

Parenting Representations of Google Doodle Designs for Mother's & Father's Days

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Anneler & Babalar Gününe Yönelik Google Doodle Tasarımlarında Ebeveyn Temsilleri

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Öz

Bu çalışma, dijital görsel iletişimin dinamik yapısı içinde ebeveynlik temsillerini Google Doodle tasarımlarıyla incelemektedir. 2000–2025 yılları arasında Anneler ve Babalar Günü'ne özel olarak üretilen Doodle'lar örneklem alınarak, ebeveyn figürleri nitel analiz çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiştir. İncelemede; duygusal destek, biyolojik roller, paylaşımcı sorumluluklar ve geleneksel temsiller gibi tematik eksenler temel alınmıştır. Veriler denotatif ve konotatif anlam katmanlarını kapsayarak çözümlenmiştir. Araştırma, dijital mecralarda üretilen görsellerin sadece estetik ifadeler olmadığını, aynı zamanda ebeveynliğe ilişkin anlam üretiminde ve rol inşasında etkili iletişim araçları olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Dijital temsiller, ebeveynlik deneyimlerini hem geleneksel kalıplar hem de modern ve paylaşımcı yaklaşımlar doğrultusunda yansıtarak, toplumsal algıların şekillenmesine katkı sunmaktadır. Çalışma, dijital görsel kültürün medya içerikleri aracılığıyla ebeveynlik stillerini nasıl yeniden kurguladığını göstererek, iletişim çalışmaları literatürüne bir çerçeve önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital iletişim, Dijital görsel kültür, Ebeveynlik stilleri, Toplumsal cinsiyet, İletişim araştırmaları.

Abstract

This study examines parenting representations within the dynamic structure of digital visual communication through Google Doodle designs. Mother's and Father's Day Doodles from 2000–2025 were sampled, and parental figures were evaluated via qualitative analysis. The analysis focused on thematic axes such as emotional support, biological roles, shared responsibilities, and traditional representations. Data were examined through both denotative and connotative layers of meaning. The study shows that digital media visuals are not merely aesthetic but also effective tools for producing meaning and constructing parenting roles. Digital representations convey parenting experiences through traditional patterns and modern, shared approaches, shaping social perceptions. By revealing how digital visual culture reconstructs parenting types via media content, the study offers a framework for communication studies literature.

Keywords: Digital communication, Digital visual culture, Parenting styles, Gender, Communication researches.

Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

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1. Introduction

Digital visual culture has become a significant domain reflecting how parenting roles are perceived and shaped. Visuals shared on digital platforms present parenting not only as a set of individual responsibilities but also as a typological framework that conveys social and cultural meanings. Within

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this framework, parenting styles emerge as a key analytical lens through which parental roles are structured and interpreted. Mothers and fathers are represented through varying degrees of emotional support, authority, involvement, and shared responsibility, corresponding to different parenting styles. These representations reflect both traditional and contemporary approaches to parenting, while increasingly highlighting more dynamic and collaborative forms of parental engagement in digital contexts.

Thematic analysis of Google Doodle designs reveals that representations of parenting can be categorized into distinct parenting styles for both mother and father figures. These representations demonstrate how parenting styles are constructed, categorized, and normalized within digital culture through recurring visual patterns and symbolic codes. As such, digital visuals function as influential tools not only in reflecting but also in shaping and reorganizing parenting practices within broader social and cultural contexts.

In light of this, the significance of family and parenting representations in media has gained increasing relevance, especially with 2025 being declared the “Year of the Family” (aileyili.gov.tr, 2025) by the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye. This national designation reflects a broader cultural and political initiative aimed at strengthening family values and supporting parental roles. Within this context, examining digital visual materials such as Google Doodles offers a timely and culturally grounded contribution to ongoing discussions on how parenting is represented and reinterpreted. The study’s focus on digital visual culture highlights how global media content intersects with local cultural frameworks while contributing to the reconstruction of parenting styles in contemporary society. Accordingly, this study focuses primarily on how parenting styles are reconstructed through digital visual representations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Motherhood and Fatherhood as Gender Identities

In this study, a distinction is made between biological sex and gender. While sex refers to biological and physiological differences between individuals, gender is understood as a socially constructed set of roles, behaviors, and expectations assigned to individuals based on their perceived sex. Accordingly, the focus of this study is on gender as a socio-cultural construct rather than biological sex.

Within this framework, motherhood and fatherhood are examined not as biological conditions but as gendered roles shaped by social and cultural meanings. Motherhood and fatherhood are identities deeply intertwined with gender roles. These roles go beyond mere biological parenthood, encompassing cultural, psychological, and social dimensions. In this context, when discussing gender, the reference is not to inherent characteristics one is born with, but rather to the behaviors, attitudes, and roles that society expects from individuals based on their biological sex. Moreover, it is acknowledged that these behaviors and attitudes are not natural or innate; instead, they are shaped by society and learned through social norms (Muratoğlu Pehlivan, 2019, p. 16). Gender is so deeply embedded in everyday practices that it is often believed to be part of our genetic makeup, making it difficult to recognize its social construction. Our learned expectations about how women and men should behave are so powerful that individuals often do not realize how these expectations have been produced (Lorber, 1994, pp. 54–55).

Elucidating the implicit meanings and socio-cultural connotations of gender identities is crucial for understanding how individuals are perceived and how certain roles are assigned. Gender functions not merely as a biological distinction but as a socially constructed framework shaping normative expectations, power dynamics, and role distributions. Within this framework, mother and father identities emerge as symbolic anchors central to societal structures, carrying cultural meanings and

moral expectations. Maternal and paternal identities thus play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of what it means to be female or male, contributing to the legitimization and reproduction of gender roles across generations. Their position within the gender system is both foundational and indispensable for any critical analysis of gender as a social construct.

In this study, the notion of “legitimized parenting roles” refers to the process through which particular parental behaviors, interaction patterns, and role distributions are represented as natural, desirable, and socially acceptable within digital visual culture. These representations do not indicate the inherent effectiveness of any parenting style; rather, they reflect how certain parenting models are symbolically constructed and normalized through visual codes. Accordingly, parenting styles are approached as analytical categories, and the study adopts a critical perspective that examines how these roles are produced and circulated, rather than evaluating them in normative terms.

Within the scope of this study, however, these gendered identities are not examined as ends in themselves but as a contextual framework through which parenting styles are constructed and represented. In this sense, gender provides the background that informs how parental roles are visually organized, while the primary analytical focus remains on how different parenting styles—such as emotional support, authority, and shared responsibility—are structured and communicated in digital visual culture.

2.1.1. Motherhood as an Identity

Motherhood as a social identity has been shaped and redefined across different historical periods, from traditional to modern and postmodern contexts. In more traditional frameworks, motherhood has largely been associated with caregiving, self-sacrifice, and domestic responsibility, positioning women within the private sphere. With the transformations brought by modernity, however, motherhood has increasingly been reconsidered in relation to women’s participation in education and professional life, giving rise to more complex and sometimes conflicting expectations. In more recent, postmodern perspectives, motherhood is approached as a flexible and negotiated identity, influenced by individual choices, changing cultural norms, and diverse family structures (Arendell, 2000).

At the same time, feminist scholarship has critically engaged with motherhood by questioning its naturalized character and emphasizing its social construction. Rather than treating motherhood as an inherent or essential aspect of womanhood, these approaches underline how maternal roles are shaped through cultural norms, institutional arrangements, and power relations (Rich, 1976; Glenn, 1994). In this regard, motherhood can be understood not only as a personal experience but also as a socially produced role that is continuously reinterpreted across contexts. As Hays (1996) suggests, the notion of “intensive mothering” further illustrates how motherhood has come to be framed as a highly demanding, child-centered practice, reflecting broader societal expectations rather than purely individual preferences.

The mother identity of women is often laden with certain societal and cultural expectations. These dimensions can be explained under the headings of societal expectations, emotional and psychological dimensions, personal development and changes, and conflicts between social roles.

Societal Expectations: Society expects mothers to be compassionate, nurturing, patient, and self-sacrificing. The role of the primary caregiver and emotional supporter of children is typically attributed to women. For instance, the stay-at-home mother holds a respected social role; it is believed that through her, the child will develop harmoniously, ultimately benefiting society as a whole (Badinter, 2023, p. 82). In this context, a significant responsibility is placed on mothers in raising emotionally intelligent, successful, and socially well-adjusted individuals.

Emotional and Psychological Dimensions: Motherhood can be a profound source of emotional connection and fulfillment for women. Biological processes such as pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding play a significant role in shaping maternal identity. These experiences transform a woman's relationship with her body and with her child. For example (Dudu Karaman & Doğan, 2018, p. 1479), in patriarchal societies, motherhood is often perceived as an element that completes a woman's physical and emotional wholeness. In this context, not having children or choosing not to become a mother is sometimes interpreted as a deficiency or a sign of emotional incompleteness.

Personal Development: Motherhood can reshape a woman's priorities, lifestyle, and personality. New responsibilities and challenges may enhance her resilience and problem-solving abilities. The transition into motherhood is a process through which a woman adapts and learns maternal behaviors (Özkan & Polat, 2011, p. 36; Koç, Özkan & Bekmezci, 2016, p. 144). Maternal identity begins to form during pregnancy, continues after childbirth, and matures over time (Meighan, 1998; Mercer, 2004). This dynamic transformation allows the woman to discover her inner resources, grow emotionally and mentally, and align her attitudes and behaviors with her personal development.

