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Depicting #fatherhood involvement on Instagram: Caregiving, affection, and stimulation

Abstract

This article aims to analyze how fatherhood is performed on Instagram by examining the domains of involvement. Parental roles and behaviors have changed in the last years and are currently a relevant social and scientific topic. The way that fatherhood is performed is also a frequent subject on social media, spreading the ideal of a new fatherhood and portraying the father as committed to childcare duties. The hashtag “fatherhood” was used to identify posts on Instagram representing father involvement. A final sample of 121 posts was identified. Results depicted three main domains in fatherhood’s online representations of involvement: (1) child caregiving; (2) fathers as a source of the child’s affection; and (3) fathers involved in play, committed to the child’s interests and offering new opportunities of stimulation. The display of fatherhood as a role requiring dedication and effort also emerged, but to a lesser extent. Nevertheless, only positive emotions were shared, depicting pleasure in the performed role, and communicating an ideal and self-enhancing profile. Moreover, posts seemed to disseminate an ideal of fatherhood rather than raise questions or discuss the challenges related to it. Findings uncover how media social representations of fatherhood are still an unfinished process, failing to capture diversity and challenges in contemporary families.

Keywords

Fatherhood, father involvement, Instagram, digital expression, hashtag.

1. Introduction

The sharing of photographs representing fathers involved with the child is currently a frequent occurrence on social media, with photos typically showing an engaged father, committed to parenting duties. Nowadays, the image of the father as the family breadwinner or as emotionally distant from childcare has been replaced by the image of an involved father, sharing household tasks, and engaged in the child’s discipline, playtime, and caregiving (Cabrera, Volling & Barr, 2018; Lamb, 2004). Hence, fathers are represented as playing an active role in child caregiving, as well as in children’s growth and in family well-being (Cabrera *et al.*, 2018; Gregory & Milner, 2011; World Health Organization, 2007). This new representation of fatherhood has moved away from the traditional cultural ideals of masculinity (Frank, 1998), supporting a new way of being a father and living fatherhood

(Gregory & Milner, 2011). Several recent events add to build a new culture of how fatherhood should be performed and shared. Among which stands out, for example, the implementation of new governmental policies, such as the right of both parents to enjoy parental leaves and the extension of leaves to be exclusively used by fathers (Henz, 2019). Feminists' movements also contribute to the discussion of parental rights and duties focusing on equal father involvement, especially in household tasks, arguing that this is critical to achieve equality (Doucet & Lee, 2014). The call for a greater involvement by men in family chores is mainly anchored in the increased number of women in the labor market, as well as the diversity of family structures and dynamics. The high rate of divorces introduced social changes about gender attitudes, appealing to this new model of fatherhood (Cabrera *et al.*, 2014; Collier & Sheldon, 2008; Dermott & Miller, 2015). However, imbalances between mother and father involvement still remain, with fathers often perceived as peripheral to mothers (Ammari *et al.*, 2018; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Monteiro *et al.*, 2017; Planalp *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, real social changes on fatherhood may be slower than public debates or social policies seem to suggest (Collier & Sheldon, 2008; Gregory & Milner, 2011). Although the new model of fatherhood is echoed by social and cultural changes –discussing how fatherhood should be performed– there is still tension between social expectations and real father behaviors and practices (Collier & Sheldon, 2008; Gregory & Milner, 2011). This combination can have consequences on how fatherhood is portrayed: reflecting the way it should be done, rather than how it is done.

The changes in fathers' roles in contemporary families have led to debates about fatherhood, involving its ideals, components and responsibilities, with social media playing an important role in its dissemination (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Gregory & Milner, 2011). Social media and digital environments dominated by visual elements, such as Instagram, have increased the act of taking photographs, introducing new dynamics into how individuals communicate and present themselves (Serafinelli, 2017), including their parental roles. These social platforms have been widely used to share daily routines, interactions and behaviors, allowing others to uncover families' representations of parenthood (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Scheibling, 2018). Currently, smartphones or mobile digital technologies are relevant tools for the communication of fatherhood and its ideals, by registering constant updates and interactions through users' profiles, uncovering new attitudes, behaviors and emotions of fathers in contemporary families (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Moignan *et al.*, 2017; Scheibling, 2019).

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of how photos shared on Instagram reflect the construction of collective representations of fatherhood by analyzing how the father is represented as involved with the child. Drawing on psychosocial models of fatherhood and impression management approaches, the construction of father involvement is conceptualized as resulting from a blend of cultural traditions and expectations, reflecting feelings, meanings, interactions, and behaviors expressed in socially-mediated environments. Specifically, we aim to analyze and describe how fathers are involved with their child(ren), as communicated on Instagram posts using the tag #fatherhood. This is timely, taking into account that social platforms have been widely used to disseminate an understanding of fatherhood, providing clues to men's definition of themselves as fathers (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Moignan *et al.*, 2017; Scheibling, 2019).

First, we will start by presenting a brief overview about father involvement and the construction of fatherhood in digital environments. Next, we will detail how snapshots were identified and categorized. Finally, we will discuss how and in which ways father involvement is constructed in areas such as caregiving, affection and stimulation.

