

**Motherhood and sexuality:  
A 20-year content analysis of sexuality-related articles in popular magazines for mothers**

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**Abstract**

This exploratory study investigated the inclusion of articles related to sexuality in magazines targeted to mothers over a 20-year period. Articles in the most popular parenting magazines, including *American Baby*, *Baby Talk*, *Fit Pregnancy*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parenting*, *Parents*, and *Working Mother*, were analyzed for sexuality content from 1991 to 2010. The starting point for this research was selected after an obviously pregnant Demi Moore appeared nude on the cover of the August 1991 issue of *Vanity Fair*. The cover, and many others that followed, suggested an acknowledgement of pregnant women as sexual beings. However, it also raised questions about if such an acknowledgement exists in magazines targeted to mothers by their inclusion of articles on sexuality issues. Four issues per year of each of the eight magazines (N=548 issues) were analyzed for sexuality-related content. Results revealed that of the 14,746 articles analyzed over the 20-year period and across all eight magazines, few (n=332 or 2.3%) included content on sexuality issues. The limitations, implications, and directions for further research are discussed.

*Key Words:* Mothers, sexuality, parenting magazines, content analysis

**Introduction**

Motherhood is an experience that alters a woman's sense of herself and her relationships. In her classic book, *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*, Rich (1976) suggests that the unique sexual and intimate aspects of pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering are an important part of women's experience. Two decades later in her book, *Women's sexuality across the lifespan*, Daniluk (1998) reiterates this point about the link between motherhood and sexuality, suggesting that birthing, breastfeeding, and nurturing a child are experiences that impact a woman's sense of herself as a sexual person (Daniluk, 1998).

Women may turn to the popular or academic literature on mothering to understand their sexual feelings when breastfeeding their child, or to make sense of the changes in their intimate relationships and levels of sexual desire during the early years of parenting. However, in so doing, they will find few answers to their questions. While there are numerous books filled with advice on how to breastfeed and care for children at each stage of their development, there is little attention in the literature to the sexual desires and sexual experiences of mothers. Sexuality issues are rarely addressed in popular pregnancy and parenting books. One exception would be the books by Vicki Iovine: *The girlfriend's guide to pregnancy* (1995) and *The girlfriend's guide to surviving the first year of motherhood* (1997). Both books include a chapter on sexuality. Yet even popular books that specifically address women's sexuality and sexual development such as

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*For yourself: The fulfillment of female sexuality* (Barbach, 2000), *Women's sexualities* (Ellison, 2006), *Sex matters for women* (Foley, Kope, & Sugrue, 2002), *Women's experience of sex* (Kitzinger, 1985), and *Sexual Salvation* (McCormick, 1994) pay little or no attention to the changes in women's sexual issues when they become mothers. Such findings support Ester Perel's claim in her international bestseller, *Mating in captivity*, that the sexual invisibility of the American mother is ingrained in our national psyche (Perel, 2006, p. 151).

If mothers turn to the popular media, they will find no shortage of highly sexualized images of women (Kilbourne, 2000; Lamb & Brown, 2006). However, from advertisements for maternity clothing through representations of mothers at all stages of the family life cycle, images of women as mothers *and* as sexually interesting and desirable people are rare (Daniluk, 1998). It is only in more recent decades that the presentation in advertising of mothers as sexual has occurred (Dobscha, 2006).

In August 1991, the nude photograph of an obviously pregnant Demi Moore appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine. According to O'Malley (2006), prior to this, pregnant women were rarely shown in fashion magazines, or they were shown in desexualized ways. Moore's simultaneous representation of female sexuality and motherhood produced a great deal of controversy. Whether the cover was sexually objectifying or empowering was debated on radio, television, and newspaper articles. The image became so controversial that it was banned in a number of chains of "family" stores; some retailers sold the magazine in brown paper bags, while others placed it on the top shelf next to the pornographic publications (O'Malley, 2006). This response is a far cry from the August 2006 *Harper Bazaar* magazine cover of an obviously pregnant Britney Spears which barely raised an eyebrow. In fact, a number of pregnant celebrities have taken cover photos for magazines including Christina Aguilera, Claudia Schiffer, Melissa Joan-Hart, Mariah Carey, Tia Mowry, and Nia Long. According to O'Malley (2006), reactions to these more recent magazine covers suggest that we are no longer shocked by images of sexual pregnant women.

But what about the content of articles found within magazines read by mothers? The findings from a small number of studies suggest that what is inside these magazines is in sharp contrast to what has appeared on the outside cover. Only a handful of studies have examined the portrayal of mothers in popular media such as film or magazines (i.e., Kaplan, 1990; Keller, 1994; Johnston & Swanson, 2003a; Johnston & Swanson, 2003b; Murphy, 1994; Walker, 2000). For example, Kaplan (1990) explored representations of sexuality and motherhood in films. Her analysis found that in terms of female sexuality, mothers are "excluded or marginalized" (p.422). Within these movies, women are not both mothers and sexual people. In fact, while women are often portrayed as sexual before marriage, there is a lack of images reflecting this sexuality after marriage and children. The message appears to be that with maternity women lose their sexual desirability and appeal (Kaplan, 1990).

