

## Fathers seem get no respect, even on Father's Day

By Amanda Cuda  
Staff writer

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Pick up a Mother's Day card, and chances are you'll read a heartfelt tribute to the many sacrifices made by Mom over the years. The message will likely be warm -- almost syrupy -- and possibly written in verse. It will probably be accompanied by pictures of brightly colored flowers, or maybe a butterfly.

Then pick up a Father's Day card. Chances are that what you find will be very different. The picture on the cover will likely be of some sort of animal. The message will likely be one about golf, food or the television remote control. More likely than not, there will be no poem.

Of course, the above images don't represent the whole picture of Mother's Day and Father's Day cards. There are plenty of funny cards for mom, and a fair amount of sentimental things for dad. But, in general, the cards we give for these holidays represent a certain way of thinking about fatherhood, said Steven Raucher, chairman of the department of communication, film and theater at the University of New Haven in West Haven. Raucher said, though he's never researched the difference between Mother's Day and Father's Day cards, he has noticed that cards aimed at Mom tend to be more reverent and cards for Dad tend toward the comical.

dominant men

However, that's somewhat typical of the way parents are view in our culture, Raucher said. Though men are typically more dominant in American society

than women, Raucher said, that perception shifts when you're talking about moms and dads. Even in today's enlightened culture, where many fathers play a large role in their children's lives, moms are typically more cherished.

"The cards are really a representation of society's perception of fathers," he said. "The media, in this case is reactionary, not revolutionary."

David Gudelunas, associate professor of communications at Fairfield University has also noticed that Father's Day cards are generally less sentimental than Mother's Day offerings. There are a number of possible reasons for that, Gudelunas said. For instance, children might be more comfortable expressing sentiment and affection to a female relative than to a male one, or they might think that their father wouldn't be interested in a sappy card.

But, like Raucher, Gudelunas said the contrast in parental greeting card styles probably has a lot to do with the high premium our society still places on motherhood. "I think, in general, that motherhood is seen as sort of a full-time job, whereas being a father is more of a hobby," he said.

Not all see a difference between Mother's Day cards and Father's Day greetings.

Deidre Mize, a spokeswoman for Hallmark greetings, said that, though humor cards are slightly more popular for Father's Day than Mother's Day, the overall message for both holidays is intended to be similar. "What we see is that the simple, straightforward messages are what perform best," Mize said in an e-mail. "The holidays and the way we communicate are more alike than different."

But Raucher said there's definitely a contrast in attitudes surrounding these two events, and it isn't

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limited to greeting cards. Just look at how we observe the two holidays, he said. "Mother's Day is the toughest day to get a restaurant reservation," Raucher said. "And on Father's Day, everybody barbecues."

#### TV sitcom dads

The less-than-worshipful perception of fathers extends to other areas of popular culture as well, including television sitcoms. "When we do get a representation of fathers on television, they're usually these buffoon-like characters," Gudelunas said.

Prime examples of sitcom-dad-as-oaf are Al Bundy of "Married...with Children," Archie Bunker on "All in the Family," Homer Simpson of "The Simpsons" and Ray Barone of "Everybody Loves Raymond."

The last show is particularly irksome to James Castonguay, associate professor and chairman of media studies at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield. "That show drives me nuts," said Castonguay, himself a father of two. "His whole life is about not being a dad. And when he tries at it, he's incompetent. What that teaches young men is that they're just not meant to do this."

Richard Hanley, assistant professor of journalism at Quinnipiac University, agreed that most TV dads aren't role models.

He said most sitcoms depict fathers as overgrown children, who need to be whipped into shape just as much as the little ones they're supposed to be raising. "The father is the fool and the mother is the savior," he said.

It wasn't always so. Hanley pointed out that, in the 1950s and 1960s, many TV series featured involved, competent, level-headed dads, including Ward

Cleaver of "Leave it to Beaver" and Jim Anderson of "Father Knows Best." There was a devolution of the TV dad by the 1970s, when bigoted, oafish Archie Bunker came on the scene, he said.

Since then, there's been a smattering of positive, involved sitcom dads, such as Cliff Huxtable on "The Cosby Show" in the 1980s and Hank Hill on the current animated series "King of the Hill." But, overall, sitcoms "teach us that dads can't handle responsibility," Castonguay said. He said that's strange, as more and more "real" dads are taking a larger role than ever in raising their kids, or even raising their young ones alone as single fathers.

So why are men -- dads in particular -- treated so poorly by the media? Because everybody likes to pick on the big guy, Raucher said.

He said men often bear the brunt of comedic exaggeration or ridicule in popular culture because they're still so dominant in other aspects of our culture, like business and politics. "Part of comedy is bringing down what's high and mighty," Raucher said.

Hanley agreed that, despite the way they're portrayed through greeting cards, sitcoms and the like, you shouldn't shed any tears for American men. "Men aren't oppressed in any way," he said.

"They might be ridiculed, but they're not oppressed."

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