

“I Don’t Need a Shotgun, Just a Look”: Representing Manhood in Secular and Religious Magazines

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Abstract

In this article, we examine gender representations in secular and religious media. Based on comparative content analysis of six secular and religious magazines, we analyze how both types of media represented manhood in ways that facilitate the elevation of men at the expense of women. Specifically, we demonstrate how religious and secular magazines represented fatherly and spousal manhood by emphasizing inherent gender differences, male leadership, protection and control, and reasons to excuse men for failing to live up to familial and marital expectations. In conclusion, we draw out implications for understanding the importance of comparative analyses of secular and religious media, the insights that such analyses provide for the study of contemporary secular and religious dynamics, and the reproduction of gender inequalities.

Keywords

manhood, religion, media, patriarchy, sociology

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In recent years, secular and religious media offerings have become two of the primary sources whereby people learn to signify gendered selves. In the case of secular media, for example, researchers have found that content has become increasingly sexualized and derogatory in its portrait of contemporary womanhood, and ever more grandiose and violent in its depiction of “real” manhood (see, e.g., Ezzell 2008; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Taylor 2005). Similarly, researchers have noted the emphasis upon essential and hierarchical gender roles—as well as the elevation of masculine privilege in relation to divinely inspired feminine submission—embedded within much religious media (see, e.g., Fetner 2008; Gallagher and Wood 2005; Robinson and Spivey 2007). While these studies have importantly revealed some ways secular and religious media influence societal conceptualizations of gender, they have typically examined each of these types of media in isolation from one another, and some (see Bartkowski 2001) have argued that they mobilize purely oppositional messages. Despite these trends, one wonders what comparative analyses of secular and religious media might reveal about gender representation?

We examine this question through content analysis of secular and religious magazines. Specifically, we compare secular and religious representations of husbands and fathers to ascertain the gender representations conveyed through both outlets. In so doing, we demonstrate that both secular and religious magazines constructed representations of fatherly and spousal “manhood” (see Schwalbe 2005) that facilitate the ongoing subordination of women. Our analysis thus contributes to sociological studies of gender, religion, and media representations by demonstrating the similarity of gender representations in secular and religious media, and the consequences such representation may pose for understanding contemporary secular and religious dynamics (see also Cragun and Nielson 2009), and the reproduction of gender inequalities (see also Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Representing Manhood

Masculinities are the meanings people attach to males as members of the dominant gender category (see, e.g., Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kimmel 1996; Martin 2001). Reviewing masculinities scholarship over the past thirty years, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) expand this understanding by conceptualizing masculinities as the result of the dramaturgical work people do, individually and collectively, to signify and affirm masculine selves (see also Goffman 1977; West and Zimmerman 1987). Specifically, they demonstrate that males learn to draw upon their symbolic resources to signify the types of gendered beings they believe themselves to be, align these self-presentations with shifting historical, cultural, and situational definitions of “what it means to be a man,” and maintain their position within—as well as the existence of—the dominant gender category. Rather than fixed, immutable components of biological or psychological selfhood, masculine selves thus rely upon the performance and affirmation of convincing “manhood acts” (Schwalbe 2005), which may be defined as collective and/or self-presentations that elicit the

attribution of a masculine self, and justify receipt of the privileges typically conferred upon members of the dominant gender category (see also Johnson 2005). Whereas the content of manhood acts may vary historically, culturally, and in relation to dominant notions of race, class, sexuality, and age, all such acts rely upon available symbolic resources and involve attempts to signify a masculine self by exerting control over or resisting being controlled by others.

Media offerings provide some of the primary symbolic resources people use to make sense of and signify manhood. Following Goffman (1979), media offerings promote ideal versions of masculinities, which ordinary citizens may then use to craft “appropriately” gendered selves (see also Butler 1999; Kimmel 2009; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). We may thus conceptualize media depictions of manhood as “enabling conditions” (Schwalbe 2008). Specifically, media representations of manhood provide audiences with signs, symbols, cues, and patterns of behavior that may be interpreted as elements of an essential masculine self; and in so doing, enable viewers, readers, and listeners to “know” both what manhood is and how it is done without having to reflect upon the socially constructed nature of these definitions (see also Ezzell 2008). Whereas media offerings do not necessarily cause people to construct or affirm manhood acts, they, in an indirect way, make it easier for people constructing manhood acts to be interpreted by others as convincingly masculine, and make it harder for audiences to conceptualize other ways of being male (see also Kimmel 2009).

Previous research has documented many ways secular media representations reproduce dominant versions of manhood. Examining the depiction of manhood in magazines directed at male audiences, for example, Ezzell (2008) observed that manhood was almost completely defined by aggression, predatory sexual behaviors, violence, and economic competition. Similarly, researchers have found that secular media depictions of manhood in, for example, alcohol advertisements (Messner and Oca 2005), rap lyrics (Weitzer and Kubrin 2009), anti-rape organizations geared toward men (Murphy 2009), and cigarette advertisements (White, Oliffe, and Bortorff 2012) ultimately reproduced associations between men and violence, control, strength, or aggression. Further, researchers have noted the over emphasis upon male characters in, for example, children’s books (McCabe et al. 2012) and Hollywood offerings (Kimmel 2009). In each case, secular media offerings enable mass audiences to conceptualize—and thus expect and affirm—masculine power, prowess, and superiority over others.