2. Father involvement: an overview

The role of the father in contemporary families is currently a relevant scientific and social topic (Barker, Iles & Ramchandani, 2017; Cabrera *et al.*, 2018; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Lamb, 2004). New beliefs about parents' duties and gender roles (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015; Cabrera *et al.*, 2014; Gregory & Milner, 2011) introduced new expectations about fathers, now perceived as key figures in the child's development (Cabrera *et al.*, 2018; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Lamb, 2004). The importance of the father on family dynamics has been reflected in social policies, such as the increase of paternal leaves, or labor regulations, aiming to promote a more active and engaged form of fathering (Collier & Sheldon, 2008; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Henz, 2019; Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2010).

However, studies show that the way in which parents are involved with their child is not equal: fathers are mainly involved with their child's social and leisure activities, rather than in direct care and responsibility domains. The latter remain typically performed by mothers, often perceived as the main caregivers (Ammari *et al.*, 2018; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Monteiro *et al.*, 2017; Planalp *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, there is an imbalance between how parents perceive their involvement with childcare: mothers perceive fathers as less involved with direct care and responsibility for the children than fathers perceive themselves (Mercer *et al.*, 2018).

As research examining fatherhood increases, theories have emerged to conceptualize the extent to which fathers are involved (e.g., Lamb, 2000; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine, 1987; Pleck, 2010). One of the most influential frameworks conceptualizes how fathers may be involved with different domains of childcare (Pleck, 2010), describing five main dimensions of involvement: (1) *Positive engagement* includes interactions related to the child's development; (2) *Warmth & responsiveness* corresponds to affective care of the child; (3) *Control* relates to the child's monitoring and decision-making; (4) *Indirect care* describes activities without direct interactions, but necessary to child's development and well-being, e.g. scheduling doctor's appointments, buying clothes for the child; and (5) *Responsibility* involves the father's assurance that the child's needs and well-being are met (Pleck, 2010). This model understands father involvement as an individual process, influenced by a blend of social, cultural, and contextual aspects, such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, and interpersonal relationships, which have an influence on child outcomes (Barker *et al.*, 2017; Cabrera *et al.*, 2014, 2018; Kroll *et al.*, 2016). It is important to bear in mind that how fatherhood is represented and performed is anchored on the interplay between social representations of fatherhood, disseminated by legacy and social media, and public policies regulating parental rights and duties (Collier & Sheldon, 2008; Scharrer, 2012). Moreover, different sorts of social media have been used to discuss these emerging trends, contributing to the communication of new models of fatherhood, namely by the spread of personal or commercial social media accounts/blogs focusing on fatherhood topics (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Scheibling, 2019). Thus, it is critical to examine how fatherhood has been represented and disseminated by social media. Although an increased number of studies have explored how parents represent themselves on social media platforms (Fletcher & StGeorge, 2011; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Scheibling, 2019), most of these studies still remain focused on the mother's perspectives and communications. Hence, there is a call to better understand how fathers are represented in social media (Salzmann-Erikson & Erikson, 2013).

3. Constructing fatherhood in digital environments

Studies examining online expressions of parenthood have contributed to the reframing of fatherhood, based on discussions related to fathering, family, work, and gender (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015; Scheibling, 2019; Seko & Tiidenberg, 2016; Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017). These studies uncover the growing importance of photography, not only as a form of expression, but also as a form of social communication about parental duties and norms (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015; Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017). Digital sharing regarding parenting

has been changing over time, following the evolution of information and communication technologies, from communication that was mainly text-based to a non-textual format, with pictures now being dominant as a significant expression of communication in which text becomes accessory.

The widespread use of social media networks, the extensive access to the internet, and the simplification of processes through applications (i.e., apps) introduced new dynamics into how people communicate and share information, leading to transformations of socialization practices (Serafinelli, 2017). This has also been echoed in the essence of self-presentation on social media networks, in which visual objects are a central part of the user's online identity construction and impression management (Goffman, 1959), and are considered key elements of the social media platforms through which users perform among their audiences.

Among social media platform users, parents are emerging as a fast-growing number, discussing specific topics related to parenthood, such as the share of family daily events and challenges (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015, 2018; Gibson & Hanson, 2013; Morris, 2014; Salzmänn-Erikson & Erikson, 2013), and men present themselves online as fathers (Scheibling, 2019). Social media platforms, including Instagram, are widely used as instruments to understand fatherhood, providing clues to men's definition of themselves as fathers while constructing experiences (Kelly & Tropp, 2016; Scheibling, 2019). However, how fatherhood is communicated on different social media platforms varies due to the different features and formats the platform presents. Posts on Instagram, by valuing its visual component, mostly disseminate a positive and performative role of fatherhood which can be contextualized by adding a caption, whereas blogs, in opposition to Instagram, value a textual format and are mainly used to communicate reflections and challenges about fatherhood, often introducing controversial topics related to parenting (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015, 2016; Rolland & Correia, 2018a). Therefore, different platforms engender a normalization of certain practices or behaviors, and how they are perceived by its users (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015, 2018; Fletcher & StGeorge, 2011).