A similar message has been noted in studies exploring the representation of mothers in popular magazines (Keller, 1994; Johnston & Swanson, 2003a; Johnston & Swanson, 2003b; Murphy, 1994; Walker, 2000). Their collective findings suggest that sexuality and motherhood do not appear to coexist. The message that is often perpetuated is one of a traditional woman whose life revolves around cooking, cleaning, and waiting on her children and spouse (Murphy, 1994). In a comparison study done of women's magazines, Murphy (1994) found four themes in traditional women's magazines (*Family Circle*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's* and *Woman's Day*) and compared these themes with magazines targeted to less traditional women (*Ms.*, *New Woman*, *Working Woman*, and *Lear's*). These themes are

assumptions applied to readers of women's magazines: (1) the normal world is racially black and white and middle to upper-middle class; (2) women are domestic; (3) women should be or are beautiful; and (4) consumerism is a focus of women's lives. Compared to the messages found in the less traditional magazines, Murphy concluded that, "It may now be acceptable to be independent, politically involved, sexually active, committed to a career; even to be over forty. But it is only acceptable if you look right and have the necessary accoutrements" (p.126). While these messages are more progressive, they are directed at working women and not women who are also mothers (Murphy, 1994).

More specific studies examining the portrayal of mothers in women's magazines highlight this lack of progressive thought. Walker (2000) surveyed the history of women's magazines and then examined their content from the 1920s to 1960 to look specifically at how mothers have been portrayed. Examining popular women's magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Vogue*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Redbook*, she found that there were some shifts in how mothers are viewed in response to the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War. While her findings reveal a broader image of woman's roles in society, there was still an overriding theme of the mother as non-sexual. Keller (1994) described comparable findings in her content analysis of the portrayal of mothers in *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Parents*, and *Good Housekeeping Magazine* from the 1950s to the 1980s. Her results suggest that the depiction of mothers in magazines across the decades is of a White, educated, married, middle-class woman who does not work outside the home (Keller, 1994). Sexuality is not part of the representation.

Similar findings have been revealed in more recent content analysis of mothers in popular magazines. Johnston and Swanson (2003a) analyzed five women's magazines: *Good Housekeeping*, *Family Circle*, *Parents' Magazine*, *Family Fun* and *Working Mother*. Their analysis revealed that mothers are depicted as separate from their sexuality, and that they can choose one or the other. In a second article by the same authors (Johnston & Swanson, 2003b), their analysis of women's magazines revealed that mothers' representations undermine the confidence of mothers through either negative portrayals or an overall lack of representation. While these magazines are full of advice for mothers, there is little recognition of the influence mothers have in other areas of life, and certainly no recognition of them as sexual beings. As with the previous studies, the topics of motherhood and sexuality are often seen as mutually exclusive topics.

### **Purpose of this Study**

This exploratory study investigated the number and type of articles related to sexuality in the most popular magazines directed to mothers. The present study examined articles within popular pregnancy and parenting magazines from 1991 to 2010: *American Baby*, *Baby Talk*, *Fit Pregnancy*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parenting*, *Parents*, and *Working Mother*. The analysis identified the proportion of articles with content on sexuality, as well as what sexuality topics were discussed within those articles. The starting point for this research (1991) was selected because, as stated earlier, an obviously pregnant Demi Moore appeared nude on the cover of the August 1991 issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine. This cover implied an acknowledgement of pregnant women as sexual beings. It also raised questions about if such an acknowledgement exists in pregnancy and parenting magazines targeted to mothers by examining the inclusion of articles on sexuality issues. The limited research on the representation of mothers in popular magazines, and more specifically mothers as persons with sexual concerns and/or interests as

reflected in articles appearing in parenting magazines, prompted the following research questions:

1. What proportion of articles cover sexuality issues in the most popular magazines directed toward mothers: *American Baby*, *Baby Talk*, *Fit Pregnancy*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parenting*, *Parents*, and *Working Mother*?
2. What topics related to sexuality are discussed in these articles?
3. Has there been an increase in sexuality-related content in these magazines over the past 20 years?

## Methodology

### Sample

The most popular magazines for mothers were identified by reviewing listings from various online search engines (i.e., Google, Yahoo). Eight magazines were repeatedly identified by various searches of “top magazines for mothers,” “pregnant and parenting magazines,” “magazines for new parents,” and “magazines read by mothers.” These eight magazines were *American Baby*, *Baby Talk*, *Fit Pregnancy*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parenting*, *Parents*, and *Working Mother*. In addition, each magazine’s subscription data confirmed that all eight magazines have high readership of women of childbearing age (Mediamark Research & Intelligence, 2007). A synopsis of each magazine is detailed in Table 1.