Conflict of Social Roles: In modern society, the role of motherhood is no longer limited to providing care for the child; it is also accompanied by the expectation that women should be active and successful in professional life. These multiple and often conflicting role expectations place significant physical and psychological pressure on women. The ideal of the "perfect mother," in particular, imposes a standard of excellence both at home and at work, leading many women to experience feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and emotional exhaustion. As a result, motherhood becomes less of a personal experience and more of a social performance shaped by the contradictory demands imposed by gender roles.

These shifting perspectives are also reflected in media representations, where traditional and contemporary understandings of motherhood coexist and are visually negotiated.

2.1.2. Fatherhood as an Identity

The "father" identity for men is also shaped by social and cultural norms, but it encompasses a different set of expectations and roles compared to motherhood. These can be examined in terms of societal expectations, active involvement in the evolving role of fatherhood, emotional and psychological dimensions, social pressures, and identity development.

Societal Expectations: Traditionally, fathers have been viewed as providers, protectors, and disciplinarians within the family. They have been less associated with emotional expression and direct involvement in child care. Although these roles have lost some of their dominance in modern societies compared to traditional ones, many cultures still regard the father as the head of the household, a key figure responsible for maintaining contact with the outside world and managing affairs beyond the domestic sphere (Şenol & Erdem, 2017; 2018).

Evolving Role of Fatherhood: Today, fathers are increasingly encouraged to take a more active role in the care and emotional development of their children. The new father figure represents a man who spends more time with his children, plays with them, reads to them, and builds strong emotional bonds.

Emotional and Psychological Dimensions: Fatherhood can also be a profound source of fulfillment and personal growth for men. The bond established with their children can add meaning to a father's life and enrich his emotional world. This process is reciprocal. Researchers studying the emotional well-being of young children have found that children with involved fathers cope better with stress and new situations, have more positive peer relationships, are more liked by others, and participate more effectively in social activities (Kato et al., 2002).

Social Pressures: Men today face growing pressures to succeed professionally while also fulfilling the expectations of being a good father. Balancing the traditional “provider” role with the modern “involved father” identity can be challenging. According to Lamb (2000, pp. 26–27), fatherhood in contemporary societies encompasses four main responsibilities: providing for the family, supporting the emotional needs of the spouse, participating in child care and upbringing, and serving as a moral authority figure—especially in contexts where mothers are more engaged in daily child interaction.

2.2. The Construction and Stereotypes of Mother and Father Representations

Representations of mothers and fathers are produced and disseminated through media according to gender norms and cultural codes. Appadurai (1996, p. 33) notes that global cultural connections are imagined through media and are not static. These representations reflect societal expectations of parenting roles, encouraging their internalization. Mothers are commonly associated with sacrifice, compassion, caregiving, and domestic responsibilities, while fathers are linked to authority, strength, protection, and financial provision, creating a narrow perception that overlooks the diversity of real-life parenting.

Stereotypes play a key role in shaping these representations and sustaining gender inequality. Mothers are often depicted as emotionally involved caretakers, while fathers are coded as providers connecting the family to the external world. Media typically shows women at home caring for children or doing housework, and men working outside (Kalaycı, 2015, p. 262), reinforcing rigid family roles, limiting women’s labor participation, and discouraging men’s domestic involvement. These patterns also influence children’s gender socialization—girls toward caregiving and obedience, boys toward strength and extroversion.

Holliday, Kullman, and Hyde (2010, p. 52) argue that media’s cultural codes can reproduce ideologies. In both digital and traditional media, parental representations have become increasingly visible, especially during occasions like Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, often circulating idealized images of parenting. Rather than challenging stereotypes, these representations may reinforce them, making critical analysis essential for promoting gender equality and more inclusive models of family and parenting.

2.3. Parenting Styles

Parenting is not merely a biological responsibility; it is also a multilayered experience shaped by numerous social, cultural, and psychological elements. The representations of mother and father figures constructed through the media directly influence how parenting practices are perceived. Within the normative framework shaped by these representations, parenting styles are also framed within certain patterns and continually reproduced. Parenting styles are classified based on criteria such as attitudes toward children, approaches to discipline, levels of emotional support, and involvement in decision-making processes. In the pioneering studies of Diana Baumrind (1966, 1967, 1973), parenting was categorized into authoritarian, authoritative (democratic/competent), and permissive styles. Later, Maccoby and Martin (1983) expanded this classification by adding the uninvolved/neglectful parenting style. These four primary styles are shaped according to the levels of parental warmth and control.

Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) studied a diverse sample of about 10,000 high school students, examining parenting styles in relation to psychosocial development, academic competence, and problem-solving. Previous research has associated authoritative parenting with more positive psychological well-being, higher academic competence, and fewer problematic behaviors among adolescents. These findings show that parenting styles influence both family relationships and broader social and psychological outcomes. Moreover, these styles are continually

reproduced through media and cultural representations, and are presented as normative models. Therefore, understanding how parenting styles are shaped not only by individual choices but also by social representations is essential for a holistic understanding of parenting.

While existing literature often associates certain parenting styles—particularly authoritative parenting—with more positive developmental outcomes, this study does not aim to evaluate or compare the effectiveness of these styles. Instead, such distinctions are acknowledged as part of the broader academic context, while the primary focus remains on how parenting styles are represented, constructed, and legitimized within digital visual culture.

As traditional frameworks have explained parenting styles primarily through family dynamics and individual attitudes, digital media culture has increasingly become a significant force shaping parenting practices and perceptions. Representations of mothers and fathers in digital visual culture contribute to the circulation, reproduction, and idealization of normative parenting models. Particularly in social media, digital campaigns, and visual content produced for special occasions, parental figures function as influential models that shape not only individual behaviors but also patterns of communication and emotional interaction.

In this context, digital representations of parenting serve both symbolic and communicative functions, structuring how parental roles, values, and relationships are perceived within society. Through recurring visual codes and narratives, these representations contribute to the construction and normalization of specific parenting styles.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Purpose, Scope and Limitations

This study explores how parental roles are represented in digital visual communication, using a semiotic approach to examine how globally accessible content—particularly Google Doodle designs—constructs parental figures and conveys values and norms. The research aims to show how these digital representations influence societal perceptions of parenting and bridge traditional and modern understandings of parenthood. The sample includes Google Doodle visuals for Mother's Day and Father's Day from 2000, when Google first released such content, to June 2, 2025, the date of the final data review. These materials were analyzed semiotically at both denotative (literal) and connotative (cultural/ideological) levels. Based on the literature, sub-thematic axes such as active parental involvement, emotional support, biological roles, shared responsibilities, and cultural symbolism were identified. The data were then categorized through thematic content analysis into four primary parenting representations: permissive, authoritative, authoritarian, and neglectful (Baumrind, 1966, 1967, 1973; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Repeated visuals or images with negligible variations that are not relevant to the typology (e.g., changes in hair color for a male child in the 2014 Polish Father's Day Doodle) were excluded from the sample. After eliminating duplicates, 33 unique Father's Day Doodles were included from a total of 164 published between 2000 and 2025. Likewise, 183 Mother's Day Doodles were reviewed, and after filtering out repetitive or duplicate designs—such as identical Doodles reused in different years or countries—37 unique visuals were selected. For example, the 2016 Russian version of the Mother's Day Doodle that differed only in shoe style from the global version was excluded, as this variation was deemed irrelevant. In total, 69 Doodle visuals—comprising 33 for Father's Day and 36 for Mother's Day—were subjected to analysis.

The main limitation of this study lies in its exclusive focus on Google Doodle designs. Since these visuals are produced through institutional and cultural filters, their capacity to reflect universal representations of parenting is inherently limited. Additionally, the study focuses solely on visual

materials; written content, user comments, and real-life parental experiences are not included in the scope of analysis. Thus, the findings should be interpreted within the specific context of digital visual culture. Furthermore, as semiotic analysis involves interpretative methods, it may include subjective evaluations. However, efforts have been made to mitigate these limitations and to ensure the academic rigor of the study by adhering to principles of validity and reliability.

3.2. Research Design

This study employs a semiotic approach to analyze how meaning is constructed and communicated through visual representations. Semiotics examines the relationship between signs, symbols, and the meanings they produce, enabling the interpretation of both explicit (denotative) and implicit (connotative) layers of visual content. As Rifat (2018, p. 126) notes, semiotics can be understood as a theory of signs that explains how meaning is generated through symbolic systems. Similarly, Günay (2012, p. 12) emphasizes that human beings are surrounded by a world of signs, forms, symbols, and images, and that these signs are produced to establish communication. In this sense, visual materials such as Google Doodles can be considered cultural texts through which meanings are constructed, circulated, and interpreted.

Accordingly, this study explores how parental roles are represented in digital visual communication and how these representations convey values and norms while contributing to the construction of societal perceptions of parenting. Rather than measuring audience reception or the direct effects of these representations, the study focuses on how parenting-related meanings are produced, structured, and normalized within digital visual culture, and how traditional and modern understandings of parenthood are symbolically articulated through these representations.