Instagram, a social networking platform available since 2010 and with a growing number of users (Omnicores, 2020), is characterized by a strong visual component, which is an appealing factor for sharing and consuming content among its users. On Instagram, users give special attention to the curation of their profile, valuing photographic aesthetics both in the sense of appealing to followers and of constructing an ideal or desirable image (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Zappavigna, 2016). In online construction of the self, users combine multimedia elements and cultural references, aiming to represent one's self as authentic and ideal as possible, namely by posting positive and funny images (Papacharissi, 2010; Toma & Hancock, 2013; Zappavigna, 2016). Images can be complemented with captions, where the presence of hashtags is common. These hashtags are used as part of the communication with several intents and logics of usage, from giving context to publications, to reinforce the notion of building and belonging to a community (Laestadius, 2017), "situated between self-representation and public discourses" (Locatelli, 2017, p. 10).

Parenting posts on Instagram share snapshots of the family's everyday life with different audiences, in a public or private sphere, increasing the mediated visibility on how parenting is performed. Still, the photographs shared tend to communicate good moments, emphasizing cuteness, milestones, positive family/friend moments, eliciting positive emotions in the viewer (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015). They invite viewers to assess/share the emotions and experiences of the photographer (Zappavigna, 2016). Photographs with fathers may be used to obtain support and attention from the audience, and disseminate the ideals of a new fatherhood (Ammari *et al.*, 2018; Dermott & Miller, 2015).

The analysis of the snapshots of fatherhood contexts offers an opportunity to comprehend how fathers engage themselves with children and in which specific domains of involvement. This is important given that fatherhood images and ideals are not simply

reflections about being a father, rather, they provide meaningful discursive repertoires or tools to interpret and define paternal identities, experiences, and expectations (Collett, Vercel & Boykin, 2015; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Marsiglio *et al.*, 2005; Ranson, 2015). Thus, it is critical to understand how father involvement is displayed on social media, particularly on Instagram, a widely accessed photo-sharing platform (Leaver, Highfield & Abidin, 2020), which has changed the ways in which images are seen, produced (Serafinelli, 2017), and distributed. Bearing this in mind, it is meaningful to explore how parents perceive, construct, and share fathering on social platforms. Specifically, we aim to examine and describe how father involvement, as communicated on Instagram, captures the multiple domains described in Pleck's model (2010) by examining how and in what ways fathers are involved with their children.

4. Methodology

This article analyzes the visual discourse logic (Rose, 2001) of images published on Instagram with the hashtag #fatherhood to explore representations and the domains of father involvement with children up to preschool age., i.e., until 6 years old, according to the World Health Organization's age ranges. To this end, we explored different visual themes that could emerge from Instagram posts addressing the following questions: which are the main father domains of involvement represented on Instagram? How are the father's involvement domains constructed in a social media context? What are the main valences and emotions shared in the photos?

The corpus of data was created inspired by the operating procedures of others' research (e.g., Jorge, 2019; Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017). We queried Instagram for hashtags including the word "father" and a set of suggestions were returned. The choice to search expressions in English was due to its being the typical language used for most users (Nurhantoro & Wulandari, 2017; Jorge, 2019). Among the top results were expressions like #fathersday, #fatherandson or #fatherdaughter. However, the most relevant one for this study, for its comprehensiveness and neutrality when compared to other suggestions, was #fatherhood, which at the time of collection (October 2019) totaled 2,291,600 publications. During the period of one week, from October 11th to 18th 2019, we daily accessed Instagram (without logging in), typed "#fatherhood" into the search field, and screen-captured the first 100 posts from the results. To each screen-capture a number was attributed and saved in a dataset constructed for the study.

Our initial sample included 800 publications. Taking into account the study goals, we opted to restrict the final corpus to photographs (i.e., not videos), and removed all the commercial, religious, pregnancy, ultrasound, quotes and meme related content. Although we are aware that the act of posting images regarding parenting may start before birth, with the publication of ultrasounds or belly pictures (Seko & Tiidenberg, 2016; Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017), we decided not to include them because they do not allow for the depiction of the defined domains of father involvement ($n = 4$ of a belly and $n = 1$ of an ultrasound). Images without at least one child were also removed, narrowing down the final sample to 239 posts. URLs were collected to revisit the publications after one and a half months, and if the post was no longer available it was removed from the corpus, following Instagram's good research practices (Laestadius, 2017). However, all the posts remained available.

Although there is no consensus on whether the information available on the internet is public or private, there are recommendations that help researchers to make decisions about it (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Based on these recommendations we decided that if the posts were available to the public in general, without requiring login or protected by a password, and defined as public in privacy levels (i.e., public, private, as required by Instagram), they were included in our corpus. Still, considering that the corpus involved children we decided to anonymize the collected data, e.g., faces, name of the profile,

comments, as well as not citing the captions *verbatim*. This decision relies on the fact that although the posts were public, the authors may not expect their content to be shared outside the platform (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018).