Researchers have also documented many ways that religious media representations reproduce dominant notions of manhood. Rather than emphasizing strength, violence, or aggression, however, religious media typically conceptualize manhood as an inherent—generally God-given—capacity for leadership, control of self and others, and both familial and religious authority (see, e.g., Bartkowski 2001; Gallagher and Smith 1999; Robinson and Spivey 2007). Examining media content published by the Southern Baptist Convention, for example, Kaylor (2010) found that commentators regularly defined males as divinely inspired leaders of families,

churches, and communities. Similarly, Gallagher and Wood (2005) noted that conservative Protestant publications—despite conflicts between traditionally explicit and contemporary softer rhetorical strategies—typically conceptualized manhood in terms of protecting, leading, and overseeing Christian families while exerting control over their own emotional experiences and desires. While religious representations of manhood emphasized different elements of masculine selves, they ultimately reproduced the representation of manhood as an essential characteristic of males that justifies their power, superiority, and control over others.

Importantly, a handful of studies have compared specific forms of religious and secular media representations. In her examination of religious and secular romance novels, for example, Clawson (2005) found that both types of novels emphasized similar notions of gender (e.g., greater variation within depictions of men and depictions of women than between men and women's depictions), but differed in their conceptions of masculine heroes (e.g., secular male characters are more dominant overall but less so in the relationship whereas religious male characters are less dominant overall but more so in romantic relationships). Similarly, Fetner (2008) noted that archival and promotional materials gathered from secular (lesbian and gay) and religious (the Religious Right) social movement organizations both drew upon conventional notions concerning the importance of families to advocate for their causes (see also Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004). Rather than, as others have suggested (see Bartkowski 2001), purely oppositional messages, these findings—in combination with our overview of studies focused explicitly on secular or religious media—suggest religious and secular media may have much in common after all.

Building on these insights, we offer a comparative analysis of religious and secular magazines within a specific historical and cultural context (see Schwalbe et al. 2000). Specifically, we examine how religious and secular magazines represented spousal and fatherly manhood. In so doing, both of these media outlets disseminated enabling conditions for the social construction and performance of manhood acts, which ultimately reproduce the ongoing subordination of women. Further, we demonstrate some ways that these religious and secular representations mirror patterns of gender inequality found in various concrete social situations as described and taken from the various magazines analyzed.

Methods and Analysis

The data for this study were derived from content analysis of six religious and secular magazines (seventy issues) published throughout the course of a one-year period. Considering that previous research has shown that media representations of gender become more pronounced and contentious before, during, and after historical periods characterized by political campaigns and controversies concerning gender (McCabe et al. 2012) and religion (Kaylor 2010), we selected a rather unremarkable year in terms of gender and religion in order to establish a possible

baseline for media representations of gender that could be developed into more systematic comparative analyses in the future. To this end, we selected every issue of six religious and secular magazines published in the year 2007 in order to study these representations in a year without political campaigns, situated between two election cycles where gender issues played a prominent role in campaigning, and lacking in any specific gender-related controversies that captured immense nationwide media attention.

Seeking to establish a baseline for future comparative analyses, we intentionally selected religious and secular magazines that focused on a wide variety of lifestyle elements, issues, and concerns. Rather than focusing on materials specifically targeted at—and thus marketed to—parents (for an analysis of fatherhood in secular parenting magazines, see Sunderland 2006) or spouses (for an analysis of spouses in secular magazines, see Cancian and Gordon 1988), we sought to gather gender representations that arise within magazines targeted at generalized secular and religious audiences. To this end, we selected materials based upon both the potential impact they might have (as demonstrated by circulation rates) and the diversity of topics they regularly covered for their readers.

It is important to note, however, that despite the magazines' targeting of general audiences, their offerings primarily focused upon the experiences of marital and family units. This was especially the case in the religious offerings, but the secular offerings mirrored this focus for the most part throughout the year. As a result, our analysis focuses heavily on the ways these magazines represented fatherly and spousal manhood, and reveals the intense focus these topics received regardless of the religiosity or lack thereof promoted by the media sources themselves. In fact, this may suggest that some of the common ground between religious and secular representations of manhood may be tied to the emphasis upon marriage and family embedded throughout contemporary American culture.

In terms of religious media, we selected two institutionally affiliated religious magazines and two magazines published and disseminated by organizations that are not affiliated with particular religious institutions (for circulation data on each of these publications, see Table 1). Specifically, the institutionally affiliated selections included *SBC Life*, which is published by the Southern Baptist Convention, and *Ensign*, which is the official adult publication for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Further, the selections unaffiliated with specific religious traditions included *Christianity Today*, which is published by Christianity Today International, and *Focus on the Family*, which is published by Focus on the Family and was renamed *Thriving Families* in 2009. Through these publications, we arrived at a sample of forty-six religious magazine issues that reached over 2.4 million people in 2007.

In order to compare our religious selections to secular representations, we selected two secular lifestyle magazines that possess long histories of cultural recognition and widespread distribution patterns. Specifically, we selected *Playboy Magazine*, which has been published by Playboy Enterprises Inc. since 1953 and

Table 1. Circulation Data for Magazines, 2007.

	Print Circulation									
	Total Subscriptions	News Stand Sales	Total Circulation	Female Readers (%)	Household Income	Age	Married (%)	Have Children (%)	Education	
<i>Cosmo</i>	1,048,000	1,867,000	2,915,000	86	Median = \$55,401	Median = 31.5	39.1	85.6	63.5% attended college or graduated	
<i>Playboy</i>	2,600,000	NA	NA	20	Median = \$54,450	Median = 33.1	34	NA	17% college graduate +	
<i>Christianity Today</i>	145,000	NA	NA	38	Average = \$80,790	Median = 55.1	81		40% college graduate +	
<i>Ensign</i>	850,000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
<i>SBC Life</i>	57,000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
<i>Focus on the Family</i>	1,400,000	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	

Note: Circulation information for *Cosmo*, *Playboy*, and *Christianity Today* was originally obtained from the Media Kits on their respective websites. Circulation information for *Christianity Today* was confirmed by and *Focus on the Family* circulation data comes from numbers provided by the Evangelical Publishers Association. Circulation information for *Ensign* and *SBC Life* were provided by the respective editorial offices of the publishers.

boasts a readership of 2.6 million people, and *Cosmopolitan*, which has been published by the Hearst Corporation since 1905 (although it originated with a different company in 1886) and boasts a total circulation of roughly 3 million. Importantly, these are two of the most widely read and well-known secular magazines that regularly focus on relationship and familial issues. Between these two sources, we arrived at a sample of twenty-four secular magazine issues that reached over 5 million people in 2007.