### Table 1

#### *Synopsis of the eight most popular magazines for mothers*

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- *American Baby*, established in 1938, is the oldest baby-focused (as compared to older children) parenting magazine and a sister magazine to *Parents*. Free for several months to expectant women, this magazine addresses issues related to baby and parent health, baby-care, baby development, and family issues. The advice columns deal with such topics as behavior and family health. The total estimated circulation is 86,000.
- *Baby Talk*, founded in 1935 (purchased by Time, Inc. in 1991), is targeted towards expectant mothers and those with infants. It is a sister magazine with *Parenting*. For readers who meet this description, the magazine is available for free. Articles within the magazine include themes such as baby care, family issues and health. The magazine also includes regular advice columns. The total estimated circulation is 2 million.
- *Fit Pregnancy* is a more recent mothering magazine with a starting date of 1995. This magazine, as its name alludes to, offers health and fitness information and advises pregnant women. The exercise advice included is offered for women pre- and post-natal. *Fit Pregnancy* has many articles focusing on celebrity mothers providing an idealized image of pregnancy. Overall, this magazine offers a great deal of good advice for staying in shape while pregnant and after. The total estimated circulation is 112,000.
- *Good Housekeeping* magazine is one of the oldest women’s service magazines and was established in 1886. The magazine’s article topics include home, health, beauty,

relationships, and celebrity profiles. *Good Housekeeping's* advice columns are constantly changing to keep up with the times. The total estimated circulation is 4.7 million.

- *Mothering* magazine was started in 1976 and has the subtitle *the Magazine of Natural Family Living*. This non-conventional parenting magazine takes a more natural, holistic approach. In contrast to most magazine articles that are often written by staff writers, articles in *Mothering* are mostly written by experts or advocates. Articles often contain advice on vaccines for infants, the effects of c-sections and other activist issues. *Mothering* has an estimated circulation of 100,000.
  - *Parenting* magazine, subtitled, *on rearing children from crib to college*, was established in 1987. This magazine is filled with information aimed at new mothers and those with small children with little advice aimed towards parents of older children. Articles are kept short, so mothers will have time to read about issues such as health, child development and product reviews. There is some information for dads as well. The information in the magazine is complemented by the information listed on their webpage. The total estimated circulation is 1.9 million.
  - *Parents* magazine established in 1926 focuses primarily on early child development and health topics rather than topics related to older children. Readers' questions related to maternal and parental health are answered in advice columns along with questions related to child development. The total estimated circulation of 2.1 million.
  - *Working Mother* magazine's subtitle is, *the Smart Guide for a Whole Life* and was founded in 1981. This magazine's goal is to provide a resource for mothers who also work outside the home. *Working Mother's* advice columns include information on maternity leave, childcare, health, beauty, and the best companies to work for. In addition to providing advice for child related job struggles, the magazine also offers mothers information on family activities and games. The total estimated circulation is 825,000.
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### Procedure

Four issues from each year (one from each season of the year: winter, spring, summer and fall) beginning in 1991 to 2010 were obtained for five of the eight magazines: *American Baby*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parents*, and *Working Mother* (80 issues for each of these magazines). Three other magazines were not available starting in 1991 due to their later start date for publication and/or due to their unavailability through a national search of library holdings. Inquiries to the publishers revealed that back issues were not available. The three magazines that were included in the study but content analysis began after 1991 included *Baby Talk* (1998-2010), *Fit Pregnancy* (2002-2010), and *Parenting* (1996-2010). Of the eight magazines, a total of 548 issues were included in the content analysis. Year of analysis and number of issues analyzed for each magazine are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*List of magazines by years analyzed and total number of issues (N=548)*

Magazine Title	Years Analyzed	Number of Years	Number of Issues <sup>2</sup>
<i>American Baby</i>	1991-2010	20	80
<i>Baby Talk</i>	1998-2010 <sup>1</sup>	13	52
<i>Fit Pregnancy</i>	2002-2010 <sup>1</sup>	9	36
<i>Good Housekeeping</i>	1991-2010	20	80
<i>Mothering</i>	1991-2010	20	80
<i>Parenting</i>	1996-2010 <sup>1</sup>	15	60
<i>Parents</i>	1991-2010	20	80
<i>Working Mother</i>	1991-2010	20	80

<sup>1</sup> Content analysis for these magazines began after 1991 due to start date of publication and/or availability through a national search of library holdings.

<sup>2</sup> Four issues each year (in winter, spring, summer, and fall) were selected for content analysis

## Analysis

The print version of each magazine (not the online version) was used for the analysis. Articles in each magazine issue were examined for sexuality content. In order to determine the proportion of articles addressing sexuality, the number of articles in each issue and the number of those that included sexuality were recorded for each magazine. Articles that included sexuality were further coded as primary or secondary in terms of their content. Primary articles were defined as those whose main focus was on sexuality. In all cases, the title told the reader that the article was about some aspect of sexuality. For example, an article focusing on finding time to have sex would be categorized as primary (e.g., “Ten best ways to sneak in sex after baby” *Baby Talk*, February 2001). Secondary articles were those in which sexuality issues were not the main focus of the article (or implied in the title) but were discussed within the article. For example, an article on concerns while being pregnant included a variety of topics, one of which was sexual intercourse during pregnancy (e.g., “Your pregnancy A-Z: All about the second trimester” *Fit Pregnancy*, April/May 2002).

