

FAMILY MATTERS

An alternative perspective on parenting

Offbeat periodicals fill a void in the market.

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Having recently given birth to a second daughter, Amy Condra-Peters found herself frustrated and a bit lost. Although newsstands were brimming with parenting magazines, not a single one addressed issues she found pertinent. Most offered little more than child-rearing how-to's, recipes and kids' fashions. Many offended her sensibilities with their condescending tone.

A women's history student at the University of New Hampshire, Condra-Peters took matters into her own hands. With virtually no publishing experience under her belt, she created *The Mother is Me*, a quarterly publication that explores the realities of motherhood in the 1990s.

"Today women are not only told how to raise their children but how to feel while they raise their children — namely fulfilled, altruistic, nurturing and selfless," she explained from her home in Dover, N.H. "All of these emotions are certainly inherent in mothering, but so are feelings of frustration, doubt and resentment. Ideally, I'd like *The Mother is Me* to accept all of these responses as natural."

A recent issue of Condra-Peters' magazine, which has a circulation of 3,000, featured stories on motherhood and depression, reconciling the women's movement with motherhood and one woman's lament on the loss of private time. *The Mother is Me* includes poetry, fiction, artwork, photography and book reviews.

"So many mainstream magazines include pieces that reinforce women's insecurities and doubts in her mothering role — the judgments passed on her by society. Not just by the experts but by the media, popular culture and, most painfully, by other mothers," she said. "At *The Mother is Me*, we believe that all mothers are good mothers."

Welcome to the world of the alternative press. Fed up with mainstream publications, a number of determined individuals across the country are successfully producing a colorful array of magazines, newsletters and tabloids that offer a fresh perspective on parenting.

Whether it's meeting the unique needs of the stay-at-home father or addressing the troubling concerns of adolescent girls,



these offbeat periodicals fill a void in the market and lend a voice to those who wouldn't otherwise be heard. And they're doing so with style, panache and humor.

Take MUM, *Mother's Underground Magazine*, an 8-year-old Chicago-based publication. MUM's inspiration came from an informal mothers' support group led by Flora Calabrese, an Italian-born art instructor. As Calabrese and friends gathered around her kitchen table telling their own stories, they realized the power of this sharing and invited others to join in the exchange through a newsletter. Hence the birth of MUM, which now boasts an international circulation of 3,000 yet continues to be produced from Calabrese's back porch.

"Women are seeking empathy," she explained. "There's something very affirming to know that someone else has gone through what you're going through."

Each issue of MUM centers on a theme such as girlhood, single mothers, women's anger or the womb and, not surprisingly, stories are written in the first person. MUM also includes fiction, poetry and stark black-and-white photography. The readership is broad from women in their 20s to those in their 70s and includes more than just parents.

"A lot of older women who need the voice of the feminine in their lives are also reading us," she said.

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Alternative magazines for parents

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New Moon Network also focuses on the feminine but is targeted for "adults who care about girls." This bi-monthly publication out of Duluth, Minn., aims to bridge the gap between the academic writings on girls' lives and the day-to-day realities. Issues also are arranged thematically and recently included sports and play, violence in girls' lives and politics and feminism.

Founded by the husband-and-wife team of Joe Kelly and Nancy Gruver, New Moon Network is an offshoot of New Moon, a highly successful alternative magazine they founded four years ago. Interestingly, New Moon is produced by and for girls ages 8 to 14. Their inspiration?

"We started looking around for things to help us to resist the silencing of girls that so often happens when they reach adolescence," explained Kelly, the father of 16-year-old twin girls.

Of a similar ilk is Daughters, an eight-issue per year newsletter for the parents of girls ages 8 to 18. Serious and precise, Daughters offers articles and practical information directly from the sources — psychologists, social workers and doctors — and features interviews with leading authorities such as Mary Pipher, author of "Reviving Ophelia,"

the provocative best seller about adolescent girls.

A board of advisers, including pediatricians, psychologists, teachers, a juvenile judge and others help to decide the editorial content and make recommendations. Daughters contains no advertising because, "Some' advertising sends harmful messages to girls (and parents, too) — messages that urge them to conform to cultural standards that may be detrimental to their health and their individuality.

"Girls today need an ally, and we're trying to help the parents to be the ally," said Jack Hoos, publisher and founder of the Nashville, Tenn.-based Daughters.

The father of two young girls, Hoos also holds an MBA and is a former marketing consultant who quit his corporate job to devote himself to Daughters full-time.

For the growing minority of fathers who stay home to mind their children, two publications may prove helpful. At-Home Dad, a quarterly, contains practical advice as well as a networking section that puts stay-at-home fathers across the country in touch with one another. Interestingly, dads in 35 states are represented in the network, which has spawned a number of playgroups.

At-Home Dad's founder, Peter Baylies of North Andover, Mass.,

lost his computer job and found himself at home, caring for his young son. After he and his wife opted to make the arrangements permanent, he founded the publication to combat the isolation and broaden the Dad Network.

Another publication aimed at men is Full-Time Dads, "the magazine for caring fathers." Published on a bi-monthly basis, Full-Time Dads provides a forum for fathers to "share ideas, find support and discuss ideas that will help us become better parents."

Perhaps one of the oldest and the most widely circulated representative of the alternative parenting press is Mothering, "the magazine of natural family living."

Having recently printed its 20th anniversary edition, Mothering continues to honor the opinions of its readers and provides an extensive Letters to the Editor section. Within the pages of this glossy magazine readers will find articles on homeopathy, natural foods, attachment-style parenting and first-person accounts of the parenting journey.

"Mothering celebrates the experience of parenthood as worthy of one's best efforts and seeks to inspire a recognition of the immense importance and value of parenthood and family life in the development of the full human potential of parents and children."