Our analysis developed in an inductive manner. Drawing on elements of “grounded theory” (Charmaz 2006), we loaded all the magazine issues into qualitative analysis software and examined the entirety of the text for recurring themes. Doing so revealed patterns that we sorted into categories and compared between religious and secular publications. During this process, we observed that both types of magazines regularly offered advice and explanations concerning the things men did within families and noted the presence of representational patterns in these discussions of “manly” fathers and spouses. After examining literature on masculinities, we came to see these articles as part of the process whereby religious and secular magazines defined manhood in traditionally gendered ways. As a result, we created categories to capture the ways religious and secular magazines represented fatherly and spousal manhood.

Representing Manhood

What follows is an analysis of the ways religious and secular media represented fatherly and spousal manhood. First, we examine how these media offerings represented fatherly manhood by characterizing males as natural protectors and leaders while justifying men’s failures as irrelevant compared with traditionally masculine conceptions of success. Then, we examine how these media offerings represented spousal manhood by suggesting men should take control of romance, emphasizing differences between women and men, and offering excuses for male infidelity. Importantly, these messages simultaneously allowed readers to incorporate contemporary notions of more involved and caring males while reinforcing traditional elements of masculine privilege and authority. Throughout our analysis, we reveal how these messages mirror societal patterns of gender inequality found within a wide variety of concrete settings.

Representing Fatherly Manhood

Secular and religious magazines both appeared to be intimately familiar with shifting societal definitions of the family (Powell et al. 2010) as well as religious (Bartkowski 2001) and secular (Hochschild 1989) calls for fathers to be more attentive to and emotionally expressive with their children. Rather than building upon these societal changes to fashion more egalitarian representations of fatherhood, however, they typically linked fatherly involvement and emotionality to

traditional interpretations of masculinity. Further, they justified fatherly failings in involvement and care work by suggesting they only fell short in these respects as a result of their efforts to be financially or religiously successful. As a result, their representations constructed fatherly manhood as ultimately dependent upon men's inherent capabilities as successful protectors and leaders (see Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Religious magazine articles often suggested fathers should become emotionally involved with their children. In so doing, however, they typically defined these emotional activities as strategies men engaged in to protect their children. Following a discussion about the ways deficits in parental emotional involvement may foster homosexuality, for example, *Christianity Today* offered the following example of a father protecting his child's emotional development: "When my son was little, he sometimes toppled over while attempting to walk. But I cheered him on. I didn't scold him when he fell." Rather than simply wishing to express understanding for one's child, religious magazines defined emotional involvement—typically coded as feminine—as an example of fatherly protection, typically coded as masculine, wherein fathers forestalled negative influences upon their children's lives (see also Hochschild 1989). At other times, religious magazines, like the following excerpt from *Christianity Today*, made the link between emotional involvement and masculine protectors more explicit.

Fisher, a quiet, steady Christian witness in a league of bling and groupies, left Salt Lake City in order to focus on his daughter's health. Only 11 months old, Tatum was diagnosed in May with retinoblastoma. The rare cancer threatens not just her left eye, but her life. Fisher gave up millions of dollars, and possibly his career, in order to move to a city with the right combination of medical specialists.

Similar to the ways Mixed Martial Arts fighters manage their emotions in order to achieve victory in the cage (see Vaccaro, Schrock, and McCabe 2011), Christian fathers would sacrifice their professional desires in order to facilitate the protection of their children. Rather than an example of a parent becoming emotionally overwhelmed by a child's distress, religious magazines defined Fisher's departure from basketball as a goal-oriented activity designed to protect—and eventually save—his child. Further, religious magazines often emphasized the dangers families could face when men fell victim to emotion. The following excerpt from an article in *SBC Life* offers a typical illustration:

Six in ten heads of Moscow households are alcoholic. Many men die too young from drinking and despair. Many children seldom see their fathers. Mothers struggle alone to make ends meet. Dysfunctional families are the rule, not the exception.

Similar to lessons suggesting little boys will ultimately suffer significant consequences if they don't learn to properly manage and control their emotions (see Schrock and Schwalbe 2009), religious magazines thus equated a loss of emotional

control—such as falling victim to alcoholic desire or feelings of despair—with the utter destruction of families. Echoing contemporary masculine feeling rules (see Vaccaro, Schrock, and McCabe 2011), the entirety of these representations characterized men’s emotional involvement as only appropriate if it both served a rational (read masculine) goal and did not get out of control.

Echoing masculine feeling rules, secular magazines also defined fatherly emotional involvement in relation to protecting children. Rather than stressing goal-oriented caring and understanding, however, secular magazines accomplished this by emphasizing the ways that fathers could protect their daughters’ virtue by inspiring fear in would-be suitors. The following excerpt from a *Playboy Magazine* interview with Bruce Willis offers a typical example:

- Playboy: As a former and possibly current male predator, how have you dealt with your daughters’ suitors?
- Willis: I certainly know what sixteen-year-old boys are thinking.
- Playboy: Were you an intimidating presence to guys who came to your house to pick up your daughters for dates?
- Willis: There were a couple of years when the girls were giving me shit about it. I wouldn’t do anything demonstrative. I would just say, “I want to meet them.”
- Playboy: With a shotgun?
- Willis: I don’t need a shotgun. Just a look. My daughters will say, “Dad, you’re scaring them.” Me? Ashton has been a big help in this. He has a similar point of view.

