Discursive representation of older first time parents in British press

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In the context where the average age of first time parents is rising and reproductive technologies facilitate parenting for a more diverse adult population, this paper explores how late motherhood / fatherhood is represented in UK press. Media Frame Analysis and Discourse Analysis inform the study of a corpus of UK newspaper articles (N=c.100, covering a four year period 2008-11). An initial macroanalysis of the corpus revealed five main types of news pegs and five main frames of news. This was complemented by a microanalysis of selected articles to investigate the construction of advantages and disadvantages of parenting at midlife (and beyond) and the implied ‘normative’ and ‘non-normative’ age boundaries regarding reproduction and childrearing. Differences in ideological framing in terms of the type of article (such as front page news vs. feature article) or type of paper are looked at, as are discursive depictions of the parents themselves in terms of their lifespan stage and relationship status in particular. Finally, the findings are related to the discursive construction of lifespan and gender identities in this specific context and the changing landscape of families and parenting in the twenty-first century and the role of news media in ideologically framing those changes.

Keywords: lifespan identity, news discourse, parenting.