The topics of the sexuality-related articles were also recorded. Initial coding categories were created. Articles were then coded by the researchers, compared, differences discussed, and coding categories refined. Four sample issues were randomly selected for assessing inter-rater reliability. The two authors independently examined the content and inter-rater reliability was determined to be 94%.

## Results

### Research Question 1

The first research question asked: “What proportion of articles cover sexuality issues in the most popular magazines directed toward mothers: *American Baby*, *Baby Talk*, *Fit Pregnancy*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parenting*, *Parents*, and *Working Mother*?” The number of articles related to sexuality for each magazine are presented in Table 3 and discussed in more detail below. Of the 14,746 articles examined in all eight magazines combined, a total of 332 articles (2.3%) contained content related to sexuality. Looking at results presented in Table 3 for the individual magazines, the percentage of articles on sexuality issues ranged from a low of approximately 1% (in *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parenting*, and *Working Mother*) to a high of 4%-5% (in *American Baby*, *Baby Talk*, and *Fit Pregnancy*).

In terms of identifying if the article’s inclusion of sexuality was primary or secondary, only about one-third of the articles (123 of the 332 articles) were coded as primary articles. In those cases where sexuality was the primary issue, the title clearly told the reader that the article was about some aspect of sexuality and was the major focus of the article. For example, an article titled “How’s your love life” focused on sexual enjoyment, and an article titled “Making time for making love” was about how to balance being a mom with being sexual with your partner/spouse. However, the results of this analysis revealed that for most articles that included sexuality-related topics, sexuality was not the major focus of the article, but was a topic included under a larger topic. For example, an article on time management might include a paragraph about making time for sex, or an article on what makes a good marriage might include a section on ways to keep your sex life exciting.

**Table 3***Number and proportion of articles related to sexuality for each magazine*

Magazine Title	Years Analyzed	Total Number of Articles	Number of Sexuality-Related Articles <sup>1</sup>	Proportion of Sexuality Articles
<i>American Baby</i>	1991-2010	884	44 (23)	5.0%
<i>Baby Talk</i>	1998-2010	949	42 (14)	4.4%
<i>Fit Pregnancy</i>	2002-2010	851	39 (18)	4.6%
<i>Good Housekeeping</i>	1991-2010	3,512	43 (13)	1.2%
<i>Mothering</i>	1991-2010	1,034	11 (7)	1.1%
<i>Parenting</i>	1996-2010	3,083	39 (19)	1.3%
<i>Parents</i>	1991-2010	3,101	95 (21)	3.1%
<i>Working Mother</i>	1991-2010	<u>1,332</u>	<u>19 (8)</u>	<u>1.4%</u>
Totals:		14,746	332 (123)	2.3%

<sup>1</sup>The number in parentheses refers to the number of articles designated as primary. For example, 44 articles in *American Baby* contained content related to sexuality. Of these, sexuality was the primary focus of 23 articles; the 21 others included sexuality as a secondary issue within an article, but it was not the main focus of the article.

## Research Question 2

The second research question examined those articles that included sexuality and asked, “What topics related to sexuality are discussed in these articles?” For the 332 articles that contained content on sexuality, their topics were coded into categories. Nine categories were identified: 1) Balancing children and a sex life; 2) Sex during pregnancy; 3) Sex following birth; 4) Looking sexy; 5) Being single and sex; 6) Birth control/protection; 6) Sexual desire; 8) Sexual functioning; and 9) Other. A description of each category is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Categories of sexuality-related topics*

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1. *Balancing children and a sex life*: This category includes articles that refer to how having children affects your sex life and how to balance children and intimacy with a partner. Discussions included what has worked for others and advice from experts such as marriage counselors. Examples of articles coded in this category include, “And Baby Makes Friction” (*Fit Pregnancy*) and “Sex after Children” (*Mothering*).
2. *Sex during pregnancy*: This category includes articles that discuss having sex during pregnancy. Article topics included such things as sexual positions that work for pregnant women, and how one’s sex life might be affected by being pregnant. Examples of articles coded in this category include, “Sex and Pregnancy” (*Parenting*) and “Bouncing Back” (*Baby Talk*).
3. *Sex following birth*: This category includes articles that talk about when you can resume having sex, getting back into a sexual routine, how your body has changed and what the experience of sex after birth might be like. Examples of articles coded in this category include, “The First Time” (*Fit Pregnancy*) and “Foot in Your Face” (*Mothering*).
4. *Looking sexy*: This category includes articles that talk about mothers being sexy. Article topics discussed such things as buying sexy lingerie, sexy clothing for going out in public, and why men find pregnant women attractive. Examples of articles coded in this category include, “Hot Mama” (*Fit Pregnancy*) and “Red Hot Mama” (*Working Mother*).
5. *Being single and sex*: This category includes articles that discuss sexuality issues for single mothers. Articles discuss topics such as finding time to date, having a partner spend the night for the first time, and finding time for sex with a boyfriend. Examples of articles coded in this category include, “The New Dating Game” (*Working Mother*) and “On Your Own” (*Fit Pregnancy*).
6. *Birth control*: This category includes articles that discuss forms of birth control. Articles discussed such things as which form of contraception would be best for women based on certain criteria or how to avoid getting pregnant. Examples of articles coded in this category include “Birth Control Choices” (*American Baby*) and “Birth Control After Baby” (*Parenting*).
7. *Desire*: This category includes articles that discuss sexual desire. Article topics include wanting or not wanting sex, feeling or not feeling desirable and fantasies. Examples of articles coded in this category include “Your Marriage, Only Hotter” (*Parents*) and “Wanted: An R-Rated Fantasy” (*Good Housekeeping*).

