

The 1990s Shift in the Media Portrayal of Working Mothers

Joanna Kling*
(jkling@umd.edu)
and
Reeve Vanneman
(reeve@umd.edu)

Department of Sociology
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742

Abstract

A cultural theme of distressed working mothers depicts working mothers as caught between the demands of work and family in an unforgiving institutional context. Susan Faludi first identified this theme as a conservative backlash against feminists' attempts "to have it all." But the same narrative helps support demands for more flexible work-family policies and more significant housework contributions from fathers. We explore this theme by coding 859 newspaper articles sampled from the 1981-2009 *New York Times*. Articles discussing problems for working mothers increased in the mid-1990s and have continued increasing into the 21st century. Other themes about problems and benefits for working mothers show quite different trends. There is also an unexpected mid-1990s shift in attention from problems working mothers are having at home to problems at work. The increase in the distressed working mother theme coincides with the mid-1990s stall in the gender revolution. The simultaneity of the cultural, economic, political and attitude trends suggests that the rise of the distressed working mother theme and the stall in the gender revolution have mutually reinforced each other over the last two decades.

* corresponding author: Joanna Kling, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742; jkling@umd.edu

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Introduction

Anne Marie Slaughter's much-discussed June 2012 *Atlantic* article, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All", detailed her personal struggle of balancing work and family as the director of policy planning at the U.S. State Department. Her story was a cautionary tale for mothers who think they can have it all, but the title incited controversy because it was easily read as yet another media example of denying women's equality in the workplace by pushing them towards a mommy track. The *Atlantic* article came two decades after Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1991) argued that the 1980s media had consistently attempted to blunt the feminist movement by portraying negative images of women trying to "have it all."

Both Slaughter's personal memoir and Faludi's media analyses identified a similar theme of the distressed working mother. Central to this theme, stress is the inevitable result of mothers' attempts to combine careers and parenting in today's unforgiving environment. For Faludi, the media image of stressed-out mothers represented a conservative backlash against women's entry into the labor force. For Slaughter, the reality of stressed out mothers was evidence that progressive reforms were needed in the workplace and the family to accommodate women's legitimate vision of gender equality. The ability of a single image to appeal to such disparate political agendas has guaranteed it a pervasive place in contemporary culture. A similar tension within the social science literature contrasts a need to create a more humane work-family balance against an urge to close the remaining gaps in gender equality by avoiding a "mommy track" (Gornick and Meyers 2009, Stier and Mandel 2009).

This paper is motivated by trying to understand how the theme of distressed working mothers in popular media might have contributed to the timing of the 1990s stall of the gender revolution. A broad range of gender indicators including mothers' labor force participation, occupational and educational integration (England and Li 2006; Cohen, Huffman, and Knauer 2009; Cohen 2012), the gender wage gap (Hegewisch et al. 2010; IWPR 2012), female elected officials (Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics 2012), and even time spent on household chores (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006) have documented a mid-1990s stall. Attitudes on gender also ceased becoming more egalitarian in the mid-1990s (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001) and have shown minor change since then (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2011). While the stall is now a generally accepted fact, explanations for it have not been so readily developed. We demonstrate below that the popular media's adoption of the distressed working mother theme coincided with and may have reinforced the stall in gender outcomes.

We trace the prevalence of a distressed working mother theme in the *New York Times* between 1981 and 2009. We code 859 systematically sampled articles and find that references to *problems* for working mothers increased in the mid-1990s. Attention also shifted in the mid-1990s from problems working mothers had at home to problems working mothers had at work. By contrast, we find a decline in an earlier critique that their *children* are hurt by mothers' work outside the home. And although feminist themes of the benefits of careers for working mothers also rose briefly in the mid-1990s, the feminist themes fall back to pre-1990 levels in the early 2000s while the distressed working mothers theme continued to increase into the 21st century.

Popular Culture and the theme of distressed working mothers

Faludi's *Backlash* (1991) argued that the media were portraying a new image of mothers trying to "have it all": that combining successful careers and primary caregiving at home only led to stressed-out mothers. Faludi interpreted this media image as an attack on feminism, an often explicit argument that feminist reforms were only injuring the very people they were supposed to have helped. She argued that this new theme of distressed working mothers had replaced an older critique that identified their children as the main casualties of women's new career orientation.