5. Results

5.1. An overview of the posts

The analysis of the posts and the understanding of how fatherhood was represented in the social environment of Instagram included photographs; captions were used to better understand the message of the photograph. However, aspects such as the number of followers, likes (available at the time) and comments were not taken into consideration in the analysis, since they were not part of our study goals. The identified posts were coded based on a system of categories exclusively created for the analysis of the photographs.

The coding of father involvement was based on the Multidimensional Model of Father Involvement (Pleck, 2010). This model was chosen as the categorization frame through which to identify the different ways that fathers may be involved with their child. Although Pleck's model is linked to psychology, it was used to analyze the posts taking into account that it is one of the most influential models on the topic, allowing for the identification of how fathers engage with their children and in which particular activities. This model, by disentangling the different possibilities of involvement, led to a better understanding of how fatherhood is represented on Instagram. The model was used to give support to the analysis of the photographs. The original dimensions were adapted based on posts' content, rather than by making an effort to fit posts to previously existing categories. The codes were derived both bottom-up and top-down from the literature, and from the characteristics of the snapshots, such as the photo's content, valence, or aesthetics (e.g., Moignan *et al.*, 2017; Zappavigna, 2016). Both authors performed this process, as well as the analysis of the content of the photographs, and the creation of codes and categories to analyze the content of the corpus. The categories were not mutually exclusive. The sample of posts was independently categorized by the two authors and disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached.

By specifically focusing on posts' content, we were able to analyze themes or patterns related with father involvement and how they were expressed in different users' posts. Results show that among the 239 posts that made up our corpus of analysis, father involvement was identified in 121 of them. The remaining corpus is composed of posts of children alone or in the presence of others, but where father involvement was not appreciated: elements were just posing. These posts mainly displayed children smiling to the camera in a variety of scenarios. Although these photographs may suggest that they are part of father-child activities, the content does not allow us to identify how and if they were interacting. Therefore, we concluded that father involvement was not directly represented and these posts were considered as outside the scope of our study. Indeed, posts involving posing are commonly shared on social platforms, due to the function of these platforms as a photographic repository and photo album. Moreover, sharing images, namely in public profiles such as those composing our sample, is also a way of maintaining their audience's attention by providing constant updates of life moments through the hashtag #fatherhood (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Toma & Hancock, 2013).

Concerning the corpus of posts representing father involvement, identified posts uncovered different domains in which father involvement was shared with others by being publicly posted on Instagram. These posts were later categorized, and according to their content, the original domains of the multidimensional model of father involvement were adapted. The domains of direct and indirect care were merged into the category *Caregiving*, while the category of *Affection* included aspects related to warmth and affection. Finally, the domains of play, outside leisure, and teaching were merged into the category *Stimulation*.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample according to the father involvement dimensions and categories inherent to them. The posts analysed, irrespective of the domains of father involvement, were mainly set in an outside context portraying the father and child relationship, with the mother or significant others was portrayed in photos to a lesser extent. These posts were typically used to communicate intimacy i.e., father and child closed together. Posts' themes varied across the different domains of father involvement: e.g., daily activities of routine were more common among *caregiving* categories, whereas leisure was commonly represented in *affection* or *stimulating* dimensions. The emotions registered were mainly positive, in color photos and where the public Instagram users comprising our sample preferred not to pixelate the face or otherwise anonymize their child.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Identified Photographs.

	Domains of father involvement					
	Caregiving		Affection		Stimulating	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Total	10	8.3	59	48.8	52	42.9
Contexts						
Inside the house	2	20	13	22.	12	23.1
Outside	6	60	26	44.1	39	75
School environment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other places (e.g. hospital)	1	10	4	6.8	0	0
Not perceived	1	10	16	27.1	1	1.9
Interpersonal relations						
Father-child relationship	10	90.9	49	74.2	45	73.8
Mother-father-child relationship	0	0	9	13.7	6	9.8
Significant others	1	9.1	8	12.1	10	16.4
Social distance						
Depicting intimacy	6	60	54	91.5	33	63.5
Depicting more social distance	4	40	5	8.5	19	36.6
Photo's "theme"						
Daily activities/moments	8	80	9	15.3	6	11.5
Celebratory events	0	0	2	3.4	3	5.8
Infant's milestones	1	10	10	16.9	0	0
Leisure	1	10	14	23.7	43	82.7
Not perceived	0	0	24	40.7	0	0
"Emotion's" valence						
Positive	7	31.8	80	62.5	56	47.0
Negative	0	0	0	0	3	2.6
Neutral	9	40.9	30	23.4	37	31.1
Not perceived	6	27.3	18	14.1	23	19.3
Photo's Aesthetics						
Photo of a photo	0	0	2	3.1	2	3.5
Montage	0	0	2	3.1	1	1.7
Child face pixelated	0	0	1	1.6	1	1.7
Black & White	1	9.1	8	12.5	1	1.7
Color	10	90.9	50	78.1	51	87.9
Containing a message	0	0	1	1.6	2	3.5

Source: Own elaboration.