Echoing cultural notions of frightening men capable of intimidating others (Vaccaro, Schrock, and McCabe 2011) and sexually ravenous men incapable of managing their own desires (Ezzell 2008); interviews like this defined fathers as protective and intimidating forces in the (sexual) lives of their daughters. Similarly, the following excerpt from *Playboy Magazine* reveals some ways fathers use anger and fear to protect their daughters:

When my boyfriend slept with my best friend and I was playing the field a little, I dated some boys my age, but my father intimidated everybody. He’d wait at the window, and when they would drop me off in front of my house, he’d fly out the door and rip them out of the car by their neck. He didn’t want me in cars with boys, and they would never come back. My father is a big, scary sort of guy. He ruined my social life.

Echoing societal discourses that define anger as the primary masculine emotion (Simon and Nath 2004), and some men’s attempts to gain status by fostering fear in others (Vaccaro, Schrock, and McCabe 2011), secular magazines represented fathers’ emotional involvement in the lives of their daughters in ways that reinforced societal notions of masculine invulnerability and power.

Alongside emotional investments, religious and secular magazines also emphasized generalized notions of fatherly involvement in the lives of children. Rather than merely an example of parenting, however, they typically linked fatherly involvement to the capacity for males to provide leadership and guidance to children. Secular magazines, for example, often suggested that fathers could provide their children with proper guidance by being involved in their lives without giving them too much. The following excerpt from the *Playboy Magazine* interview with Bruce Willis provides an illustrative case:

We spent the holidays in Sun Valley. Ashton and Demi have a big pool in the backyard, so it's a good house to come over and bring people to. He and I just stand at the door and say, "How are you doing?" They're all very polite. Ashton took one of the kids aside, asked him his name and said, "Jimmy, you're in charge of all your friends. You're responsible for them." The kid goes, "What?" I say, "That's right. Anything happens to one of these girls, we're going to take you apart first." It was a joke, but he got the point.

Rather than becoming overly involved, secular magazines encouraged fathers to guide their children from a distance, and in so doing, pass on masculine notions of protection to others. Echoing patriarchal notions of women in need of male protection and guidance (see Johnson 2005), representations like this defined men as both protectors and leaders of women and other men. Similarly, secular magazines often stressed the importance of teaching children to work for themselves. As the following excerpt from a *Playboy Magazine* interview with Texas oil magnate T. Boone Pickens suggests:

Playboy: Will you pass along your wealth to your children?
 Pickens: My estate will basically go to charity.
 Playboy: Why won't you give your money to your children?
 Pickens: It doesn't do them any favors. If my kids are going to be rich, they're going to make the money. It won't be because of an inheritance.

Echoing classic American mythology valorizing the "hard working" man (Kimmel 1996), statements like this suggested fathers should be involved in their children's lives in ways that did not forestall their kids' cultivation of strong, masculine work ethics. Echoing these sentiments, secular magazines also featured stories where fatherly guidance led children to successful careers, but also created within them the desire to do things differently. As the following excerpt from a *Playboy Magazine* interview with Chris Tucker reveals:

Tucker: My daddy, he would whup you in a minute. He had his own janitorial service, so we used to clean up McDonald's, Burger King, office buildings, and restaurants at night. I used to half do the job. Sweep those french fries under the table—but nicely, so you

wouldn't see them. My dad would come along and pull everything out. He'd say, "Look at all this!" I'd say, "It was clean until you started messing it up." Then he'd give me a whupping in front of everybody.

Playboy: Do you discipline your son the way your dad disciplined you?

Tucker: I'm not sure that's a good thing. I don't whup my son. Maybe a little when he was younger, but I'm a different type of dad. I talk to my son, tell him not to do stuff that I used to do. But whup him? Nah. He's a good kid.

Similar to the notions of emotional involvement, illustrations like this reveal that while the tactics have changed—in this case, from physical punishment to disciplinary conversations—over time, the importance of strong, male guidance—as well as the absence of any mention of opinions the child's other parent may have—remains the same.

In a similar fashion, religious magazines stressed the importance of fatherly involvement in the lives of children. In so doing, however, they suggested that children required the moral guidance of fathers to learn to follow righteous rather than sinful paths (see also Bartkowski 2001). As the following excerpt from *Christianity Today* reveals, these messages reproduced Ex-gay ministry discourses defining masculine guidance as a central element in the gender development of children (see Robinson and Spivey 2007):

The ex-gay movement does not speak with one voice on the causes of homosexuality, but most believe that early childhood deficits are crucial—often a poor or nonexistent relationship with a father.

Expanding upon these notions, religious magazines also suggested fathers should be careful not to be too emotional, and in so doing, provide their children with strong moral leadership. The following excerpt from *Christianity Today* offers a typical case:

The president of a religious NGO, The Institute for Global Engagement, Chris Seiple, is described as being the antithesis of a "touchy-feely peacenik who bends justice so everyone can get along," just like his father. Chris is "someone who commands respect. He will tell you the truth. He will keep his word. And he doesn't blink."