8. *Sexual function*: This category includes articles that discuss sexual function. Article topics often include problems women have with sex such as a lack of achieving orgasm, vaginal dryness or pain during sex, and masturbation. Examples of articles coded in this category include, “Sex and Marriage” (*Parents*) and “Talking about Sex Q & A” (*American Baby*).
  9. *Other*: This category includes articles that did not fit under any other category, and did not occur often enough to create an additional category. Examples of articles coded in this category include, “Sex, Lies, and TV” (*Good Housekeeping*) and “How to Talk About Sex” (*Parenting*).
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In terms of the categories related to sexuality, the most common topic when examining all magazines was “Balancing children and a sex life” (27%). Over half of the sexuality-related articles in *Mothering*, *Parenting*, and (not surprising) *Working Mother* were in this category. The rest of the articles were fairly evenly distributed across the other sexuality categories of “Sex during pregnancy” (9%), “Sex after birth” (9%), “Looking sexy” (10%), “Birth control” (9%), “Sexual desire” (13%), and “Sexual function” (11%). Only 2% of articles focused on the category “Being single and sex.”

The findings for each of the individual magazines by number and type of sexuality-related articles are discussed below. The number and percentage of sexuality articles by categories are presented in Table 5. In some cases, an article was coded in more than one category. For example, the article, “Babyproof your sex life” in *Baby Talk* magazine (February 2007) was coded under three categories because it covered all three topics: “Balancing children and a sex life,” “Sex during pregnancy,” and “Sexual desire.” This explains why, when adding the number of coding categories for a particular magazine, the total codes assigned exceeds the number of articles on sexuality-related issues.

**Table 5***Categories of sexuality-related articles and percentage of those articles within each category<sup>1</sup>*

	Balance children & sex	Sex during pregnancy	Sex after birth	Looking sexy	Being single & sex	Birth Control	Sexual Desire	Sexual Function	Other
<i>American Baby</i> (n=44) 46 codes <sup>1</sup>	17% (n=8)	7% (n=3)	17% (n=8)	11% (n=5)	4% (n=2)	15% (n=7)	7% (n=3)	13% (n=6)	9% (n=4)
<i>Baby Talk</i> (n=42) 45 codes <sup>1</sup>	20% (n=9)	13% (n=6)	13% (n=6)	15% (n=7)	2% (n=1)	18% (n=8)	13% (n=6)	2% (n=1)	4% (n=2)
<i>Fit Pregnancy</i> (n=39) 48 codes <sup>1</sup>	13% (n=6)	29% (n=14)	15% (n=7)	17% (n=8)	2% (n=1)	2% (n=1)	2% (n=1)	17% (n=8)	4% (n=2)
<i>Good Housekeeping</i> (n=43) 46 codes <sup>1</sup>	17% (n=8)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	7% (n=3)	2% (n=1)	7% (n=3)	26% (n=12)	13% (n=6)	28% (n=13)
<i>Mothering</i> (n=11) 12 codes <sup>1</sup>	75% (n=9)	0% (n=0)	8% (n=1)	8% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	8% (n=1)
<i>Parenting</i> (n=39) 41 codes <sup>1</sup>	51% (n=21)	7% (n=3)	10% (n=4)	3% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	12% (n=5)	10% (n=4)	0% (n=0)	7% (n=3)
<i>Parents</i> (n=95) 104 codes <sup>1</sup>	24% (n=25)	5% (n=5)	8% (n=8)	9% (n=9)	1% (n=1)	7% (n=7)	21% (n=22)	19% (n=20)	7% (n=7)
<i>Working Mother</i> (n=19) 21 codes <sup>1</sup>	57% (n=12)	5% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	10% (n=2)	14% (n=3)	14% (n=3)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)
<i>Total</i> (n=332) 363 codes	27% (n=98)	9% (n=32)	9% (n=34)	10% (n=36)	2% (n=9)	9% (n=34)	13% (n=48)	11% (n=41)	9% (n=32)

<sup>1</sup> Some articles were coded in more than one category. This explains why, when adding the number of codes for a magazine, the total exceeds the number of sexuality-related articles.