Overall, the posts communicating father involvement had an over-representation of white middle-aged men; but black and Asian-origin men were also captured. Most of the posts represented daily moments between fathers and their son/daughter, rarely including other figures, such as the mother or siblings. Although English was the main language used to communicate photos' descriptions, we registered captions in other languages, e.g., Portuguese, German, Italian. Images and captions seemed to reflect users' experiences related to fatherhood, aiming to share with others their conceptualizations, through the presentation of daily moments and activities. Our analysis also captured: the context of involvement (e.g.,

inside house, outside); interpersonal relations (e.g., mother, siblings), and emotion valence (e.g., negative, positive, neutral). Even though the corpus is composed of posts from users from different contexts, languages and nationalities, aspects of their background were rarely communicated, ignoring specific and cultural norms related to fathering, and thus reflecting an Instagram posting culture.

5.2. Domains of father involvement on Instagram

5.2.1. Caregiving

Of the domains of father involvement on Instagram, the category identified as *caregiving* was the smallest one, representing 8.3% of the sample. Among this content the expressions of care sometimes began on the child's first days of life, namely at the hospital, with a picture of the father carrying the child home, and captions that conveyed the idea of the beginning of a new stage of life, which expressed positive emotions concerning the current moment. The content coded with the *caregiving* dimension often displayed activities related to childcare, mainly in a direct way, e.g., changing diapers, giving a bath, feeding or putting the child to sleep. These posts tended to communicate the father's competence in parenting roles, as a way to naturalize the daily family routine (Rowland & Correia, 2018a).

Among *the* representations of *caregiving*, one of the most frequent was feeding. This activity was not portrayed as a simple everyday activity, but as a privileged connection between father and child, mainly by the absence of the mother or significant others in the photo. Feeding, as a moment of bonding and interaction, was shared in expressions of a smiling father or child, sometimes a father and child gaze, set in a harmonious environment. Captions that accompanied this type of photo also reinforced the idea of the meal as a special moment, using expressions like “best feeling” or “life is good.” Feeding was represented through pictures of the father giving the bottle to the child, giving food to the mouth or by capturing meal or snack times. Among these was present the idea that fatherhood prioritizes the child's needs (see Figure 1). The feeding activity tagged with #fatherhood was common to different phases of the child's life, in which scenarios of child meltdown or negative emotions were not present. Because photographs were published on a social media platform, users build their image, or use it as a photo album, and may wish to associate only positive moments with it, self-enhancing their performance as fathers and communicating idealized versions of themselves (Toma & Hancock, 2013).

Figure 1. Act of feeding. A common activity depicted by #fatherhood.

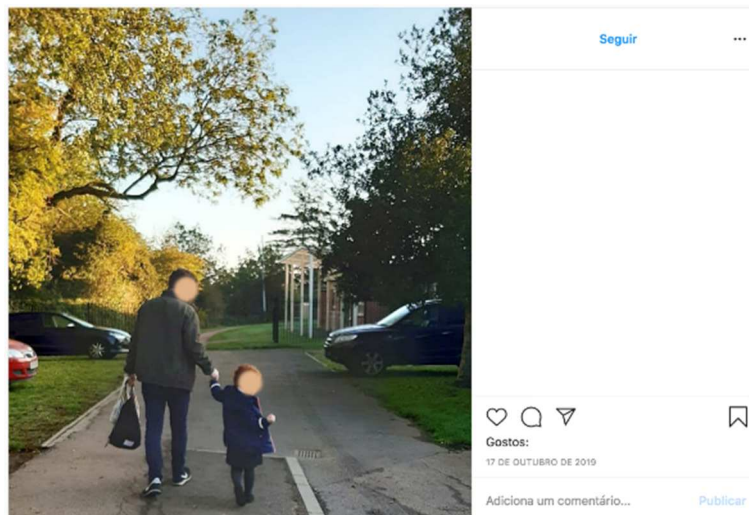


Source: Instagram.

In addition to feeding, napping was also an activity frequently encompassed by the *caregiving* dimension in the fatherhood context, without displaying significant others. Napping was shared through moments of children sleeping, such as father and child napping together, or with the child napping on the father's lap, mostly in indoor contexts. Again, the posts communicated napping as a moment for bonding. Contrarily, bath time or changing diapers were shared as funny moments, communicating direct care via a leisure perspective. These posts tried to transmit involvement as moments of joy by sharing pictures where it was possible to, for example, see a baby with small amounts of moisturizer on its body creating a pattern, or a picture of a baby sneaking through the tub, or a father holding a baby in his arms, away from him, both with surprised faces due to a misplaced diaper which resulted in a "record leak" as explained in the caption. Some of the captions that accompanied the photos tended to explain situations by relying on humor. Other captions revealed not only self-criticism— taking responsibility for not having performed the task correctly —but also preferences for domestic chores, giving a wider picture of father involvement. This type of caption seemed to serve the double function of displaying the challenges related to fatherhood, providing funny moments capturing audience's attention (Zappavigna, 2016), and communicating the subtle message of the father's "natural lack of skills" in some parenting roles (Rowland & Correia, 2018a).