Echoing conventional representations of the unflinching, powerful masculine leader (see Kimmel 1996), these statements defined fatherly involvement as an exercise in setting proper moral and gendered examples for children. As the following excerpt from *Christianity Today* suggests, these messages also often represented fatherly involvement in relation to the promotion of conventional gender roles:

Driscoll, 36, plays T-ball with his three sons or feeds ducks with his two daughters. Hardly the stuff that provokes raging blog debates and church pickets. As

Driscoll's Mars Hill Church in Seattle has grown to 6,000 members in 11 years, quiet moments like this with his family have preserved some of his sanity.

By emphasizing the ways fathers instill normative gender behaviors in their children—such as engaging in athletic activity with sons and caring for other creatures with daughters—while differentiating between parenting—peaceful time—and occupational—real work—endeavors, religious magazines represented fatherly involvement in the lives of children in ways that reproduced societal patterns of gender distinction and inequality (see, e.g., Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Despite their collective emphasis on fatherly involvement (emotionally and instrumentally), religious and secular magazines were also aware that many men would resist these messages. Rather than—as societal authorities and media offerings generally do with women (see West and Zimmerman 1987)—holding men accountable for involved parenting, however, religious and secular magazines excused men that failed to become actively involved by suggesting their ultimate purpose was to be successful. Echoing classical American representations of the male breadwinner (see Kimmel 1996), for example, secular magazines suggested men could be less involved—or avoid involvement altogether—as long as they did so in pursuit of financial success. In the following excerpt from *Cosmopolitan*, for example, the authors make excuses for “absent” men:

“There’s this dual expectation: Achieve career success and be an available, empathic partner,” says Farrell. “But if he’s always at the office, his girlfriend accuses him of being emotionally absent; if he skates by at work, he feels like he won’t be enough of a provider.” For many men, this damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don’t situation can be almost paralyzing.

Rather than holding men accountable for the combination of duties mothers have traditionally faced, statements like this offered “excuses” (Scott and Lyman 1968), or explanations for untoward behavior where one admits the impropriety of an action while denying full responsibility. In so doing, secular magazines excused men from fatherly duties by—somewhat ironically—emphasizing the difficulties created by time and energy constraints embedded within the “second shift” (Hochschild 1989). As the following excerpt from a *Cosmopolitan* article reveals, secular magazines also excused men’s inability to be involved fathers by emphasizing the strains of men’s work outside the home:

You’d think I would have been elated when (my mother) finally went into remission from ovarian cancer six months later. But instead, I became depressed. I was 14 years old, and a lot had fallen on me while she was sick. My dad did as much as he could, but he was working and couldn’t be home 24/7. So I helped take care of my then-3-year-old brother, cooked dinners, and rubbed my mom’s head when the chemo made her throw up. I was emotionally exhausted.

Similar to the ways, some (male) organizational leaders mobilize notions of feminine emotional sensibility to justify assigning women to specific occupational roles (see Martin 1997, 2001), these statements excused men from caretaking roles by subordinating these types of work to the (masculine) pursuits of paid labor.

Rather than offering an oppositional representation of fatherly manhood, religious magazines also excused men who failed to be involved in the lives of their children by emphasizing the importance of successful endeavors outside the home. Instead of focusing on financial success, however, religious magazines asserted that men had a divinely inspired calling to be successful spiritual leaders. As the following excerpt from an *SBC Life* article about a father's lack of involvement in his son's life notes, religious magazines argued that familial sacrifice was often necessary to accomplish God-given goals:

Dad walked many miles through his garden picking tomatoes and okra for free, while at the same time sharing about more important issues related to faith and life. He even delivered boxes of tomatoes to local vegetable stands for no charge, knowing they would sell his bounty for a profit, just for the opportunity to share about more important issues exemplifying Christ's love in practical ways. What made him a great father was not that he spent lots of time with his kids and tried to understand them. It was that he set an example for his kids about the importance of spreading his religious beliefs.

Echoing traditional religious rhetoric concerning the importance of spiritual (read male) leadership (see Weber 1922), religious magazines excused spiritually active fathers from the demands of parental involvement. Echoing this sentiment, an issue of *SBC Life* devoted considerable space to celebrating the spiritual commitment of Baptist men:

Traveling may seem romantic to those who haven't done much of it, but Bobby Welch is willing to serve his Convention and his Lord in yet another way though it will require hundreds of hours on airplanes, in hotels, and in restaurants when no one would have blamed him for declining this kind of rigorous schedule and time away from his home, wife, children, and grandchildren.

Similar to some gay Christian men that signify masculine selves by stressing their ability to lead their communities to proper religious standards of behavior (Sumerau 2012), representations like this celebrated traditional notions of spiritual leadership even when they facilitated men's absence from their families. Further, religious magazines asserted, as the following excerpt from an article in *Christianity Today* suggests that men's spiritual leadership should take priority over any other aspect of their lives:

The money was in position but not the manpower or the know-how. That's when Cavin confronted a fateful question: Should he uproot his family and move to Kigali?

Though not many friends encouraged him, he felt, as he told *Christianity Today*, “If God is calling you to something, just respond.” So he did.

Rather than committing to notions of fatherly involvement, statements like this reveal the primary symbolic space spiritual leadership maintains in religious media. Similar to members of the Promise Keepers (Heath 2003), religious magazines thus grappled with shifting societal norms in ways that allowed them to maintain respectability while sustaining their previous conceptualizations of what it means to be a man.