This qualitative study analyzes Google Doodle visuals produced between 2000 and 2025 through a dual-layered methodological framework combining semiotic analysis and thematic content analysis. Semiotic analysis is conducted following Barthes' two-stage model, examining denotation (what is directly shown, such as figures, colors, and settings) and connotation (the cultural and ideological meanings associated with these elements) (Barthes, 1972, p. 117; Barthes, 1977, p. 33; Putri et al., 2022, p. 376). Through this approach, visual representations of parenting are interpreted in relation to recurring cultural patterns, such as emotional caregiving or active involvement. In addition, thematic analysis is applied using Braun and Clarke's (2021) codebook method, which allows for a structured yet flexible categorization of data based on predefined themes and subthemes informed by the literature (Hınız & Yavuz, 2023, p. 390). Within this framework, parenting representations are categorized into four types—permissive, egalitarian, authoritarian, and neglectful—enabling both descriptive and interpretive analysis of how parenting styles are constructed and normalized in digital visual culture.

The connotation analysis linked cultural and ideological associations to four main parenting themes from the codebook. Mothers depicted in emotional support and closeness were categorized as "Permissive" with the subtheme "Emotionally Nurturing Figure." Fathers shown in outdoor or guiding roles were classified as either "Productive/Creative" under "Democratic/Authoritative" or "Traditional Gender Role" under "Distant/Authoritarian," depending on context. In addition to static visuals, animated Doodles were also analyzed as narrative materials, and their coding was based on the signs embedded in their storylines. Mapping these signs to the codebook allowed systematic analysis of how visuals reproduce normative parenting values, showing that digital images convey both surface narratives and symbolic gendered meanings. Connotation data were evaluated using the four main codebook themes and subthemes, with a binary coding of "present" (clearly represented) or "partial" (indirect/limited); the "absent" code was not presented in the data table. This approach ensured

consistency in description and interpretation, showing how visuals aligned with the codebook and highlighting emphasized, lacking, or implicitly reflected themes.

In this context, the research questions are listed. In the discussion section of the study, answers to these questions are sought based on the findings (**RQ1.** Through which symbols is parenting legitimized?, **RQ2.** How are parental figures represented through cultural myths?, **RQ3.** How are gender roles constructed in the representations?, **RQ4.** Within which normative framework are family and parenting roles presented?, **RQ5.** How do the visuals guide the emotions of the audience?, **RQ6.** Which parenting styles are emphasized in the Doodle designs?, **RQ7.** How are the cultural and universal dimensions of parenting combined in digital representations?, **RQ8.** How are binary oppositions used in parenting representations?, **RQ9.** Do digital representations tend to question or reproduce norms related to parenting?).

3.3. Validity, Reliability Principles, and Original Contribution

In this qualitative study, validity and reliability were addressed through content consistency, interpretive transparency, and systematic analysis. Internal validity was ensured by aligning themes with data and the conceptual framework. Semiotic analysis considered both denotative and connotative layers of Google Doodles, while thematic codes were grounded in parenting literature (Baumrind, Maccoby & Martin, 1966, 1967, 1973) and developed by the author. Conceptual validity was supported through expert feedback. Reliability was ensured via transparent, replicable coding, comparison with an independent researcher, and calculation of agreement rates. Sampling included all Mother's and Father's Day Doodles from 2000–2025, and reflexive notes were maintained to reduce researcher bias and clarify interpretations.

When academic studies conducted over the last five years (2020–2025) are examined, it can be seen that some of the research using “Google Doodles” as a sample has been shaped within the framework of visual communication and semiotics (Bulduk Türkmen, 2020; Kuzu, 2023; Kum, 2023; Yıldız & Uğur, 2024). Bulduk Türkmen (2020) examines contemporary illustration practices through the example of Google Doodles, focusing on their use in interactive media environments, user-centered design, and the integration of traditional artistic techniques with digital technologies across cultural and multimedia contexts. Kuzu (2023) examines Doodle designs within the paradigm of design, highlighting their emergence as a form of creative expression shaped by postmodern popular culture and their growing role as distinctive and widely recognized visual elements in contemporary design practices. Kum (2023) analyzes Google Doodle illustrations through Barthes' semiotic framework, demonstrating how visual, typographic, and color elements convey both explicit and implicit cultural meanings across themes such as national celebrations, historical figures, and festivals. Yıldız and Uğur (2024) evaluate Google Doodles designed for Türkiye from a visual communication design perspective, finding that while these illustrations are generally effective in conveying messages, they show limitations in accurately reflecting the distinctive characteristics of the figures represented.

In addition, narrative studies (Belova, 2021) and social memory (Britten, 2020; Yeku & Ojebode, 2021) have emerged as important points of investigation. Belova (2021) examines Google Doodles as multimodal communication tools, emphasizing their evolution from simple visual alterations to complex, interactive, and culturally layered digital designs that function as effective forms of global visual storytelling, infotainment, and meaning-making. Britten (2020) explores Google Doodles as influential visual artifacts of collective memory, demonstrating how their evolving, interactive forms shape social awareness by selectively commemorating certain events, figures, and themes within digital culture. Yékú and Ojebode (2021) analyze digital platforms such as Google and Facebook as sites of visual culture and political meaning-making, highlighting how digital images and narratives are used to construct historical memory and express forms of performative nostalgia within African contexts.

Furthermore, research on social and socio-psychological topics (Berlanga-Fernández & Sánchez-Esparza, 2021; Coupé & Shmueli, 2021; Ojha & Shah, 2022; Bal & Alpaslan, 2025) are founded. Berlanga-Fernández and Sánchez-Esparza (2021) examine Google Doodles as tools of sensory and experiential marketing, showing how pandemic-related Doodles functioned to inform, educate, and emotionally engage audiences through interactive and multimodal digital experiences. Coupé and Shmueli (2021) investigate the distribution and impact of COVID-19-related Google Doodles, showing how these targeted visual messages were selectively displayed across countries and could influence public behavior, particularly mobility patterns. Ojha and Shah (2022) examine the relationship between Google Doodles and global recognition and happiness indexes, suggesting that Doodle visibility is associated with broader indicators of societal recognition and well-being. Bal and Alpaslan (2025) analyze the historical development of Google Doodles (1998–2021), examining their thematic and technical distribution, and find that birthday-themed designs are the most prevalent while social message-oriented Doodles and interactive techniques are comparatively less frequently used.

Also, studies focuses on gender (Ersan & Bal, 2025), branding (Gürel & Arslan, 2021; Kaur, & Singh, 2021), cultural values (Rafomoyo, 2021; Jahanmard & Namvarmotlagh, 2023; Prasetyo, 2023) are comes to the fore. Ersan and Bal (2025) analyze Mother's Day and Father's Day Google Doodles through a semiotic framework, finding that these designs largely reproduce traditional gender roles and reflect patriarchal norms through recurring visual and symbolic patterns. Gürel and Arslan (2021) examine Google Doodles as instruments of personal branding, analyzing how person-focused Doodles contribute to the construction and representation of individuals as recognizable and symbolic personal brands within digital culture. Kaur and Singh (2021) discuss Google Doodles as interactive digital advertising tools, emphasizing their role in enhancing brand awareness and visual identity through engaging graphic content within competitive online environments.

On cultural values, Rafomoyo (2021) critically examines a Zimbabwe-themed Google Doodle as a form of digital soft power, highlighting how such representations can both globalize cultural heritage and reproduce asymmetrical power relations linked to digital coloniality and platform-driven visibility. Jahanmard and Namvarmotlagh (2023) analyze Google Doodles through Genette's concept of transtextuality, demonstrating how these designs function as intertextual references that connect multiple cultural, historical, and textual layers. Prasetyo (2023) analyzes Indonesian-themed Google Doodles through a qualitative visual approach, showing how illustration style, color, and typography work together to convey culturally specific meanings aligned with the featured artists and themes.

Studies as well as access to knowledge, learning methods, and problem-solving (Stock & Basso, 2022; Küçükgençay & Peker, 2022) have also been produced in these thematic areas. Stock and Basso (2022) examine the use of a Google Doodle alongside Scratch in an educational context, demonstrating how these tools support the development of computational thinking, particularly in understanding algorithms, sequencing, and repetition among primary school students. Küçükgençay and Peker (2022) analyze math-themed Google Doodles (2000–2022), showing that most are dedicated to commemorating mathematicians, with limited thematic diversity and notable differences in regional representation, particularly in Türkiye.

This study's originality lies in its semiotic analysis of Mother's and Father's Day Google Doodles, focusing on parenting role representations. Rather than viewing motherhood and fatherhood solely through gender, it examines behavioral patterns, emotional connotations, and social expectations via visual codes, contributing to family sociology. By comparing maternal and paternal roles, the study explores how parenting is idealized in digital media, which normative patterns are presented, and how they are culturally legitimized. Using a globally accessible platform like Google Doodle shows that parenting roles are shaped by both individual experiences and collective symbols. Additionally,

situating the study within Türkiye's 2025 "Year of the Family" highlights its relevance to contemporary societal and political discussions on family values and communication.

