed ideas of natural growth. This

increased in 1950 when three out of the four (18.6%) articles coded express concepts of natural

growth. Natural growth parenting styles reached a peak in 1970 when 100% of the articles

coded were identified as natural growth. By 2010, however, a significant decrease occurs as

only and 6.25% of articles have a natural growth focus, and a majority of articles emphasize

concerted cultivation.

Table 2			
Parenting Style Expressed in Article by Year			
Year	Natural Growth	Concerted Cultivation	Total
1930	2 (12.5%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)
1950	3 (18.75%)	1 (6.25%)	4 (25%)
1970	4 (25%)	0 (0%)	4 (25%)
2010	1 (6.25%)	3 (18.75%)	4 (25%)
Total	10 (62.5%)	6 (37.5%)	16 (100%)

Table 3 examines the terms used to describe a natural growth parenting style. The most

frequently occurring words used in these articles are the importance of children having freedom

and experiencing independence. The article "Let Them Alone" (July 1930) quotes a

psychologist explaining that freedom is necessary for the growth of individuality; "It's not so

harmful to cramp the feet as it is to cramp the individuality." Other themes emphasized are the

importance of unsupervised activity and a child's self-responsibility and self-directed free play.

The only year in which all articles focused on natural growth parenting, 1970, highlights the

words used. The article "An Organizational Child" (April 1970) discusses how children's lives

are overscheduled; "too many club meetings and planned activities can rob a youngster of the

quiet time he needs for creative play and self-discovery.

Table 3					
Words Used Describing Natural Growth in Articles by Year					
Years	1930	1950	1970	2010	Total
Independence	1	3	3	0	7 (29.3%)
Free Play	0	2	3	1	6 (25.0%)
Freedom	2	1	2	0	5 (20.8%)
Unsupervised	0	1	1	0	2 (8.3%)
Responsibility	0	1	1	0	2 (8.3%)
Self-Directed	0	1	1	0	2 (8.3 %)
Total	3 (12.5%)	9 (37.5%)	11 (45.8%)	1 (4.2%)	24 (100%)

Notably, a majority of the articles' authors regardless of the time period were freelance writers, editors, and parents. Only a few articles were written by doctors or other experts; however, a majority of the articles did provide quotes from "experts." For example, a freelance writer and parent is the author of the July 2010 issue titled "Let's Make Believe," but a professor was quoted in the article reassuring the parent that the behavior of her child is "normal." In the article the author is questioning the normalcy of her daughter playing with an invisible family. The professor is quoted saying, "Healthy children need to engage in fantasy just as they need to eat, drink, and sleep." Most of the articles about natural growth have a similar type of structure. A parent or the author of the article questions whether the behavior of a child is normal and an "expert" is quoted reassuring that parent or author, as well as the audience reading the magazine, that the behavior of that child is normal and that children need to partake in natural growth concepts such as free play and unstructured activity in order to develop "naturally."

The articles that focused on concerted cultivation emphasize parent-assisted activities, such as a parent intervening in a decision that his or her child is making, or discipline and parent involvement in children's arguments. Similar to the articles focused on natural growth, a majority of the concerted cultivation articles are written by authors and freelance writers, although one was written by a doctor of psychology.

As Table 4 shows, in 1930, the articles discussing concerted cultivation focus on "parent assisted activies," "discipline," "authoritative parenting," and "challenging authority." This was seen in an article in the October 1930 issue titled "Discipline for Parents and Children," which discussed how children will challenge authority in terms of discipline but that, "a child is not in a position to judge what is good for him." The terms "parent-assisted" and "planned activities" were discussed in the articles from 1950. The articles coded in 1970 did not discuss any style of parenting related to concerted cultivation, but this changed significantly in 2010. The articles in 2010 were primarily focused on concerted cultivation and they used terms related to "parent-assisted activities," "adult surveillance," "planned activities," "challenging authority," and "authoritative parenting." This is evident in the October 2010 issue in an article titled "Musical Notes," which discusses the important role that parents have in assisting their child as he or she choosing a musical instrument. The author explains, "You and your child need to agree on what she'll play. A parent and child usually learn together – so you not only have to attend your kids lessons, you'll be expected to participate as well." This article shows how involved parents are expected to be when it comes to decision making and assisting their child throughout the learning process.

Table 4					
Words Used Describing Concerted Cultivation in Articles by Year					
Years	1930	1950	1970	2010	Total
Parent-Assisted	1	1	0	3	5 (35.8%)
Adult Surveillance	1	0	0	2	3 (21.4%)
Planned	0	1	0	2	3 (21.4%)
Challenging Authority	2	0	0	2	2 (14.3%)
Authoritative	1	0	0	0	1 (7.1%)
Total	5 (35.7%)	2 (14.3%)	0 (0%)	7 (50.0%)	14 (100%)

The data suggests that both concerted cultivation and natural growth are parenting styles discussed in *Parents,* but the historical era during which the article was written in affects the type of parenting styles emphasized. Although the parenting style varies over several decades, the target audience of *Parents* has remained the same. Race is underrepresented in this popular parenting magazine, and the content remains directed towards women.