### **Content analysis of *American Baby***

A total of 884 articles over 20 years (1991-2010) were analyzed for content on sexuality. Results for *American Baby* had the highest percentage of articles (5%; n=44) related to sexuality issues. In addition, of these 44 articles, half were identified as primary articles in which the main focus of the article was sexuality. The most common categories were “Balancing children and a

sex life” (17%), “Sex after birth” (17%), followed by “Birth control” (15%) and “Sexual function” (13%). Examples of article titles include:

- *Talking about sex: Q & A* (frequent column until 2004)
- *Sex, money, diapers* (November 1998)
- *Pregnant and sexy* (November 1999)
- *Birth control after baby* (November 2003)
- *My toddler saw me having sex! Will she be okay?* (December 2005)

### **Content analysis of *Baby Talk***

A total of 949 articles over 13 years (1998-2010) were analyzed for sexuality content. Results for *Baby Talk* magazine revealed one of the higher percentages of articles (4.4%; n=42) that included sexuality. One-third of the articles (n=14) were identified as primary articles in which the major focus was sexuality. For the 42 articles, the topics were wide-ranging from “Balancing children and sex” (20%), “Birth control” and “Looking sexy” (15%) to “Sex during pregnancy” (13%), “Sex after birth (13%), and “Sexual desire” (13%). Examples of article titles appearing in *Baby Talk* include:

- *In the mood for love - or not* (Jun/Jul 1998)
- *10 best ways to sneak in sex after baby* (February 2001)
- *Why pregnant women are sexy* (February 2004)
- *Not in the mood?* (February 2005)
- *Babyproof your sex life* (February 2007)

### **Content analysis of *Fit Pregnancy***

A total of 851 articles over 9 years (2002-2010) were analyzed for content. Results for *Fit Pregnancy* had one of the highest percentages (4.6%) of articles related to sexuality. Of these 39 articles, sexuality was the primary focus in nearly half the articles (18 of 39). Given the title of the magazine and its readership focus, it was not surprising that the category with the highest percentage of articles was “Sex during pregnancy” (29%). And although articles covered the range of topics, more were on “Looking sexy” (17%), “Sexual function” (17%), “Sex after birth” (15%), and “Balancing children and a sex life” (13%). Examples of article titles found in *Fit Pregnancy* include:

- *Practice safe sexiness* (Aug/Sept 2003)
- *Forget about sex* (Aug/Sept 2003)
- *Are you okay down there?* (Aug/Sept 2005)
- *Giving birth won't spoil your sex life* (Feb/Mar 2007)
- *The pregnancy orgasm* (Oct/Nov 2009)

### **Content analysis of *Good Housekeeping***

A total of 3,512 articles over 20 years (1991-2010) were analyzed for sexuality content. Results for *Good Housekeeping* showed that 1.2% of articles (n=43) were related to sexuality issues. Of these 43 articles, few (13 out of 43) included sexuality as a primary issue; in most cases the topic was included in other more general articles. One-quarter of articles were categorized as “Sexual desire” (26%), followed by “Balancing children and sex” (17%) and

“Sexual function” (13%). One-third of the sexuality-related articles in this magazine were coded as “Other” (28%) and were commonly found within a regular Q&A feature column entitled, “Your questions answered.” Sexuality questions were wide-ranging and often did not fit under the other specific topic areas. Some examples of articles on sexuality appearing in *Good Housekeeping* include:

- *Sex life fading?* (February 1996)
- *The quiz that could change your sex life* (August 2001)
- *What makes you feel sexy?* (February 2003)
- *Not tonight honey* (February 2007)
- *7 new date-night ideas* (February 2009)

### **Content analysis of *Mothering***

A total of 1,034 articles over 20 years (1991-2010) were analyzed for sexuality content. Results for *Mothering* revealed that 1.1% of articles (n=11) were related to sexuality, and 7 of the 11 articles had sexuality as the primary focus. For these 11 articles, nearly all (75%) were on the topic of “Balancing children and sex.” Examples of titles of articles in *Mothering* magazine include:

- *Sex Cool* (Summer 1991)
- *Sex after children* (Summer 1991)
- *When lovers become parents* (Winter 1996)
- *You sexy mama* (Jan/Feb 2000)
- *Just don't touch my breasts!* (Jan/Feb 2000)

### **Content analysis of *Parenting***

A total of 3,083 articles over 15 years (1996-2010) were analyzed for content. Results for *Parenting* revealed that 1.3% of articles (n=39) were related to sexuality, and nearly half of those (19 of the 39) had sexuality as the primary focus. While articles were coded across all the different categories, half were about the topic “Balancing children and sex” (51%). Considering the title of the magazine, this is not surprising that many of the sexuality articles would be about how to balance time spent parenting with sexuality. Examples of article titles in *Parenting* magazine include:

- *Birth control after the baby* (May 1998)
- *Sex after baby* (August 1999)
- *Pregnant sex: Everything you need to know* (November 2001)
- *How to make love to a mom* (November 2004)
- *Another reason sex is good for you* (November 2005)

### **Content analysis of *Parents***

A total of 3,101 articles over 20 years (1991-2010) were analyzed for sexuality content. Results for *Parents* magazine revealed that 3.1 % of articles (n=95) were related to sexuality (much higher than the 1% found in *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parenting*, and *Working Mother*), although sexuality was rarely the primary issue in these articles. Although the 95 articles that included sexuality covered a range of topics, the most common were “Balancing

children and sex” (24%), “Sexual desire” (21%), and “Sexual function.” Examples of sexuality-related article titles include:

- *Sex & Marriage* (regular column from 1997-2004)
- *The single mom’s guide to dating* (November 1999)
- *Behind the bedroom door* (November 2002)
- *Steps to a sexier you* (February 2004)
- *Pregnancy sex uncensored* (May 2006)

### **Content analysis of *Working Mother***

A total of 1,332 articles over 20 years (1991-2010) were analyzed for sexuality content. Results for *Working Mother* revealed that 1.4% of articles (n=19) were related to sexuality, and less than half had sexuality as the primary focus (8 of the 19). Not surprising, over half of the articles reflected the magazine’s title of a working mother balancing her life as a parent- in this case, “Balancing children and sex” (57%). This was the one magazine that had the highest percentage of articles on “Being single and sex” (14%). Other common topics were “Birth control” (14%) and “Looking sexy” (10%). Examples of article titles in *Working Mother* include:

- *Making time for making love* (February 1991)
- *Happiness: Sex & Sensibility* (November 2001)
- *All I really want for Mother’s Day is a sex life* (May 2003)
- *How’s your sex life?* (Feb/March 2007)
- *Hot mama: Results from online sex survey* (Feb/March 2009)

### **Research Question 3**

The third and final research question asked, “Has there been an increase in sexuality-related content in these magazines over 20 years?” The number of articles with sexuality-related content was found to range between 0-11 articles per year, with an average of three articles per year. See Table 6. Results did not reveal a significant increase since 1991 in articles containing sexuality content. Analysis of linear regression results indicates that the total number of sexuality-related articles did not change over time ( $p = .382$ ).

**Table 6***Number of articles on sexuality by magazine and year (N=332)*

	<i>American Baby</i>	<i>Baby Talk</i>	<i>Fit Pregnancy</i>	<i>Good Housekeeping</i>	<i>Motheri ng</i>	<i>Parenti ng</i>	<i>Paren ts</i>	<i>Working Mother</i>	<b>Tot al</b>
1991	2	NA	NA	3	3	NA	2	3	<b>13</b>
1992	1	NA	NA	4	0	NA	2	0	<b>7</b>
1993	3	NA	NA	4	0	NA	3	0	<b>10</b>
1994	2	NA	NA	2	0	NA	3	0	<b>7</b>
1995	3	NA	NA	5	1	NA	4	0	<b>13</b>
1996	2	NA	NA	3	1	1	3	0	<b>10</b>
1997	2	NA	NA	5	0	2	7	1	<b>17</b>
1998	3	4	NA	2	0	2	7	0	<b>18</b>
1999	3	3	NA	3	1	2	7	2	<b>21</b>
2000	2	4	NA	0	3	1	4	1	<b>15</b>
2001	4	2	NA	3	0	5	6	2	<b>22</b>
2002	2	1	4	0	0	1	7	1	<b>16</b>
2003	4	1	7	1	0	5	6	2	<b>26</b>
2004	1	5	5	0	0	4	4	0	<b>19</b>
2005	2	5	5	0	0	6	11	2	<b>31</b>
2006	0	4	7	1	0	2	9	1	<b>24</b>
2007	1	3	2	3	0	2	1	1	<b>13</b>
2008	2	3	4	2	1	3	4	1	<b>20</b>
2009	2	4	3	1	1	1	2	1	<b>15</b>
2010	3	3	2	1	0	2	3	1	<b>15</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>332</b>

NA= Magazine not available; from 1991 to 2001 some magazines were not available for analysis

## Discussion

The results of this exploratory study of the content of parenting magazines provide insight on the inclusion of articles on sexuality. As noted earlier, there is a link between motherhood and sexuality, which often affects a woman's sense of herself as a sexual person (Daniluk, 1998). New or expectant mothers may turn to parenting magazines to understand their sexual feelings when breastfeeding their child, or to make sense of the changes in their intimate relationships and levels of sexual desire during the early years of parenting. By having such articles in parenting magazines, the implied message is that she has more than her identity as a mother, but is acknowledged as a sexual person with continuing desires and interests. However, as the findings of the content analysis of such magazines reveal, by turning to parenting magazines, mothers will find little acknowledgement and few answers to their questions.

The content analysis revealed that of the thousands of articles examined across a range of popular parenting magazines read by mothers, only a handful of articles dealt with sexuality as a primary focus, and in some cases it was only remotely addressed as a secondary issue. The magazines that included the highest proportion of sexuality-related articles were *American Baby* (5%), *Fit Pregnancy* (4.6%), and *Baby Talk* (4.4%). Of their combined total of 2,684 articles analyzed for sexuality content in these three magazines, 125 articles dealt with sexuality-related topics. It should be noted that even though these magazines had the most articles on sexuality, less than half of the articles dealt primarily with sexuality; most included sexuality as a secondary issue – meaning it was buried within an article on another topic. Other magazines with larger readerships had virtually no articles at all. *Good Housekeeping*, *Mothering*, *Parenting*, and *Working Mother* had only about 1% of articles that addressed sexuality issues. Many of the magazines, which in some cases reach literally millions of mothers (e.g., *Good Housekeeping*, *Parenting*, and *Parents*), missed the opportunity to inform their readers about various sexuality topics that, according to Daniluk (1998), are central to motherhood. The fact that sexuality is rarely discussed in these magazines could be viewed as a disservice to their readers who have an interest in a variety of sexuality topics. Clearly, as mothers, women face a range of issues that are addressed in these magazines (e.g., balancing work and family, child care, meal times, discipline, to what toys to buy and how to handle the stress). Sexuality is also a part of the issues she faces. The results could inform editors of magazines geared for mothers who may want to consider expanding their content to include more information related to sexuality.