To a lesser extent, other forms of care emerged, such as taking the child to school (Figure 2), to the hair salon/barber, or to the dentist. This type of involvement was more salient with older children, transmitting the idea that as the child grows, it allows for the father's involvement in a wide range of activities. These moments were mainly outside of daily routines of care, showing a willingness to portray multiplicity and the variety of moments concerning father involvement. The sharing of specific events also seemed to reflect different fatherhood stages and moments of father-child relations.

Figure 2. Father walking the child to preschool.



Source: Instagram.

Among the #fatherhood hashtag in the *caregiving* dimension, it was possible to identify the father figure as active in his role and not as a spectator. Posts seemed to disseminate the idea of fathers as able to construct a relationship with the child across different moments and stages of infancy. These posts were often displayed with captions that, according to our analysis, seemed to have two major functions: (1) contextualizing the image by describing the situation; and/or (2) providing an emotional print by associating (positive) emotions with the

narrative, namely by demonstrating affection towards the situation or the child. The wide range of situations in which fathers were presented in caregiving activities communicated their active role in intimate and daily moments of childcare, depicting physical and emotional proximity with the child (Moignan *et al.*, 2018; Plantin, 2018). However, it is important to emphasize that among our sample, the specific involvement with *caregiving* was the least frequent category, uncovering that is not a trendy dimension about fatherhood on Instagram. Although it is argued that social media is often used to disseminate a new ideal of fatherhood (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Gregory & Milner, 2011), our analysis showed that compared with other forms of involvement, *caregiving* was less common. As such, the dissemination of a “new fatherhood” seems to be anchored on the stereotypical fathering roles of play and leisure, rather than an involvement with “real care.” This finding suggests not only a preference regarding the type of involvement to be shared on Instagram and how users represent fatherhood, but may also point to inequalities regarding involvement with childrearing tasks.

5.2.2. Affection

The posts communicating *affection* –transmitting joy and happiness by demonstrating affection, warmth and/or appreciation toward the child– were found frequently in our sample ($n=59$; 48.8%). Typically, these publications shared tender moments, portraying a loving relationship between the father and his child, e.g., images of the father holding the child, hugging (Figure 3), or kissing him/her. Hugging was a common way of communicating affection and seemed to be used as a form of nonverbal communication, not only to show love and affection, but also to transmit complicity in the father-child relationship in different contexts, such as outdoor activities, birthday parties, or child’s milestones. Complementary to hugging, kissing was also commonly present; however, it was frequently the father kissing the child, and not the opposite. In such posts, declarations of love were reinforced in captions through expressions like “Endless love,” “in love” or “You are my world.” To a lesser extent, a few quotes also tried to express the feeling of the child towards the father classifying him as “the best.”

Figure 3. Hugging, a form of affection expressed via #fatherhood.



Source: Instagram.

In general, pictures and captions classified under the *affection* dimension were used to construct fatherhood on Instagram in association with a set of positive feelings by sharing positive moments, e.g., waving, making the victory sign, winking, swinging, cuddling or

holding hands. These posts portrayed the father, not only as a source of affection, but also of protection and of responsibility for the child's development and well-being, conveying fathers as nurturing (Gregory & Milner, 2011; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Lamb *et al.*, 2017). This type of post is in line with dominant social representations of fatherhood, with its affective presence related to positive child development (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Cabrera *et al.*, 2018; Lamb, 2004; Moignan *et al.*, 2017). Indeed, the importance of father affection toward the child and other family members has been widely used to engage fathers in their paternal roles and promote rewarding relationships with strong emotional bonds between the father and child (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Milkie & Denny, 2014; Rowland & Correia 2018b). Social media also has emphasized the affective role of the father on the child's education, merging the role of affective figure, moral guide, and breadwinner, thus representing them as responsible for the family's well-being (Scheibling, 2019).

The photographs communicating affection tended to rely on close-ups as a way to express the intimacy of the father-child relationship (Zappavigna, 2016), and included only the father and the child. However, photographs of celebratory events or outdoor leisure tended to include other figures, such as siblings or the mother. As in the *caregiving* dimension, images communicated only positive emotions, showing happy moments reinforcing the harmonious father-child relationship. As such, it is argued that these photographs should not be understood as a documentary of parenting, but as a selective and biased representation of it (Moignan *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, the lack of pseudonymity on Instagram decreases the sharing of negative emotions or feelings (Ammari *et al.*, 2018) as a way of engaging the audience (Morris, 2014; Zappavigna, 2016).

5.2.3. Stimulation

This dimension was prominent among the analyzed posts about father involvement, representing 42.9% of the sample. These posts conveyed moments of father involvement in play, leisure, and to a lesser extent teaching. These are aspects often perceived as the chore of father involvement (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Monteiro *et al.*, 2017; Planalp *et al.*, 2013).