In sum, religious and secular magazines represented fatherhood in ways that reproduced societal patterns of male privilege and authority. Rather than promoting more egalitarian notions of family life, they incorporated recent calls for emotional and instrumental fatherly involvement in the lives of children into their existing notions of manhood. In so doing, they established guidelines that would enable secular and religious men to manage shifting societal notions of family and parenthood while maintaining their claims to patriarchal privilege. These guidelines involved assertions that fathers could be caring and involved (characteristics typically coded feminine) as long as they only did so in an attempt to protect and lead (typically coded masculine) their families and children, and that if fathers failed to be caring or involved, they could excuse these failures by appealing to the demands of successful (financial or spiritual) leadership. As a result, religious and secular magazines represented manly fatherhood in ways that ultimately reproduced gender inequalities embedded within the larger social world (see also Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe et al. 2000; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Representing Spousal Manhood

Secular and religious magazines both seemed to be acutely aware of shifting societal definitions of marital roles (Powell et al. 2010) as well as religious (Gallagher and Wood 2005) and secular (Pfeffer 2010) calls for husbands to be more attentive to their spouses. Rather than affirming these societal changes by promoting more egalitarian conceptions of husbands, however, they typically emphasized the supposedly essential differences between husbands and wives while linking attentiveness to traditional notions of masculine control. Further, they excused men’s spousal infidelity by appealing to biological, social, and spiritual interpretations of manhood. As a result, their representations constructed spousal manhood as ultimately dependent upon distinctions between husbands and women (see Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Although religious and secular magazines (as both the previous section and the rest of this section reveal) emphasized supposedly essential differences between women and men—as well as mothers and fathers and husbands and wives—throughout their offerings, sometimes they made these distinctions especially explicit. As a result, it is important to specifically demonstrate examples of this

type of representation from each of the magazine types. In religious magazines, for example, articles generally reified notions of gender difference by offering representations—stories and interviews mostly—that suggested that the inherent differences between husbands and wives were central ingredients to a healthy marriage. As the following excerpt from a *Christianity Today* article celebrating the life of Ruth Bell Graham—the late wife of the famous evangelical preacher Billy Graham—reveals, this tactic often defined “essential” gender differences as ingredients for a happy marriage:

Having established that everyone needs to be disagreed with, she concluded the column with a curious tale about having lunch with several friends while their husbands played golf. One “older companion” offered her friends the secret to her happy marriage: “We never do anything together,” the woman said. “Except,” she added with an irrepressible laugh, “sleep together.” When their husbands rejoined them, Mrs. Graham couldn’t help noticing the obvious affection the other woman’s husband displayed. “Three cheers for incompatibility!”

Echoing justifications for gender segregation found in Fraternity Little Sister Organizations (Stompler and Martin 1994) and on women’s athletic teams (Ezzell 2009), religious magazines defined conflicts and distinctions between women and men in positive terms. Echoing this notion, secular magazines, like some advice columns in *Cosmopolitan*, stressed the importance of giving males the “space” to be men. The following excerpt from an article in *Playboy Magazine* provides a typical illustration of this rhetoric:

A man woke up one morning to find his wife in a skimpy negligee, standing by the bed with a velvet rope in her hand. She purred at him, “Tie me up and you can do anything you like.” So he did. Then he went fishing.

Rather than emphasizing the shared goals or collective memories couples could experience together, religious and secular magazines characterized marriage as an ongoing effort to separate the “fe” from the “male.” Considering that gender inequalities rely upon foundational assumptions about male and female difference (see Martin 2004), religious and secular messages ultimately facilitated inequitable marital relationships by stressing distinctions between masculine and feminine selves.

Building upon notions of essential spousal difference, secular and religious magazines responded to societal calls for husbands to become more involved in and committed to their marriages by suggesting ways men could do this by taking control of their romantic lives. Specifically, both magazine types advised men to take initiative in their romantic lives by making plans and developing options whereby they could handle the needs of their wives. As the following excerpt from a *Cosmopolitan* article suggests, men could be more involved by making “special” plans for the occasional night out:

Normally, you may go back and forth with “I dunno, what do you want to do?” So if you actually have a plan, it feels like more of an event. Suggest doing an activity alone together for a few hours—whether it’s going to a comedy show, bowling, or hitting up a restaurant she loves. She’ll love that you took initiative to plan out a memorable night without making her do any of the work.

Rather than encouraging men to become more active throughout their marital lives, columns like this suggested creating specific plans to make “spending time together” easier to handle, and suggested that men could best accomplish this by taking control of romance, which would result in women celebrating their “work” and “initiative.” Echoing these sentiments, religious magazines generally encouraged men to take time out from the serious concerns of life to “spend quality time” with their wives, which could include secular (like walks in the park) or religious (like church attendance) activities. In so doing, however, men were encouraged, as the following excerpt from *Christianity Today* suggests, to focus on what they could “do” for their wives rather than simply enjoying their wives’ company: “Moon’s husband, who became a Christian four months ago, now reads the Bible to her daily.”

While these messages may appear, on the surface, to be relatively mundane, research has consistently demonstrated that males maintain both power within relationships and privileges within many social contexts by redefining feminine concerns, desires, and needs as problems that may be solved or controlled through instrumental (read masculine) demonstrations of relational—as well as familial and marital—initiative and work (see, e.g., Hochschild 1989; Pyke 1996; Tichenor 2005). As a result, secular and religious magazines’ emphasis upon men’s spousal initiative, work, and management of women’s relationship needs and romantic desires ultimately reproduces assumptions that lie at the heart of societal—as well as interpersonal—patterns of masculine emotional, relational, and familial control (Hochschild 1989).