4. Findings

4.1. Permissive Parenting Theme

The permissive/indulgent parenting theme emerges as a type of parenting characterized by high warmth and low control, reinforced through three subthemes: child-centered representation, friendly approach, and approval-giving. In these depictions, the parent takes a back seat in setting boundaries, with the child positioned at the center. In the child-centered representation, the parent's visibility decreases, and the child is portrayed as the decision-maker. In the friendly approach, the parent is positioned not as an authority figure but in the role of a "friend." The emotional approval-giving subtheme is reinforced by portrayals of a parent who supports the child under all circumstances and refrains from criticism.

Table 1. Permissive Parenting Theme

Subthemes	Mother's /Father's Day	Present	Partially Present
<i>Child-centered representation</i>	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day		
<i>Friendly approach</i>	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day		
<i>Approval</i>	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day		

4.1.1. Child-centered Representation

In the first subtheme of this category, the child-centered representation, the focus is placed on the child rather than the mother or father. These depictions often appear as if they were created by a child, leaving a strong sense of childlikeness in the visuals. Children tend to dominate in number, take initiative, and interact with objects or toys that shape the visual aesthetic, with the child portrayed as active and engaged in experiences. In visuals that partially reflect this subtheme, child-related and child-centered designs are evident; however, the presence and position of the parent remain visible or on an equal level with the child, taking on the role of creator, initiator, or protector of the child's imaginary or play world. For example, in the 2013 Mother's Day Doodle, children are shown preparing a celebration cake for their mother. The mother appears surprised, implying that she is unaware of her children's preparations and the mess they have made. Here, the children are depicted as enterprising, taking initiative, and behaving without fear of authority. In the 2008 Father's Day Doodle, a father and

child are shown flying a kite. The kite, a nostalgic metaphor evoking childhood and freedom, is being flown by the daughter, while the father appears only as a supportive figure.



Figures 1 & 2. 2013 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2008 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

At the connotative level, the child-centered narrative reflects contemporary approaches in education and psychology, carrying values such as recognizing the child as an individual and placing their development at the center. The parent is not depicted as an instructor or director, but as a figure who accompanies the child's guidance and stands by their side. This mode of representation elevates the awareness of a child's emotional needs and respect for their individuality. The prominent space allocated to the child in the visual language also indicates an increased significance attributed to childhood.

4.1.2. Friendly Approach

The second subtheme of this category is the friendly approach. In this approach, the parent and child are shown sharing experiences together. The child is depicted as free—completely the opposite of authoritarian control—and experiencing this freedom alongside the parent. The mother, father, and child are equals. These depictions focus on activities associated with childhood, with parents actively participating. In the friendly approach, games, experiences, and imagination unique to childhood take center stage, with parents joining the “kingdom of childhood” through their own childlike spirit. In Doodles coded as “partial,” the parent also takes part in the play; however, the ultimate decision-making and control remain with them. Even if the game is imagined by the child, power is not equally distributed. For example, in the 2014 Mother's and Father's Day Doodles, on the left, a mother and two children are shown riding bicycles together—an exciting activity where all three appear equal in role, wearing capes as if they were superheroes on an adventure. On the right, a father and two children are depicted flying an imaginary airplane, their journey fueled entirely by the limits of their own imagination.



Figures 3 & 4. 2014 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2014 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

At the connotative level, in the friendly approach theme, the parental figure is not an authority figure but rather a companion—someone who plays, learns, and enjoys alongside the child. This mode of representation emphasizes building a relationship based on love and mutual understanding. Such depictions elevate values like mutual respect, empathy, and spending quality time together in family communication. Here, parenting is framed not through discipline and direction, but through togetherness, play, empathy, and emotional closeness. In digital culture, this narrative style transforms parenting into a more egalitarian—yet also more demanding—model. The “friend parent” ideal does not reduce parental responsibility; rather, it requires greater emotional investment and constant interaction.

4.1.3. Approval

The sub-theme of approval appears in representations where the parent gives consent for the child to carry out a behavior independently. In this sub-theme, the parent—whether in the context of play or instruction—supports the child in performing the behavior of their own free will or grants them such autonomy. In addition, the approval approach includes the evaluation of success in carrying out behavioral patterns previously taught by the parent. Within the partially coded category, acceptance may be represented through body language (e.g., leaning toward the child, turning toward the child). In some cases, the representation may also convey behaviors where it is unclear whether the parent is approving, granting excessive initiative, or being indifferent. Below, two Doodles from 2017 reflect the sub-theme of approval. In both Doodles, there are six animated representations. On the left, in the Doodle prepared for Mother’s Day, the approval theme is strongly felt in the third and fifth images. In the third image, the mother cactus watches her child cactus paint a flowerpot with admiration and appreciation, approving and liking her child’s creation. In the fifth image, the mother cactus adjusts her child’s tie and appreciates its final appearance. On the right, the Doodles prepared for Father’s Day are displayed. In the second animated image, the father cactus is combing his daughter’s hair and is pleased with the result. In the fifth image, the father cactus has taught his child how to shave his spines, and they proudly shave together.



Figures 5 & 6. 2017 Mother’s Day Doodle (Left), 2017 Father’s Day Doodle (Right)

At the connotative level, the parental figure is positioned as “encouraging rather than judgmental.” They respect the child’s individual interests and personal space. This representation emphasizes the child’s individuality and autonomy as central elements within the parenting style depicted. The parent is not active in a directive sense, but rather an accompanying and approving presence. Approval is often associated with developmental processes such as the development of self-confidence, self-expression skills, and decision-making abilities in children. This representation implies that the parent is not controlling but emotionally accessible. In these visuals, parenting is constructed more around accompaniment than guidance, and more around granting approval than exercising supervision. In digital culture, this representation particularly emphasizes the child’s autonomy, supporting a child-centered and responsive parenting approach. Such digital visuals suggest that the parent is a figure shaped by the child’s interests and that the child’s individual achievement is placed at the forefront.

4.2. Democratic/Authoritative Parenting Theme

The democratic /authoritative parenting theme emerges as a type of parenting characterized by high warmth and high control, reinforced through three subthemes: emotional/nurturing figure, productive/creative parenting, and task-sharing. In this theme, the parent–child relationship is defined by sharing and partnership. The emotional/nurturing figure subtheme highlights the parent as a source of compassion, empathy, and emotional support. In the productive/creative parenting subtheme, the parent is depicted as engaging in joint activities, learning, and growing together with the child. The task-sharing subtheme reflects representations where caregiving and responsibilities are shared beyond traditional roles.

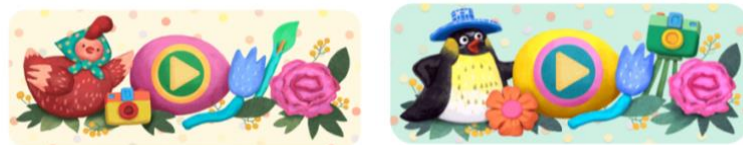
Table 2. Democratic/Authoritative Parenting Theme

Subthemes

	Mother's /Father's Day	Present	Partially Present
<i>Emotionally Nurturing Figure</i>	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day		
<i>Creatively Productive Parenting</i>	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day		
<i>Task Sharing</i>	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day		

4.2.1. Emotionally Nurturing Figure

Below are the animated Mother's and Father's Day Doodles from 2023, which serve as examples of this subtheme. These Doodles depict, through the metaphor of a photo album, the sacrifices and efforts parents make throughout their children's growth, as well as their creative roles in guiding them on the journey to adulthood.



Figures 7 & 8. 2023 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2023 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

In the 2023 animated Doodles below, album details are visible. On one side of the albums, the offspring are shown in their baby or egg forms, while on the other side, their grown-up versions appear. The shared visuals depict the sacrificial and productive activities performed by mother and father animals for their offspring, symbolizing parenting as a lifelong process of nurturing and providing.



Figures 7 & 8. Details from 2023 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), details from 2023 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

From a connotative perspective, the emotional/nurturing figure depicts the parent as both emotionally close to the child and positioned as a guide and educator. Here, control is not exercised as authority but as positive discipline and guidance that supports the child's development. The mother and father figures are portrayed as individuals who actively contribute to the child's emotional and social growth. This representation implies, as in democratic parenting theories, that the child is recognized as an individual while the parent retains responsibility and guidance.

4.2.2. Creatively Productive Parenting

In the productive/creative parenting subtheme, representations of mothers and fathers stand out through the emphasis on what parents do for their children. Activities such as fishing, biking, painting, and building sandcastles—both educational and creative—reinforce the idea that parents are always there for their children. In visuals that partially reflect this subtheme, the parents' industriousness, presence in the workforce, or everyday life productions and possessions are depicted. Additionally, the children's level of creativity may partly indicate that the parents are productive and provide opportunities for their children's creativity.



Figures 9 & 10. 2014 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2017 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

At the connotative level, the visuals evoke cultural and ideological associations portraying the parent as a figure who learns, explores, creates, and experiences alongside the child, representing a modern dimension of democratic parenting. The child's individuality and creativity are encouraged, but this support is neither unplanned nor chaotic; it involves guided productivity. The visuals align with today's ideal of the creative and productive child, emphasizing the parent's role as a nurturer of this process. This mode of representation is also linked to play-based learning and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) approaches in education.

4.2.3. Task Sharing

In the task-sharing subtheme, the dominant idea is that the child develops a practical guide to life through metaphors such as repeating, modeling, imitating, and emulating the actions of the mother and father.