While there were a relatively small number of articles devoted to sexuality (332 out of 14,746 or 2.3%), those that were included covered a wide range of topics related to sexuality. Topics ran the gamut from sex during pregnancy and after the birth, to contraception, sexual desire and sexual functioning. The most common topic was “Balancing children and a sex life.” In fact, over half the articles dealing with sexuality in *Mothering*, *Parenting*, and *Working Mother* were on this topic. On the other hand, issues that one might expect a pregnant or parenting woman to confront, such as concerns about desire or sexual functioning, were given very little attention in many magazines. Women who might have questions or concerns in these areas were often met with silence. In addition, sexual issues for single mothers were rarely discussed, and only a handful of articles out of 14,746 mentioned sexual issues in a same-sex relationship. It was implied or assumed in most articles that the mother was in a heterosexual marriage. Even *Mothering* magazine, which describes itself as a “non-conventional parenting magazine,” devoted no time to issues of single mothers and sex, or even the more general issue of mothers and sexual desire.

Finally, the results did not find a significant change in the number of sexuality-related articles appearing in these magazines over time. In fact, for some individual magazines, there was a slight decrease over the twenty years. For example, some magazines had regular feature articles related to sexuality but stopped running them. Specifically, *American Baby* featured a regular column entitled “Talking about Sex: Q & A” until 2004 when it stopped appearing. In another example of the decline in sexuality-related articles, *Parents* magazine featured a column entitled “Love and Marriage Q & A” which in 1995 changed to “Marriage Q & A;” in 1997 it changed the column title to “Sex & Marriage,” but in 2004 changed it to a more general column titled, “Together Time.”

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

One limitation of this study had to do with access to earlier issues of some of the magazines. While the initial intent of this research project was to analyze the selected magazines geared for mothers from 1991 to 2010, some magazines were not available for the entire time period. Due to the publication start date or limited library holdings available through a national library search, only five of the eight magazines were available for the entire time period selected for study. In the case of limited library holdings, the researchers contacted the magazine’s publishing company for back issues but requests were unable to be filled. Another limitation was the possibility that more sexuality-related articles may have been found in other issues not selected for analysis. While four issues across the four seasons of each year were selected, there is a possibility that different results would be found if other issues had been chosen. A third limitation was the possibility that an article contained sexuality content as a secondary issue but was missed by the researchers. Due to the fact that so few articles had the word “sex” or “sexuality” in the title, this meant the researchers had to carefully read through all the articles that might remotely discuss sexuality to look for relevant content. For example, an article focusing on great summer vacations for your family might include a section on sexuality issues (e.g. how to find time for romance despite having the children around) but one would need to read through the entire article to find this. Despite our best efforts, it is possible that there were articles that included content on sexuality as a secondary issue that were missed.

Those desiring to pursue content analysis of magazines might consider ways to increase access to older publications and to a wider range of magazines read by mothers. This study focused on the eight most popular magazines geared for pregnant and parenting women. Future research might focus on a wider range of women’s magazines, as well as those marketed to diverse groups. Perhaps other women’s magazines (not necessarily geared to mothers) contain more articles on sexuality issues unique to mothers and therefore provide some of the needed information that mothers will not find in specific parenting magazines. In addition, future research might consider the typical age of the children the mother is responsible for. Although *Good Housekeeping* repeatedly headed the list of popular magazines for mothers, their children may be much older than those of mothers who read *American Baby*. Perhaps this has an impact on the type of sexuality-related articles, although the findings from this exploratory study do not appear to support this. In addition, one might consider that many women are not just the mother of a newborn, but may have children that span a wide age-range. A final suggestion for future research would be to compare the content available through online parenting magazine subscriptions versus the content available in print magazines. Perhaps the availability of sexuality-related articles online allows for greater access to such content.

## Conclusion

Mothers have many questions and concerns about sexuality. Magazines targeted to mothers have a great opportunity to address these issues and acknowledge concerns that many of their readers share by including such articles. Unfortunately, the content analyses of these eight parenting magazines revealed that many have missed the opportunity to respond to their audience's questions surrounding sexuality. On the one hand, there has been an acknowledgement of pregnant women and new mothers as sexual, as boldly portrayed by the covers of popular magazines, such as those featuring Demi Moore and other celebrities. However, the findings from this research demonstrate that this acknowledgement of mothers as sexual is only superficial. It stops at the cover. The content of these magazines do not seem to suggest that there is a link between motherhood and sexuality, but that the two remain mutually exclusive.

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