Interestingly, religious and secular magazines devoted significant time and space to concerns about men’s infidelity. Echoing the long-standing cultural combination of masculinity and insatiable sexual desire (see Ezzell 2008), these articles offered advice for spouses dealing with men’s infidelity and extramarital sexual consumption (e.g., pornographic and masturbatory activities). Although we found subtle nuances in the representations of secular and religious magazines on this topic, both types of media responded to men’s sexual transgressions by providing excuses for the behavior instead of holding men accountable for marital commitment. In so doing, they reproduced traditional rhetorical devices (e.g., “boys will be boys”) that allow men to avoid responsibility for the emotional harm they cause to romantic partners, and interpret their sexual transgressions as a source of pride rather than shame (see, e.g., Ezzell 2009; Kimmel 1996, 2009).

In terms of religious media, magazine articles typically excused men’s sexual transgressions by defining these activities as the result of falling victim to sin and

temptation. Echoing traditional religious salvation narratives (see Weber 1922), these articles suggested wives should help and forgive their spouses rather than holding them accountable for their actions (see also Wolkomir 2006). As the following excerpt from *Christianity Today* suggests, men's sexual transgressions arose from spiritual problems—that wives and churches could help correct—rather than their own flaws:

John grew up Southern Baptist and participated in Sunday school regularly. His family attended church faithfully and was involved in many programs. After high school, John went to college and fell in love with Sharon, the woman of his dreams. But six years into the marriage, John had an affair, and his marriage crumbled. So did John. Spiritually, John walked away from God; physically, he walked away from his family. John quickly fell out of touch with God.

Echoing these sentiments, the following excerpt from *Ensign* explicitly defines sin and temptation as the source material for men's sexual transgressions:

Complete trust in each other is one of the greatest enriching factors in marriage. Nothing devastates the core of mutual trust necessary to maintain a fulfilling relationship like infidelity. There is never any justification for adultery. Despite this destructive experience, occasionally marriages are saved and families preserved. To do so requires the aggrieved party to be capable of giving unreserved love great enough to forgive and forget. It requires the errant party to want desperately to repent and actually forsake evil.

Rather than emphasizing the agency people possess to make sexual decisions, articles like this aligned infidelity with “evil” forces; and in so doing, simultaneously argued, there was no excuse for men's sexual transgressions while providing excuses for them, and urging forgiveness and love. Further, these statements call men to be accountable to God, but not to their spouse. As the following excerpt from *Ensign* makes clear, these conceptualizations also extended to other extramarital—and thus evil and immoral—sexual activities: “I am sure the Lord loves and blesses husbands and wives who lovingly try to help spouses struggling with such deep problems as pornography or other addictive behavior or with the long-term consequences of childhood abuse.” Although this article does imply that both husbands and wives may violate sexual commitments, its overall message echoes the notion that help and struggle are the proper responses—rather than accountability—to sexual transgression, and further isolates the cause of such behavior outside of spousal agency. Similar to the ways some abstinence-only advocates conceptualize extramarital sexual desire and behavior as the result of evil temptations that may be—and, as the statements go, must be—overcome and excused by appeals to God (see Fields 2008), religious magazines excused men from owning their sexual transgressions by locating the source of these missteps within the

realm of the divine, and priming wives to care for, heal, and show understanding for these mistakes.

Secular magazines also excused men from their sexual transgressions by dismissing their responsibility for these actions. Rather than casting the blame upon spiritual sources like sin or evil, however, they generally explained men's indiscretions by appealing to psychological and biological differences between women and men. As the following excerpt from *Cosmopolitan* suggests, psychological issues, such as difficulties sustaining intimacy or fitting together, are often at the heart of men's infidelity:

A man may want an emotional or sexual affair with a woman physically like his wife but free of the stresses—like financial worries and children—that a marriage can entail.

Alongside psychological excuses, secular magazines, as the following excerpt from *Cosmopolitan* demonstrates, also emphasized biological distinctions between women and men that could lead husbands to cheat on their spouses:

Neither gender has a moral leg up on the other, and we both have the same mental plumbing: a limbic system, which is the brain's emotional and sexual engine, and a frontal lobe, which puts the brakes on it. The mitigating factor is the extra testosterone guys have, which makes them more impulsive and less likely to consider the consequences of an affair. Also factoring into the equation: Men's minds are less active (women are constantly thinking), so they're always seeking excitement. Women philander when they feel the bond with their partner has been broken because, yep, they have more of the bonding hormone oxytocin.

Similar to secular (Schwalbe 1996) and religious (Heath 2003) men's movements, secular magazines relied upon exaggerated notions of "essential" biological distinctions to excuse men's sexual transgressions. Further, secular magazines, as the following excerpt from *Playboy Magazine* reveals, used these cultural notions of biological difference to suggest men's extramarital sexual activities actually served women's best interests:

In September, a reader wrote to say his wife had discovered toilet paper stuck to his penis, concluded he had masturbated and began to weep. The Advisor suggested he explain to her that his habit of touching himself has nothing to do with his desire to sleep with her. I doubt that approach would work. Instead, it would be more effective for him to say something like, "Baby, I was thinking about you and how hot you looked the other day in that dress, and I got a little too excited and took matters into my own hands." He could also note that after a man comes, it generally takes him longer to have his next orgasm, which means she gets more time to have hers. In other words, it's a win-win situation.

Echoing these sentiments, secular magazines also suggested men's tendency to seek sexual satisfaction beyond romantic relationships could be biologically determined: "Men love variety; it's our nature. Your husband's smorgasbord fantasies are normal. He doesn't fantasize about pale, blonde Finns because he has a real one at home." Echoing excuses noted in a wide variety of settings (see Scott and Lyman 1968), secular magazines thus excused men's sexual transgressions by appealing to cultural beliefs concerning rapacious biological—and thus immutable in common parlance regardless of evidence—drives (see also Ezzell 2008).