Figures 11 & 12. 2022 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2022 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

Above are the Mother's and Father's Day Doodles from 2022. Hands are used as a visual code symbolizing labor, effort, solidarity, and togetherness. In these visual representations, a parent's lifelong nurturing of their child is depicted through the metaphor of hands. The hands taught during childhood eventually support the parent when the time comes. At the connotative level, the child is presented not only as someone who is protected and cared for but also as an individual who contributes and takes responsibility. Parenting is reflected not as a relationship solely managed by the adult but as an experience involving mutual participation and collaboration. Such representations redefine the perception of childhood: the child appears not as a "dependent" but as a "participant" subject. The relationship model suggested is one where the parent empowers the child by giving responsibility, guides them, but does not exert pressure.

4.3. Distant/Authoritarian Parenting Theme

The distant/authoritarian parent theme refers to a parenting style characterized by high control and low emotional closeness. It depicts a parent who imposes strict rules, maintains emotional distance, and establishes a hierarchical relationship with the child, and is distinguished by three sub-themes. In the representation of traditional gender roles, the parent is portrayed as an authority figure. In the biological role emphasis, parenting is framed through fertility or genetic connection. The discipline and control theme stands out through the regulation of behavior and the reinforcement of achievement systems.

Table 3. Distant/Authoritarian Parenting Theme

Subthemes		Mother's /Father's Day	Present	Partially Present
Traditional Gender Roles		Mother's Day		
		Father's Day		
Biological Role Emphasis	Role	Mother's Day		

	Father's Day		
Discipline and Control	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day		

4.3.1. Traditional Gender Roles

Representations of traditional gender roles encompass culturally internalized depictions of mothers and fathers. In maternal portrayals, themes and sub-representations such as delicacy, grace, and emotionality are commonly observed, whereas fathers are more frequently associated with the external world, professional life, technical matters, and masculinity. Below are the Mother's Day Doodle from 2012 and the Father's Day Doodle from 2014. In the Doodle prepared for Mother's Day, the mother figure is represented alongside elements such as flowers and pearls, which evoke associations of grace and delicacy. In contrast, the Doodle created for Father's Day features the father figure accompanied by elements such as a mustache and a beanie, which are evocative of masculinity.



Figures 13 & 14. 2012 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2014 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

At the connotative level, the flower motif is associated with values such as love, compassion, kindness, and aesthetic beauty, emphasizing the selfless, gentle, and special position of mothers. The pearl, with its connotations of purity, elegance, and rarity, reinforces the idealization of mothers as precious and worthy of protection. In the Father's Day Doodle, masculine elements such as the mustache and beanie evoke notions of maturity, authority, protection, and resilience, representing the image of fatherhood less in its emotional dimension and more through strength, steadfastness, and identity.

4.3.2. Biological Role Emphasis

In the some Doodle representations for Mother's Day and Father's Day, the biological roles of parent figures are foregrounded. Mothers are depicted through actions associated with biological and instinctive motherhood, such as giving birth, breastfeeding, feeding, and providing basic care, whereas fathers are typically shown engaging in protective, physically supportive, or outward-facing activities.

Such representations equate motherhood and fatherhood with biological sex, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles.



Figures 15 & 16. 2015 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2015 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

In the above Google Doodle representations for Mother's Day and Father's Day, the images of a "swan with its cygnet" and a "penguin with an egg" foreground the biological foundations of parenthood, while serving— in the sense defined by Roland Barthes's semiotic theory— as a process of ideological naturalization. According to Barthes, myth "renders ideology invisible by presenting what is historical as if it were natural" (Barthes, 1957). In this context, socially constructed parenting roles are presented through nature-based imagery as "natural" and "unchangeable" phenomena. The Mother's Day depiction of a swan and its cygnet confines motherhood to its biological and instinctive aspects, such as giving birth, caregiving, and protection. The swan's act of carrying its offspring on its body associates the maternal figure with compassion, attachment, and self-sacrifice. In this image, motherhood is represented not as a cultural construct but as if it were part of nature's immutable order. In doing so, the caregiving labor and emotional burden attributed to women are legitimized within an unquestioned framework of naturalness.

The Father's Day depiction of a penguin and an egg focuses on the male penguin's incubation behavior, highlighting the rarely emphasized biological caregiving role of fatherhood. Yet even this act of care is presented through a natural behavior, framed not as a form of social caregiving labor but as a "natural exception." In this way, fatherhood, though to a limited extent, is nonetheless naturalized on a biological basis. Barthes explains such naturalizations as follows: "Myth steals meaning and gives it to nature; it removes meaning from its historical context and renders it natural" (Barthes, 1957, p. 131). In this sense, the Doodle representations in question are not merely charming animal illustrations; they are also ideological discourses that attribute culturally constructed norms of parenthood to nature. Thus, motherhood and fatherhood roles are made visible as unquestionable "natural realities," detached from their historical, cultural, and social contexts and fixed in place.

4.3.3. Discipline and Control

The Discipline and control sub-theme is constructed through visual representations in which parent figures are particularly associated with work, authority, and order. In such depictions, parents are often portrayed alongside tools of modern life (such as work-related items or household appliances), while objects like hats or ties, which evoke authority or professional affiliation, are used to signify discipline. Representations of parents who directly intervene in or guide a child's behavior present them not only as caregivers but also as figures who regulate, restrict, and manage conduct. These images highlight that parenthood encompasses not only affection and attention but also the disciplinary and norm-setting aspects of raising a child.



Figures 17 & 18. 2013 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2000 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

The *Discipline and Control* sub-theme gains meaning through visual representations in which parent figures are associated with work, order, and authority. In such depictions, parents are shown at a desk, managing the household, or guiding a child's behavior, becoming visual carriers of authority and discipline. Objects of modern life—such as computers, vacuum cleaners, and desk lamps—imply that parenthood is not only instinctual but also rational, regulatory, and functional. At this point, Roland Barthes's emphasis on the role of objects in myth-making is particularly relevant:

"Objects also speak; they tell us who we are, what we should do, and even how we should feel" (Barthes, 1957). According to Barthes, objects act as signifiers that subtly convey ideological meanings. For example, a hat is not merely an accessory but a symbol evoking a disciplinary figure (father, teacher, or worker). In this context, items such as hats, glasses, or ties visualize the parent's authoritarian aspect while simultaneously presenting this role as natural.

Furthermore, these representations can be interpreted through Michel Foucault's (1975) concepts of surveillance and discipline. According to Foucault, power in modern societies operates not only through overt coercion but also through invisible, continuous monitoring. A parent's intervention in, observation of, or shaping of a child's behavior functions not merely as an individual relationship but as a micro-scale exercise of power. The parent figure in visual depictions is positioned as a "normalizing" agent shaping the child's conduct. In this sense, parenthood is defined not only by caregiving but also by its disciplinary, supervisory, and regulatory functions. Thus, in such representations, parenthood is both naturalized through the ideological language of objects and functions as a space where modern mechanisms of power are reproduced on a micro scale. Although these roles are presented through charming and simple images, as in Doodles, the underlying normative and disciplinary structures of parenthood are reinforced in the subtext.

4.4. Uninvolved/ Neglecting Parenting Theme

It refers to a type of parent who is physically present but emotionally or cognitively distant from the child. This type is characterized by low closeness and low control. The sub-themes include neglect, representational absence, and emotional distance. In the neglect–dereliction of duty sub-theme, the parent fails to show attention to the child due to external factors. Emotional distance relates to the parent's lack of emotional presence. In the representational absence sub-theme, the parent's role is either partially or entirely unrepresented.

Table 4. Uninvolved/ Neglecting Parenting Theme

Subthemes	Mother's /Father's Day	Present	Partially Present
Avoidance of Responsibility	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day	   	
Representation Gap	Mother's Day		
	Father's Day		     
Emotional Distance	Mother's Day		

Father's
Day



4.4.1. Avoidance of Responsibility

This theme refers to situations in which a parent consciously or unconsciously postpones, delegates, or completely fails to fulfill their duties of caregiving, guidance, and emotional support. From the child's perspective, this is often perceived as "absence" or "indifference"; however, the parent's physical presence does not necessarily alter this perception.



Figure 19. 2004 Father's Day Doodle

Upon examining visual representations, no direct example of the mother figure was identified. This suggests that, in visual narratives, the mother is not associated with dereliction of duty or neglect. In other words, within the representational universe, the mother is not constructed as a character who fails in her responsibilities or shows indifference to her child; rather, such negative portrayals are excluded. This finding is noteworthy both in terms of demonstrating how socially prescribed positive and protective roles for mothers are reflected in visual productions and in showing that the mother is not depicted as an "incomplete" or "insufficient" actor in parental representations. At the same time, these representations can be seen as serving the naturalization of gender roles. Presenting the mother solely with positive attributes as an idealized figure reinforces the "good mother" norm while rendering invisible alternative maternal experiences or parenting styles. In this way, through visual language, the association of mothers with responsibility, care, and affection reproduces the idea that these roles are immutable and natural. This constitutes a powerful representational strategy that delineates the boundaries of maternal identity at both cultural and ideological levels.