Discussion

Media allows access to various issues and people are able to use the media in order to easily gain information about a particular topic. For parents, reading a parenting magazine is an accessible and discrete way for parents to assess whether their child is acting and behaving "normally," and to make sure that they are doing the "right" things as parents. Parenting styles as constructed in the media, more specifically in *Parents,* reflects American cultural and lifestyle trends during the historical period in which the articles are published. Parents reading a parenting magazine in 1930 were advised how to handle their child's behaviors differently than they were in 2010. The data in this paper indicates that there are connections between the historical time period and the childrearing practices discussed within the articles. What has changed in America that causes different approaches of childrearing today when compared to the past?

Throughout the course of American history specific events changed the way that households were ran, and how parenting was done. Grant (2004) finds that childrearing advice within books and magazines began to flourish by the 1920s and such advice became an obsession for middle-class American women. However, during the Great Depression of the 1930s the dynamic of American families was impacted by economic conditions. Women were still expected to run the household, but those in families who were negatively

impacted financially also needed to help provide for their family. Although mothers were

central to childrearing in the 1930s, childrearing techniques became an afterthought for

those who struggled with the collapsing economy. Cunha (2015) suggests that at the time,

parents used discipline in order to keep their children in order and out of the adults' way,

while also leaving children to their own devices so that they were prepared to perform

necessary tasks in society.

Child-centered philosophies emerged within another shift in childrearing advice

during the 1950s when the "nuclear family" was most prevalent. Post World War II lead to

more geographic mobility for many families, which meant that many people were living far

away from friends and family. This resulted in mothers relying on childrearing advice from

the experts in books or in the media because traditional socialization for mothers was

absent. The distinctive gender roles of men as the breadwinner and women as the

homemaker were idealized in the media during this time, as well. Mothers were present in

the lives of their child daily, meaning many activities were parent-assisted; however,

children were also trusted during this time and were encouraged to gain independence.

The value of independence increased into the 1970s, as all forms of authority were being

rethought. Women encouraged fathers to participate equally in childrearing. The values

associated with the countercultural movement of the late 1960s and 1970s also led to an

increase in parenting techniques of free play and the importance of giving children

freedom.

What has caused society to move away from the natural growth focus that was once

emphasized in popular parenting magazines? Perhaps one reason is due to parents

demanding work and social schedules, which may lead to parents wanting that same

structure for their children. Or the reason for this shift in childrearing practices could be

related to another cultural difference, which is the increasing media attention that causes

parents to fear for their children. Glassner (2010) presents the idea that there is a

phenomenon of fear in American society today. Glassner (2010) poses questions asking

people to think about the changes that have occurred in recent decades that are making

Americans more fearful. He argues that it is not necessarily that society is more dangerous

today when compared to 40 years ago, but it is actually people's perceptions of fear that

has increased. The media has the ability to instill this fear in people, and Americans pay for

social panic by reading and watching the stories that the media puts out there.

This phenomenon of fear may be causing tension between fearing for the safety of a

child and allowing a child to grow up in a world of adventure and freedom. As Gray (2009)

notes, "The fact that millions of children went outdoors today and played without adult

supervision and came home healthier, wiser, and more responsible as a result is not news,

but the fact that one child somewhere was abducted today, or drowned, or run over by an

automobile is spread quickly by the media," (p. 1). Experts warn parents of all different

forms of danger through the media, and this suggests that parents need to control their

children in order to keep them safe, and this parental control is an aspect of concerted

cultivation.

The underrepresentation of people of color in *Parents* pulls on national discourses

about race, such as blacks being identified as criminals. These discourses also link to the

culture of fear. *Parents* is aimed to target a specific audience, and the magazine may fear

that putting a black person on the cover would be sending the wrong message to that

audience. Presenting blacks in the media as "criminals" fuels whites' to fear anyone who is

black, even though a label placed on one person of a particular group is not necessarily

relevant to all members. A similar type of fear is what prevents parents from giving their

children the freedom to play outside without adult supervision.   The media's goal is to

catch people's attention and to intrigue readers and viewers to want to read, watch, and

buy more; therefore, the stories involving blacks as criminals and children being abducted

while playing outside are specifically designed to grab the audience's attention, which then

leads to this culture of fear. The increasing media coverage in American culture today

influences the perception of fear, and it causes parents to apply this fear to their parenting

practices by instilling more parental supervision in their children's everyday lives in order

to help keep them safe.

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Appendix A

Article Title: **Month/Year/Issue:**

Table of Contents Title: _____

Author:
Author Title:
Health Expert   Psychologist   Parent   Doctor   Freelance Writer   Editor
Other: _____

Image: YES _____   NO _____
             ↓
Description _____

Adult: Sex _____   Race _____   Age _____
Child: Sex_____   Race _____   Age _____
Number of Children Present _____   Activity _____

Concerted Cultivation	**Natural Growth**
-Extra curricular	-Free play
-Helicopter Parents	-Unstructured Activity
-Supervised	-Free Range
-Hovering	-Freedom
-Planned	-Independence
-Parent-assisted	-Unsupervised
-Challenging Authority	-Responsibility
-Adult Surveillance	-Self-Directed Activity
-Authoritative	-Permissive

Other   Other