Stimulation was related to #fatherhood mainly through the sharing of diverse moments, such as walking or playing together, involving children of diverse ages and commonly in outdoor environments. Contact with nature, hiking, beach walks with the father holding the child's hand or pushing the stroller conveyed the idea of support or togetherness while also as stimulation by presenting new scenarios and experiences. To these were added posts of daytime activities in the park with the father holding the child while presenting to them a new kind of stimulus provided by the natural environment itself.

Although most empirical studies describe the dominance of father involvement in physical, rough-and-tumble play (Monteiro *et al.*, 2017; Planalp *et al.*, 2013), posts uncovered how fathers engaged in different practices of leisure, namely by providing new experiences for the child, as displayed in Figure 4. Indeed, the father presented as a main figure providing stimulation, by affording new experiences and moments for their child, was frequently used to illustrate the "new roles" of contemporary fathers: committed to child development, engaged with the child's interests and partaking in their playful moments (Gregory & Milner, 2014; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). This can be seen as disseminating the idea of a change in gender and parenting norms (Dermott & Miller, 2015). At the same time, it moves away from the online representation of a more traditional form of masculinity and conveys a change in the social rationale of manhood where fatherhood is a crucial element (Frank, 1998).

Among *stimulation* posts, ones showing the father reading to the child were less common but still present, and portrayed as an activity of father involvement across children of different ages. As noted in the captions, the act of reading a book to a child was presented as a part of a routine that provided the possibility for the father to engage with the child, to strengthen

bonds and to “dream together,” rather than as an activity of supervision or teaching. Indoor examples of the *stimulation* dimension also presented posts involving different activities, such as costume parties, playing games or instruments, and one post of a father with three daughters in the kitchen with cooking hats. Although such examples fit in the *stimulation* dimension, whenever they portrayed different activities in which the father was involved with the child in the development of cognitive abilities, they tended to show a more informal way of doing so. Hence, these representations moved away from the traditional view of the father as an educator and disciplinarian (Cabrera *et al.*, 2018; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Lamb, 2004).

Figure 4. Stimulation: the father engages the child's interests, providing new experiences.



Source: Instagram.

Although posts related to teaching or discipline were less common, a few displayed fathers in the role of educators. These were frequently situated inside the house, showing engagement with tasks related to the child's homework as a moment typical of family routines, and not portraying an image of a supervising father that could be associated with traditional masculinity or rigid norms. Some messages highlighted the real commitment of fatherhood, aiming to distinguishing dads from “real fathers,” who were portrayed as really involved in the daily challenges of care to the point of reinventing themselves to get close to the child, their needs and their interests. Being a father was also equated with being a leader –a moral guide for the child. This type of post disseminated the ideal of continuity of care, requiring a permanent effort and commitment to the role.

Stimulation posts helped to construct a representation of fatherhood associated with, on the one hand, a diversified number of father-child activities, in indoor and outdoor contexts, where physical play was not prominent. On the other hand, these posts did not communicate a rigid or supervising father role. In fact, most of the posts highlighted the bonds between father and child to express positive experiences often represented by close physical contact. Simultaneously, these posts highlighted the moral role of the father in the child's life. This is in line with the way fathers are socially represented and it has been presented as a “strong” argument for promoting a greater engagement of the father, especially in popular media (Cabrera *et al.*, 2014, 2018; Lamb, 2004; Milkie & Denny, 2014). The spread of this message was also present in some posts, presenting fathers committed to a child's positive development by engaging with his/er interests and introducing new learning opportunities.

6. Conclusion

Posts conveying fatherhood are widely disseminated on Instagram, displaying fathers engaged in a variety of activities with their child(ren), but those we analysed mainly focused on direct interactions involving affection and stimulation. Direct care, a central component of childrearing classified in our analysis as *caregiving*, was barely represented. These representations are in line with the descriptions of father involvement in legacy media, portraying the father as mainly committed to leisure and play and peripheral to mothers in caregiving (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Milkie & Denny, 2014). Nevertheless, the posts of our sample typically represented fathers exclusively involved with their child. Moreover, identified photographs representing father involvement tended to value faces, mainly at close angles, which is a typical approach for communicating intimacy and constructing interaction and engagement with the viewer (Zappavigna, 2016). This trend uncovers the performative role of fathering on social media, reflecting Instagram's features and possibilities, with users intending to communicate a performer identity and conduct impression management of the self (Goffman, 1959; Serafinelli, 2017).

Hence, despite social aspirations towards equal involvement in household chores and childcare tasks, which are related to the *caregiving* dimension, they were infrequently represented in identified posts, suggesting that they are not (yet) a reality for most families (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Gregory & Milner, 2011; Milkie & Denny, 2014; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004) and not a first choice for fatherhood representations on Instagram. Indeed, empirical research on the topic shows that fathers spend much less time with their children than do mothers, and in a more restricted range of activities, e.g., more involved in play and leisure activities, rather than direct care and responsibility domains (Monteiro *et al.*, 2017; Planalp & Braungart-Rieker, 2013; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). The way in which father involvement is communicated on Instagram is in line with these empirical findings.