In contrast, representations of fathers more frequently depict neglect or dereliction of duty. Visual depictions often show fathers as not actively participating in childcare, being indifferent, sleeping, or delegating household responsibilities to the child or other family members. On one hand, this reproduces the traditional distribution of gender roles; on the other, it demonstrates that the father's lack of responsibility in parenting is presented as a humorous or normalized element. Humor and normalization strategies facilitate the legitimization of such representations in social perception. Humorous framing casts the father's lack of responsibility as a "charming flaw" or a "familiar situation," weakening critical scrutiny and subtly communicating to the audience that these behaviors are ordinary, even expected, forms of parenting. In this context, the father's passive parental role is socially reproduced not only within the content of the visual material but also in the way this content is presented.

The contrast between maternal and paternal representations holds significant implications for gender equality policies and media literacy. Idealizing the mother as a flawless or responsible parent while normalizing the father as a passive or shirking parent contributes to the unequal reproduction of gender roles. This represents a cultural barrier to achieving equality in childcare and domestic labor. From a media literacy perspective, it is critical for audiences to recognize these representations not merely as surface-level entertainment but as carriers of social norms and power relations. Critical media literacy can enhance the ability to discern the ideological frameworks underlying visuals, understand how humor serves a legitimizing function, and see how gendered divisions of labor are

naturalized. In doing so, it can contribute to the development of more equitable parenting practices at both individual and societal levels.

4.4.2. Representation Gap

Doodles generally emphasize the traditional family structure (a mother, a father, and children). This approach excludes other family forms, such as single-parent households, blended families, or extended family members like grandparents who play significant roles in child-rearing. In Mother's Day Doodles, the maternal figure is limited to the biological mother, and figures such as foster mothers, aunts, or stepmothers are not represented. Similarly, in Father's Day Doodles, figures who assume fatherhood, such as stepfathers or uncles, are overlooked. This lack of representation prevents certain segments of society from seeing themselves reflected in Doodles. These critiques highlight the need for Google to adopt more inclusive designs that embrace diverse family structures.

Furthermore, when considering the representational absence under the theme of neglectful parenting, depictions in which mothers or fathers are physically or emotionally absent from a child's life are almost entirely missing in Doodles. The absence of visuals portraying parents as indifferent, deceased, distant, or insufficiently engaged with their children is noteworthy. Yet such representations reflect real-life family experiences, as many children grow up with absent or inattentive parents. This gap results in Doodles maintaining an idealized framework that predominantly highlights perfect and harmonious family bonds.

On the positive side, however, this choice allows Doodles to convey themes of strong, loving, and supportive family relationships, instilling hope and positive emotions in the audience. The prevalence of positive family representations, particularly in content celebrating special occasions, reinforces universal values such as social solidarity, unity, and affection. Nevertheless, diversifying this positive approach with a more inclusive perspective would increase the visibility of different family forms and enrich the representational power of Doodles.

4.4.3. Emotional Distance

The final sub-dimension of the neglectful parenting theme, emotional distance, encompasses representations in which the parent does not establish a relationship with the child based on closeness, sincerity, or warmth. In this context, elements such as the parent's physical presence without responding to the child's emotional needs, exhibiting cold or distant behavior in communication, and refraining from expressing affection come to the forefront. These representations highlight that mere physical presence is insufficient in parent-child relationships, emphasizing the critical role of emotional bonds in a child's development.



Figures 20 & 21. 2008 Mother's Day Doodle (Left), 2007 Father's Day Doodle (Right)

The two Doodle works discussed above provide striking examples of the visual representation of the concept of emotional distance. First, in the 2008 Mother's Day Doodle, the mother figure is depicted with her back turned to the child, which is highly significant from a visual storytelling perspective. This posture can be interpreted as a form of disconnection, distance, and emotional withdrawal, contrary to the expected closeness and warmth in classic parent-child relationships. Psychologically, the parent turning away may signal an unmet expectation of trust and support, indicating a lack of communication in the relationship. This suggests that the child's need for attention

and affection is either unmet or emotionally rejected. Consequently, this Doodle visual functions not merely as an aesthetic composition but as a symbol of potential emotional distance between parent and child.

The second Doodle, from Father's Day 2007, depicts the father figure lying on a lifebuoy with his face obscured by a hat, while the child remains passively in the water. Here, although the father is physically present, the obscured face represents the concealment of emotional expression and, by extension, the relational connection. Departing from the traditional perception of fathers as protective, authoritative, and affectionate figures, this father is portrayed as cold, distant, and indifferent. The child's solitary posture in the water signals an absence of the emotional support they would expect from the parent, forcing the child to cope with this deficiency. From a psychosocial perspective, such emotional distance and neglect can undermine the child's self-esteem and sense of security.

In both Doodles, the theme of emotional distance reflects a critical dimension of the parent–child relationship. Emotional closeness, particularly in early childhood, is a fundamental need for healthy development. Beyond physical presence, parents must be emotionally accessible and responsive. The representations of distance in these Doodles symbolize potential deficiencies, communication problems, and emotional disconnections in parent–child interactions, prompting viewers to reflect on these dynamics. Moreover, these visuals offer critical insight into transformations in modern family structures and evolving parenting roles. Within the context of digital art and visual culture, such Doodle works serve as an important tool for raising social awareness and fostering empathy. In conclusion, these Doodles move beyond surface-level depictions of celebrating parents and children; they can be understood as meaningful visuals that symbolize weakened emotional bonds within families and the inner experiences of individuals. They underscore, once again, the powerful role of art and visual communication in conveying social and psychological themes.

5. Discussion

In the discussion section of this study, the analysis will be structured around nine key research questions. These questions aim to address the central objectives of the research, guiding the interpretation of findings and connecting them to existing theoretical frameworks. Each question is designed to explore different dimensions of the study, including the representation of parental roles, the portrayal of gender norms, the visibility of diverse family structures, and the implications of emotional and disciplinary dynamics. By systematically responding to these questions, the discussion will provide a comprehensive understanding of how the visual materials under investigation reflect, reinforce, or challenge societal expectations and cultural narratives surrounding parenthood.

RQ1. *Through which symbols is parenting legitimized?* Parenthood is legitimized through visual symbols that present parental roles as natural and unquestionable. Mothers are frequently associated with care, affection, and emotional dedication; in Doodles, elements such as flowers, cakes, pastries, or pottery emphasize the nurturing, aesthetic, and creative dimensions of motherhood. Fathers, on the other hand, are depicted with symbols of authority, protection, and strength; objects like ties, hats, and work-related tools reinforce the fatherly role in terms of discipline and reliability. Fathers are also often shown as emotionally distant; scenes of fathers sitting on a couch, shaving, or relaxing highlight physical presence while signaling limited emotional engagement. These visual codes serve to naturalize parental roles, presenting caregiving, emotional support, and disciplinary authority as inherent aspects of motherhood and fatherhood.

RQ2. *How are parental figures represented through cultural myths?:* Beyond visual symbols, parental figures are represented through cultural myths and historical codes (Holliday, Kullman &

Hyde, 2010). Mothers are idealized through the “caring and nurturing mother” myth, which links motherhood to selflessness, devotion, and emotional support. Fathers are represented through myths such as the “authoritative protector” or “strong provider,” associating fatherhood with discipline, protection, and actions directed toward the external world. Even when fathers are physically present, emotional distance in these depictions reinforces these cultural myths. These myths not only legitimize parental roles socially but also create the impression that these roles are natural and immutable, producing an ideological framework. Thus, through both visual symbols and cultural myths, Doodles encode motherhood and fatherhood according to specific norms and ideals.

RQ3. *How are gender roles constructed in representations?:* In Doodle representations, female figures are generally oriented toward indoor and caregiving roles, while male figures are depicted engaging in outdoor and physical activities. For instance, fathers are often shown fishing, flying kites, sailing, riding airplanes, or building sandcastles—tasks that are active and outward-facing. Mothers, in contrast, are illustrated performing caregiving, creative, or domestic tasks such as baking, painting, or reading books to children. This pattern reflects Butler’s (1990) notion of gender as performative, demonstrating how parental roles are culturally staged. However, some Doodles stretch these conventions: mothers are occasionally portrayed in more adventurous activities, such as cycling, while fathers are depicted as nurturing and emotionally available, as in the penguin example. According to Soydan and Küçükşen (2022), media content has evolved over time, showing that women are no longer only represented in domestic roles but also as independent and successful individuals in professional contexts. In this regard, Doodles serve as a visual medium that both reproduces traditional roles and provides visibility for alternative forms of parenthood.

RQ4. *Within which normative framework are family and parental roles presented?* In Doodle representations, family and parental roles are generally presented within socially accepted normative frameworks. This framework encompasses cultural expectations such as the “good mother” and the “ideal father.” Mothers are associated with care, affection, emotional closeness, and domestic responsibilities, whereas fathers are linked to protection, strength, authority, and duties oriented toward the outside world. Through these normative codes, parenting is depicted as both natural and indisputable. Nevertheless, some visuals depict fathers undertaking domestic roles traditionally attributed to mothers, while mothers occasionally assume active roles outside the home. These instances, however, are limited; experiences arising from parental absence or deficiency are rarely presented within this normative framework. This reinforces the idealized representation of gender roles and family structure, limiting the visibility of diverse family experiences.

