

PARENTHOOD REPRESENTATIONS IN THE SWISS MEDIA COVERAGE OF PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES

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CONTEXT

Switzerland is one of the only European countries which has **no statutory parental leave nor paternity leave** (Moss, 2012). We argue that the Swiss leave scheme is gendered: fathers are not considered as legitimate care providers by the state.

However, in the last decade, parental leave policies have been increasingly covered by the media, more and more parliamentary interventions in favour of parental leave policies have been submitted and increasingly more work organisations (private companies and public administrations) are granting their employees with extended paid paternity leaves and unpaid parental leaves.

The aim of the thesis is to **describe and analyse the emergence of parental leave policies** (i.e. parental and paternity leave) in Switzerland. We do so by analysing the media, political and labour market spheres. This poster focuses on the media sphere.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Are gendered representations challenged by the emergence of parental leave policies?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender is an « institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference » (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.510).

Gendered representations of men and women - distinguishing **typical masculine and feminine characteristics and behaviours** - are a central component of the gender system.

By extension, the construction of fatherhood and motherhood is also subject to a whole range of dichotomies: instrumental vs. emotional ; authoritarian vs. understanding ; breadwinner vs. carer.

¹ « to **frame** is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition (...) » (Entman, 1993, p.52)

How are parental leave policies framed¹?

How is parenthood represented?

What is the subject position of fathers?

METHODOLOGY

Discourse analysis:

- constructions of meaning around parenthood and fatherhood
- representation of parental leave policies
- categorisations of leave recipients
- discursive registers
- subject positions (e.g. active or passive roles)

DATA

N= 206 press articles
Sampling process:

- keyword research: "parental leave" & "paternity leave"
- media databases: Lexis Nexis, Europress and Swissdox
- nine daily Swiss French speaking newspapers
- time-frame: 1999 - 2009

PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES ARE PUBLIC ISSUES

Topicality

- Parental leave policies are presented as actual and contemporary issues

Progression



Positive representation

- The expression "real paternity leave" is frequently used, so as "good", "proper" and "satisfying"

Some exceptions

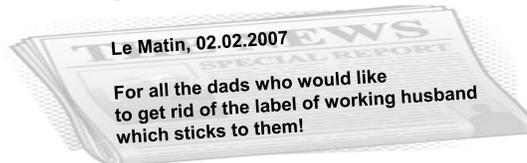
- Parental leave policies are represented as "gifts" -> suggests they are unnecessary

FAMILY MODELS & FATHERHOOD ARE CHANGING

Equal division of tasks

- The Swiss society is represented as changing
- Fathers are more involved in childcare and mothers are more active on the labour market

Criticism of the predominance of wage-work



New fatherhood is emerging...

- Personal experiences of involved fathers are reported -> suggests that family time is valuable and that care activities are hard work

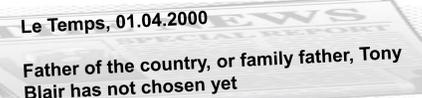
...but it is not the norm

- The salience of involved fatherhood confirms its unusualness.
- The "family life" discursive register (e.g. "dad", "diapers", "mollycoddle") -> moderates the framing of parental leave policies as public issues

FATHERS ARE SECONDARY PARENTS

Involved fatherhood concerns specific categories of fathers

- Young fathers
- With limited occupational responsibilities



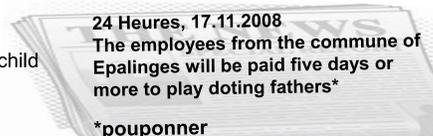
Fatherhood is optional

- The categories used to describe the potential recipients of parental leave suggest that :
 - they are "women" or "mothers" exclusively
 - either "the mother or the father" is concerned
- Paternity leave is represented as a *right* from which fathers could potentially benefit

Fathers « help out » or have unclear roles

- The legitimacy of the fathers' presence is based on their role of support-providers to their partners
- Their role is represented as unclear and passive

E.g. "be present" "dedicate time" "welcome" the child



FINDINGS

- **THE EMERGENCE OF PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES INCREASES THE VISIBILITY OF FATHERHOOD**
- **BUT IT PROVIDES ONLY A LIMITED CHALLENGE OF GENDERED REPRESENTATIONS OF PARENTHOOD**
- **PREDOMINANCE OF "MODERNIZED FAMILY TRADITIONALISM"²**

POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

- Parental leave discourse are likely to influence:
1. gender differences in practices: parenthood remains a secondary sphere of social integration for men
 2. postponement of parental leave policies: parenthood continues to be considered as a private matter in which the State has no right to intervene

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