In general, identified posts appealed to the moral role of fatherhood, demonstrating how to do it right, which is also a dominant trend in social media related to parenting (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016; Rowland & Correia, 2018a; Tiidenberg & Baym, 2017). However, some differences across different social media platforms may be found. The central visual component of Instagram seems to foster a mostly visual and performative presentation of fatherhood, rather than discussions about it or the challenges of the role, as often happens on blogs (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016; Rolland & Correia, 2018a). The results show that images have the function of sharing moments more than discussing a problem or asking for feedback on a certain situation. Hence, fatherhood on Instagram does not seem to elicit discussions or reflections about parenting, as happens on other social platforms; instead, it communicates a performative representation of an "ideal fatherhood" (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Rolland & Correia, 2018a).

Therefore, these findings leave unexplored the extent to which fatherhood representations correspond to real behaviors and attitudes of fathers in the daily routines of their child. The sharing of exclusively positive moments, disregarding challenges and negative emotions related with parental roles, reinforces this perspective, suggesting that Instagram, in opposition to other platforms, limits reflections about fatherhood and personal growth in the role. This trend may also be related to the lack of pseudonymity on Instagram, which may inhibit the discussion of controversial topics, reinforcing the performative representation of father involvement (Ammari *et al.*, 2018). In fact, the feedback "requested" from the community, i.e., the followers, is understood as having an economic contribution to using the app via content sharing and forming connections. Here it is important to stress not only the beneficial aspects of creating online communities but also the downside of comparison between users.

Moreover, sharing positive and funny moments on Instagram elicits more attention and reaches a larger audience (Morris, 2014; Zappavigna, 2016). This perspective is reinforced by the fact that all the analyzed posts communicated positive emotions regarding fatherhood activities, conveying messages of happiness and self-fulfillment in the role.

Aspects related to discipline and education, which are often attributed to the father's role (Milkie & Denny, 2014; Pleck, 2010), were surprisingly absent from the identified posts. Contrarily, a significant number of posts highlighted the moral role of the father in the child's development, portraying fathers as the "moral leaders" of their child. Nevertheless, this "leadership" relies on the sharing of funny moments, new experiences, and a constant commitment to fathering duties, rather than on the traditional models of discipline and authority. The shared message of fatherhood as a "way of life," appealing to new models of doing "fatherhood," was common among identified posts (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2016; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Scheibling, 2019).

However, the identified posts failed to capture the diversity and challenges of everyday parenting, namely across diverse social groups, obscuring the complexity of masculine identities, and reinforcing the stereotyped portrait of fully engaged, available and responsible fathers disseminated by Western cultures (Gregory & Miller, 2011). The posts, by communicating a homogeneous representation of father involvement, leave unexplored how it may be experienced across different socioeconomic groups, ethnicities, or backgrounds. This trend hampers the discussion about how fatherhood may be enacted across different backgrounds, with Instagram facilitating the representation of a universal fatherhood which is far from reality. Admittedly, such results are also a consequence of the method employed; the tagged #fatherhood representation on Instagram cannot be comprehended as a global representation, as it fails to explore specific norms, attitudes and behaviors of fatherhood in specific cultures and contexts. As such, the influence of contextual aspects –e.g., socioeconomic status, cultural background, and interpersonal relationships– addressed by most of the psychosocial models (Cabrera *et al.*, 2014; Lamb, 2004; Pleck, 2010) was rarely represented in the analyzed posts, limiting the understanding and reflection of these influences on father involvement. Hence, Instagram narrows the discussion about how fatherhood may be embedded in culturally specific norms and perspectives.

Therefore, this analysis of Instagram's posts raises questions about the extent to which fathers are really engaged with their children in daily activities, considering that *caregiving* was poorly represented and other important dimensions related to care, such as preparing the child's meals or scheduling doctors' appointments, were never mentioned in our sample's posts. Thus, it is suggested that fathers may not be involved in all dimensions concerning childcare (Andreasson & Johansson, 2016; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Lamb *et al.*, 2004; Pleck, 2010). Indeed, a recent study comparing mothers' and fathers' reports about their involvement revealed fathers reported higher levels of involvement in direct caregiving, decision-making responsibility, and assistance with household chores than those acknowledged by mothers (Mercer *et al.*, 2018).

Despite the important findings of the current study that uncover how fatherhood is represented on Instagram, some limitations must be addressed. First, by analyzing only posts tagged with #fatherhood of public Instagram accounts, potentially relevant posts from private accounts may have been left out. Second, posts were collected during a short period of time, which may have resulted in shortcomings in the analysis. Third, we did not analyze who shared the posts, and whether the identified domains were gender related. Fourth, collected data did not allow us to disentangle the extent to which representations corresponded to a real involvement in fathering signalling societal changes, or to the enactment of a performative ideal of being a father. Nevertheless, the current study adds to existing research by exploring the meanings constructed through the visual choices made in social media images related to #fatherhood, which has been an under-researched topic (Zappavigna, 2016).

Future research approaches may deepen knowledge on the topic by examining fatherhood within different social and cultural backgrounds, and applying other methods such as interviews, or analyzing specific user profiles.

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