RQ5. *How do the visuals guide the viewer’s emotions?* Doodle visuals function as a powerful tool for directing viewers’ emotions. Family and parental representations are often framed positively, joyfully, and with loving bonds, which strengthens feelings of security, warmth, and belonging. Interactions between parents and children—such as playing, smiling, or engaging in shared activities—impose an idealized perception of family and parenthood on the viewer. Additionally, humorous or charming elements, particularly when depicting paternal passivity or carelessness, evoke both empathy and gentle amusement. This strategy reinforces social norms regarding parental roles while emotionally connecting viewers, enhancing the impact of the visual message.

RQ6. *Which parenting styles are emphasized in the Doodle designs?* Parenting styles are distinctly and systematically represented in Doodle designs through recurring visual patterns and role distributions. Fathers are generally portrayed in ways emphasizing neglect, discipline, and control, although some scenes depict them actively participating in shared responsibilities. Emotional and nurturing aspects of fatherhood are, however, minimally emphasized. Mothers, by contrast, are represented intensively as emotional, nurturing, and caregiving figures. Traditional gender roles are pronounced in these depictions: mothers occupy central roles in home and child care, while fathers

are more often portrayed through authority, discipline, and limited engagement. These representations suggest that Doodles encode parenting styles according to cultural norms, reflecting both gender-based expectations and societal ideals to the audience. These observations align with the temporal analysis presented in Table 5, which illustrates a gradual evolution from the strongly traditional and gendered parenting styles of the 2000–2010 period toward more balanced, yet still culturally coded, representations in the 2010–2025 period. While fathers’ nurturing roles remain limited, recent Doodles introduce more collaborative and emotionally engaged portrayals, signaling a slow but noticeable shift in visual narratives of parenting. In parallel with the overall findings, democratic and authoritarian parenting styles emerge as the most dominant representations in the dataset, whereas neglectful parenting is the least visible, appearing only sporadically, in which fathers are more represented than mothers, though still not frequently. Fathers in this theme are occasionally depicted as distant or less involved in child care, while mothers are almost entirely absent. This pattern may reinforce the association of fathers with occasional neglect, without strongly foregrounding this representation. Mothers’ minimal representation highlights their idealized role as consistently nurturing and emotionally supportive. Overall, while Doodles subtly emphasize traditional gender norms in parenting—particularly through the limited depiction of parental neglect—they also incorporate more flexible and participatory representations of parenting, reflecting a gradual shift toward more collaborative parenting practices.

Table 5. Temporal Analysis of Parental Representations in Google Doodles (2000–2025)

Period	Maternal Representations	Paternal Representations	Overall Trend
2000–2010	Strongly traditional imagery: mothers linked to caregiving, domesticity, emotional support; objects like flowers, cakes, and home interiors dominate.	Fathers shown as protectors, providers, or authority figures; limited emotional interaction; symbols include hats, tools, or work-related items.	Clear binary gender role division; strong reinforcement of cultural myths and normative expectations.
2010–2025	More diverse depictions: mothers linked to creativity, individuality, and external engagement; involvement in active and outdoor activities.	Fathers increasingly shown in caregiving, playful, and emotionally supportive roles; participation in shared domestic tasks more visible.	Gradual shift toward balanced, democratic parenting representations; norms are softened but not fully overturned.

The temporal analysis indicates that this shift should not be understood as a linear transformation from traditional to modern parenting models, but rather as a gradual and layered process of reconfiguration. While earlier representations (2000–2010) display more rigid and clearly defined gendered parenting roles, later representations (2010–2025) introduce elements of flexibility, shared responsibility, and emotional engagement. However, these newer representations do not fully replace traditional patterns; instead, they coexist with and adapt them within contemporary visual narratives. This suggests that digital visual culture facilitates a process of normalization in which emerging parenting styles are integrated into existing cultural frameworks rather than entirely transforming them.

One of the key insights of this study is that Google Doodle representations function as a bridge between traditional and modern understandings of parenthood. While conventional gendered parenting roles—such as mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as authority figures—remain partially visible, these roles are increasingly reconfigured through more flexible, participatory, and

emotionally engaged parenting styles. Rather than indicating a complete transformation, this process reflects a rearticulation of existing norms within new visual contexts. In this sense, Doodles present a hybrid model of parenthood in which continuity and change coexist, reflecting the simultaneous persistence and transformation of parenting norms within digital visual culture.

RQ7. *How are the cultural and universal dimensions of parenting combined in digital representations?* Digital representations such as Doodles present parenting by integrating both cultural and universal dimensions. The cultural dimension emerges through socially accepted norms assigned to mothers and fathers, such as care, affection, discipline, and protection. For example, mothers are symbolized through domestic tasks and child care, while fathers are associated with protection, strength, and the external world, reflecting a specific cultural context. The universal dimension involves values applicable across societies, including love, closeness, play, support, and emotional bonding within the family. Doodles convey these universal themes through charming animal figures, play scenes, or everyday life activities, blending them with cultural codes to offer viewers a parenting experience that is both familiar and universally relatable. Scenes may also depict children caring for and respecting their parents in old age, demonstrating that intergenerational responsibility and reverence are recognized as universal values in certain cultures. Thus, digital representations integrate parenting roles and family relationships across cultural and universal dimensions.

RQ8. *How are binary oppositions used in representations of parenting?* Binary oppositions serve as significant meaning-making tools in representations of parenting. Contrasts such as indoor/outdoor, emotional/rational, and passive/active place mothers and fathers in different roles, reinforcing societal gender norms. For instance, mothers are frequently depicted cooking in the kitchen with cakes or pastries, playing inside, or reading books to children, symbolizing their emotional and caregiving roles. Fathers, conversely, are shown engaging in outdoor and physically active tasks such as fishing, flying kites, or operating boats and planes, emphasizing their rational, strong, and protective characteristics. According to Lévi-Strauss's (1963) theory of binary oppositions, such contrasts present parental roles as natural and immutable in cultural meaning-making. Consequently, visual codes reinforce fixed gender roles and convey normative messages to the audience. Nonetheless, some Doodles stretch these binaries—for example, mothers engaging in active or risky activities like cycling, or fathers assuming caregiving roles as in the penguin example—indicating that these oppositions can be flexible and occasionally questioned.

RQ9. *Do digital representations tend to challenge or reproduce norms regarding parenthood?* Digital representations such as Doodles generally tend to reproduce norms regarding parenthood. Parental figures are mostly presented within socially accepted roles, framed by the myths of the “good mother” and the “ideal father.” Mothers are depicted through care, affection, and domestic responsibilities, whereas fathers are associated with protection, strength, and duties oriented toward the external world. This presentation reinforces the perception that parental roles are natural and indisputable. Nevertheless, some Doodle visuals depict fathers participating in domestic tasks or mothers assuming active roles outside the home, occasionally questioning or modifying the normative framework, though these instances are usually subtle and limited. Overall, the prevailing tendency is the reproduction of existing social gender and parenting norms through visually mediated representation.

At first glance, these findings may appear contradictory, as Google Doodles both reproduce traditional gender norms and present more flexible, democratic representations of parenting. However, this apparent contradiction reflects the layered nature of digital visual culture. On the one hand, familiar gendered patterns are maintained through recurring visual codes; on the other hand, these patterns are softened, redistributed, and occasionally reinterpreted within more contemporary

parenting frameworks. Therefore, rather than indicating inconsistency, these findings reveal a hybrid representational structure in which continuity and transformation coexist.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Google Doodle representations primarily reconstruct parenting styles through visually mediated narratives that emphasize emotional support, shared responsibility, and varying degrees of authority. Rather than merely depicting parental roles, these visual materials organize and communicate parenting practices within recognizable typological frameworks. The findings indicate that democratic and authoritarian parenting styles emerge as the most prominent representations, while neglectful parenting appears only in limited and selective instances. This suggests that digital visual culture tends to privilege certain parenting models while marginalizing others, thereby actively contributing to the normalization of specific parenting styles.

These representations reflect a broader tendency to idealize parenting as a balanced combination of care, discipline, and emotional engagement. Within this framework, parental roles are structured around participation, interaction, and guidance, highlighting the transformation of parenting into a more collaborative and dynamic practice. Importantly, this transformation should be understood not simply as a shift in gender roles, but as a reconfiguration of parenting styles in which emotional closeness, shared responsibility, and active involvement are increasingly emphasized. Over time, particularly since the 2010s, these representations incorporate elements of flexibility and relational balance, indicating a gradual but noticeable shift toward more participatory and responsive parenting styles.

While gender remains an important contextual dimension in shaping these representations, it operates as a secondary layer that supports the construction of parenting styles rather than defining them. In this sense, gender does not function as the primary analytical category but as a framework through which parenting styles are visually articulated and culturally interpreted. In some cases, traditional associations—such as mothers with caregiving and fathers with authority—remain visible; however, these patterns are frequently reconfigured, redistributed, or softened within more contemporary parenting narratives. This indicates that digital representations simultaneously reproduce and transform existing norms, creating a hybrid model in which continuity and change coexist within the construction of parenting styles.