Overall, religious and secular magazines suggested that couples should recognize the essential differences between one another, men should take control of their romantic lives, and women should excuse the sexual transgressions of their husbands. In so doing, they established and affirmed marital guidelines that would allow secular and religious men to maintain marital authority. Specifically, religious and secular magazines suggested husbands should be attentive (typically coded as feminine), but only when they took control (coded masculine) of the relationships, and unfaithfulness could be excused by recognizing the biological and psychological essence of manhood. As a result, religious and secular magazines represented spousal manhood in ways that reified beliefs concerning "essential" distinctions between women and men, which ultimately reproduced societal patterns of women's subordination to men (see Butler 1999).

Conclusion

The religious and secular magazines we examined seemed to be well aware of shifting societal attitudes concerning parenthood and marriage (see Powell et al. 2010). While they could have seized on this opportunity to promote more egalitarian representations of family life, doing so would have required placing their influence and circulation rates at risk in an incredibly crowded marketplace. Instead, religious and secular magazines both represented parental and marital life in ways that reproduced societal patterns of male privilege and authority. Specifically, they constructed representations of fatherly and spousal manhood that emphasized supposedly inherent differences between women and men, reaffirmed notions of masculine leadership, protection, and control, and provided excuses for occasions where men failed to live up to contemporary societal calls for fatherly and spousal involvement and care.

These findings support research explicitly focused on gender in secular (see, e.g., Ezzell 2008; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Taylor 2005) or religious (see, e.g., Fetner 2008; Gallagher and Wood 2005; Robinson and Spivey 2007) media offerings, and extend this research by revealing some ways that secular and religious offerings may promote shared notions of manhood. While our analysis uncovered subtle nuances within secular (focus on business, biology, or psychology) and religious (focus on spirituality, evil, and sin) representations, both sources ultimately constructed manhood in ways that freed men from familial responsibilities and failures, encouraged

readers to interpret men as examples of familial control, leadership, and protection, and repeatedly emphasized socially constructed distinctions between men and others. Similar to comparisons of religious and secular romance novels (Clawson 2005) and social movement materials (Fetner 2008; Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004), our comparison of religious and secular magazines revealed they have a lot in common when it comes to gender. Whereas others have suggested that these sources represent purely oppositional viewpoints (see Bartkowski 2001), our findings thus reveal the importance of examining and comparing the social construction of manhood in both religious and secular media.

These findings also extend previous treatments of secularity and religion by drawing our attention to the integration of these social forces over time. Whereas researchers have often, following the blueprint originally laid out by Durkheim (1912) and Weber (1922), conceptualized secularization and religion in terms of dichotomous either/or relationships (see Chaves 1994), our analysis complicates this equation. While our findings suggest that the general direction of change is toward more secular understandings of masculinity, which is seen in the incorporation of new egalitarian ideas into more traditional views, our findings suggest that religion and the secular are not always in opposition to each other and may, in some instances, reinforce each other. Examining our findings, for example, one could argue that secular magazines have adopted traditional religious notions of manhood, though one could just as easily argue that religious magazines have adopted secular interpretations of manhood. The end result is greater similarity than dissimilarity in their reinforcement of cultural notions of manhood.

Unraveling the ways these secular and religious dynamics play out over time, however, requires asking questions beyond the scope of our study. By providing a baseline account of these similarities as well as possible representations of manhood in secular and religious materials, we suggest researchers could, for example, systematically examine the ways that religious and secular media construct similar or different media representations concerning a host of other social issues. Further, researchers could explore the ways these media offerings remain stable or change within various platforms distributed by different religious traditions and secular corporations. Finally, researchers might gain tremendous insights from systematically examining the ways new media sources (e.g., online, streaming, and messaging capabilities) might facilitate greater or lesser similarity and difference between religious and secular representations of women and men. While these are merely two possible avenues of further research concerning the dynamics of secular and religious gender representations, our findings suggest there may be much to learn about secularization or a lack thereof from such integrative comparative analyses.

These findings also have implications for understanding the dynamics of contemporary religious organizations and movements. Whereas previous research has noted the tendency for religious leaders (Fetner 2008) and subcultures (Gallagher and Smith 1999) to emphasize their differences from the mainstream, our analysis did not reveal the presence of a distinctive subcultural or political message in

religious media. Instead, our comparison revealed that despite minor nuances in the explanations religious and secular media offered for existing patterns of masculine behavior, their overall messages promoted basically the same notion of manhood predicated male authority and privilege within families (see also Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Our analysis thus lends weight to recent assertions that religious traditions integrate secular and religious ideals in order to remain relevant amid shifting societal morals. Seeking to explain these patterns in the Mormon Church, for example, Cragun and Nielson (2009) suggested that religious traditions walk a fine line between mainstream (echoing contemporary societal standards) and niche (reproducing traditional interpretations of social life) appeal. Considering the interrelation of traditional and contemporary notions of manhood exhibited by religious and secular magazines, our analysis suggests that testing Cragun and Nielson's (2009) theory of religious continuity and change may provide important insight into the ongoing evolution of religious belief, practice, and organization within and beyond patriarchal societies.

Finally, our findings suggest some ways religious and secular media enable and affirm the reproduction of gender inequality. Although researchers have devoted much attention to gender representations, there has been a tendency to catalog masculinities and femininities without critically examining the ways that such representations reproduce patterns of gender inequality in concrete situations (see Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Our analysis thus reveals some ways media representations may provide symbolic resources for constructing manhood acts, which reproduce the subordination of women in many concrete situations (see also Schwalbe et al. 2000). As such, systematic research examining the variety of ways secular and religious media representations reproduce or challenge these patterns may reveal ways to begin understanding, removing, or countering the symbolic resources that lie at the heart of gender inequalities.

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