At the same time, the limited visibility of neglectful parenting and non-traditional family structures suggests that Doodles maintain an idealized and selective representation of family life. This selectivity reinforces particular normative expectations regarding parenting, especially those aligned with emotionally supportive, engaged, and cooperative parenting styles, while excluding alternative or less idealized experiences. As a result, digital visual culture does not simply mirror parenting practices but plays an active role in shaping, guiding, and legitimizing specific parenting styles within broader social and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that digital representations function as subtle yet powerful communicative tools that influence how parenting is imagined, performed, and evaluated. By repeatedly emphasizing certain parenting styles—particularly those associated with emotional closeness, collaboration, and guidance—these visuals contribute to the formation of shared cultural expectations about what constitutes “ideal” parenting. In this sense, Doodles operate not only as celebratory images but also as normative visual narratives that structure the boundaries of acceptable and desirable parenting practices.

For future research, studies examining the perceptual effects of such representations on children and parents would provide valuable insights into how parenting styles are internalized and interpreted. In

particular, exploring how audiences engage with, adopt, or resist these visual narratives could deepen our understanding of the relationship between media representations and everyday parenting practices. Additionally, examining the representation of diverse family structures—including single-parent families, blended families, and alternative caregiving arrangements—could contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of parenting within digital culture. Such research would further illuminate how visual culture participates in both reinforcing and transforming contemporary parenting ideologies.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding this article.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

This study has been prepared in accordance with the principles of scientific research and publication ethics. The study does not require ethics committee approval.

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Extended Summary

This study investigates parental representations within the dynamic realm of digital visual communication, focusing specifically on Google Doodle designs. By analyzing Doodles produced for Mother's and Father's Day between 2000 and 2025, the research examines how parental figures are depicted in terms of emotional support, biological roles, shared responsibilities, and traditional representations. The study employs a qualitative analytical framework that considers both denotative and connotative layers of meaning, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how digital visuals contribute to the construction and communication of parenthood. The findings demonstrate that digital illustrations are not merely aesthetic artifacts; rather, they actively participate in shaping societal perceptions of parenting and family dynamics. These representations reflect both conventional and modern approaches to parenthood, highlighting the ways in which visual culture can reinforce or challenge societal norms.

This study gains particular relevance in Türkiye, where the Presidency has officially designated 2025 as the "Year of the Family." This official recognition emphasizes the importance of family values, parental roles, and intergenerational relationships. By analyzing Google Doodle representations of motherhood and fatherhood, the study provides insights that resonate with ongoing societal discussions in Türkiye regarding family cohesion and the promotion of equitable parenting practices. Examining how digital media portrays idealized, collaborative, and culturally coded parenting roles can inform public discourse, policy-making, and educational initiatives aimed at strengthening family unity and supporting modern parenting approaches in Türkiye. The analysis centers on Google Doodles, selected as a representative sample due to their broad reach and cultural significance. The study categorizes parental representations through thematic axes, including emotional/nurturing aspects, task sharing, gendered roles, and cultural myths. Denotative analysis focused on observable elements, such as the activities or objects associated with mothers and fathers, while connotative analysis considered the implied meanings and societal narratives encoded within these visual cues. This dual approach provides insight into the interplay between aesthetic choices and ideological messages, emphasizing how even seemingly playful or whimsical digital designs carry implicit social expectations about parenting.

The findings are structured around nine central research questions, each exploring a different dimension of parental representation in digital visuals. Parenthood is visually legitimized through culturally resonant symbols that naturalize maternal and paternal roles. Mothers are frequently linked to care, emotional devotion, and creativity, with objects such as flowers, cakes, and pottery reinforcing their nurturing identity. Fathers, conversely, are associated with authority, protection, and reliability, often depicted alongside tools, hats, hobbies or work-related items. Visual cues such as fathers relaxing, shaving, or sitting on a couch highlight a physical presence with limited emotional engagement, reflecting broader societal expectations regarding paternal involvement. These symbols collectively endorse the perception that caregiving, emotional support, and disciplinary authority are inherent traits of motherhood and fatherhood. Parental figures are also encoded through enduring cultural myths. Mothers are idealized as selfless, nurturing, and devoted, aligning with the "caring and nurturing mother" archetype, whereas fathers are depicted as authoritative protectors and providers, emphasizing discipline, protection, exploration and external orientation. Even when fathers are physically present, visual narratives sometimes highlight emotional distance, reinforcing these cultural

myths. The combination of visual symbols and cultural narratives constructs an ideological framework in which parental roles appear natural and immutable.

Doodles generally reflect traditional gender roles: mothers are shown performing domestic or caregiving tasks, while fathers engage in outdoor, active, or physically oriented activities such as fishing, sailing, or flying kites. This aligns with Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, illustrating how parental roles are culturally staged. Nonetheless, some Doodles present counterexamples: mothers participate in adventurous activities like cycling, and fathers assume nurturing, emotionally available roles. These representations suggest that while media reproduces normative gender expectations, it also allows space for alternative parenting models, reflecting a gradual evolution toward more equitable depictions. From the 2010s onward, notable shifts emerge: fathers are increasingly portrayed as active participants in caregiving and in more democratic, nurturing roles, while mothers are represented less in purely traditional frameworks and more in relation to creativity, individuality, and engagement with the outside world. These evolving portrayals indicate a gradual move toward balanced parental imagery that accommodates both modern ideals and cultural continuity. In parallel with the overall findings, democratic and authoritarian parenting styles emerge as the most dominant representations in the dataset, whereas neglectful parenting is the least visible, appearing only sporadically. Doodles function as powerful tools for guiding viewers' emotions, often presenting families in joyful, affectionate, and harmonious contexts. Depictions of play, smiles, and collaborative activities promote feelings of warmth, security, and belonging. Humor and charming elements, particularly in the portrayal of paternal passivity or minor clumsiness, foster empathy and gentle amusement. This emotional framing reinforces societal expectations of parental roles while engaging viewers affectively, enhancing the persuasive impact of visual narratives. In Doodles, the least visible theme is neglected parenting, in which fathers are more represented than mothers, though still not frequently. Fathers in this theme are occasionally depicted as distant or less involved in child care, while mothers are almost entirely absent. This reinforces the association of fathers with occasional neglect, without exaggerating their presence. Mothers' minimal representation highlights their idealized role as consistently nurturing and emotionally supportive. Overall, Doodles subtly emphasize traditional gender norms in parenting, particularly through the limited depiction of parental neglect.

Binary oppositions—such as indoor/outdoor, emotional/rational, passive/active—serve as central mechanisms for meaning-making in Doodle visuals. Mothers are typically associated with indoor, emotional, and caregiving roles, while fathers are represented as active, outward-facing, and rational. These oppositions reinforce societal norms, presenting parental roles as fixed and complementary. Nevertheless, selective deviations, such as mothers engaging in physically active or creative pursuits and fathers providing emotional care, suggest that these binaries are occasionally flexible, allowing for reinterpretation within idealized frameworks. Overall, Doodles primarily reproduce existing norms rather than challenge them. Mothers and fathers are visualized within the parameters of culturally sanctioned roles, reinforcing the perception of these roles as natural and unquestionable. Nonetheless, some instances—such as fathers performing domestic tasks or mothers undertaking outdoor or creative activities—subtly contest normative expectations, though these examples are rare. The dominant trend, therefore, remains one of normative reinforcement, mediated through visually appealing and emotionally engaging representations.

Google Doodles present parental roles in a largely positive and democratic manner, emphasizing family cohesion without strictly enforcing rigid gender roles. Maternal and paternal identities are depicted as complementary, interactive, and mutually influential, with both parents actively contributing to a child's life. Symbolic motifs, such as plants, animals, and creative elements, reinforce messages of family unity and collaborative parenting. Nevertheless, these representations remain

embedded within recognizable gendered frameworks, revealing a hybrid structure in which traditional norms and more egalitarian parenting models coexist.

While Doodles idealize parental roles, they incorporate both caregiving and disciplinary dimensions, emotional and rational aspects, illustrating the multifaceted nature of modern parenthood. Certain Doodles depict mothers in nontraditional, active roles or fathers providing emotional care, reflecting flexibility within normative representations. Such depictions underscore the potential for visual media to both reproduce and subtly challenge societal expectations, offering viewers a nuanced portrayal of parenthood. Modern parenting ideals—emphasizing equality, collaboration, and shared responsibility—are evident in these visuals, conveying strong, loving, and supportive family dynamics. However, representations of parental absence, neglect, or limited engagement are rare, indicating a continued reliance on idealized cultural and normative codes that privilege the “good parent” archetype. Future research could investigate the perceptual impact of Doodle representations on children and parents, examining how digital visuals influence understanding of gender roles, parenting practices, and family structures. Additionally, exploring depictions of diverse family models—such as single parents or intergenerational caregivers—could expand understanding of inclusivity and representation in digital culture, providing a more comprehensive perspective on parenting norms and visual communication.

Appendix 1. Research Sample (2020-2025 Mother’s & Father’s Day Doodles)

Year	Mother’s Day Doodles	Father’s Day Doodles
2000		
2001		
2002		
2003		
2004		

2005		
2006		
2007		
2008	 	
2009		 

2010		
2011		
2012		
2013		

2014	  	  
2015	 	
2016	 	 

2017	 	 
2018		
2019		
2020	 	 

2021	 	
2022		
2023	 	
2024		

2025