Other media analyses reinforced this indictment of the popular media's resistance to women's entry into the labor force. Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels's *Mommy Myth* (2004) noted the rise of "the new momism" which put demands on working mothers beyond what any woman could realistically fulfill. Arlie Hochschild's (1989) memorable image of the "second shift" popularized the idea of the double burden on working mothers and showed how persistent (albeit dysfunctional) male resistance could be. Lisa Belkin's 2003 *New York Times Magazine* article on her Princeton classmates "opting out" of high-powered careers documented how work conflicts pushed mothers out of their careers but was also seen as a narrative about guilty mothers distressed at leaving their children in others' care (Williams, Manville, and Bornstein 2006).

Work-Family Balance

The conflict between careers and parenthood was echoed from a very different perspective by the growing attention to work-family policy. Cross-national analyses of public policy on maternity leave, part-time work, flexible schedules, and child care all showed the U.S. to be at or near the very bottom of international comparisons (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Pettit

and Hook 2009; Ray, Gornick, and Schmitt 2010). Advocates for reform argued that trying to combine a successful career and responsible child-rearing was especially difficult for American women under these circumstances. Working mothers were rightfully distressed by the painful choices they were forced to make because of the lack of institutional and spousal support for working mothers. In this vision, the next step in gender equality would be to make the necessary reforms at work and at home to facilitate combining careers and parenthood (Gornick and Meyers 2009).

Policies aimed at alleviating work-family conflict were resisted, not only from the obvious conservative and business interests, but also from some feminists (e.g., Bergmann 2009). Parental leave, part-time work, and even flexible schedules encouraged women to withdraw from full career engagement (the much disparaged “mommy track” that angered critics of Felice Schwartz’s controversial 1989 *Harvard Business Review* recommendations). Improved family policies, critics argued, had two unintended negative consequences. An even temporary withdrawal from work interrupts women’s accumulation of the human and social capital needed to advance their careers, and these deficits put them at a systematic disadvantage in competition with male colleagues. Second, insofar as work-family benefits are perceived as *women’s* benefits, they encourage employers to engage in statistical discrimination against women because men were likely to be less costly and more job-devoted (Mandel and Semyonov 2005).

To these two unintended risks of advocacy for work-family balance, we would add a third, cultural, problem: the promotion of work-family reforms almost necessarily depends on an image of distressed working mothers that unintentionally reinforces a conservative narrative that women “can’t have it all.” A broad cultural acceptance of this image therefore affects both employers’ favoritism of men on the demand side and women’s own indecisions on the supply

side. Heightened concerns about the stresses of combining work and family could unintentionally discourage women from “leaning in” and “pushing back”, to borrow another recent argument from popular culture (Sandberg 2013). To the extent therefore that the image of distressed working mothers grew in the 1990s, it may have supported both the initial modest efforts at work-family policy (i.e., the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993) *and* a conservative backlash that underlay a stall in the gender revolution. These contradictory cultural affinities of a distressed working mother schema make its analysis especially complicated.

Content Analyses of Gender Trends in the Media

Earlier media analyses, such as Faludi’s, identified a shift towards a distressed mother narrative that was impressively wide-ranging, drawing content from newspapers, television, films, novels, and a broad variety of popular culture sources. However, as insightful as Faludi’s and other media analyses may have been about the media backlash, it is possible that her examples may have been well-chosen but unrepresentative illustrations. We would like to know about *prevalence* as well as thematic meaning of the media examples she describes. Were media claims about working mothers’ stress more prevalent in the 1990s than before, and were they more prevalent than the feminist themes of the self-fulfillment women find in their careers? Douglas and Michaels (2004), for instance, note that the era of TV shows about happy homemakers was also the time when Roseanne provided a more feminist model for combining work and family. A more systematic examination of the media’s portrayal of working mothers needs to examine both negative and positive images, and it needs to measure prevalence from a more standardized sample of sources.

Quantitative content analyses of popular culture find content about women tends to parallel trends in feminist activism. Studies of children’s books, for instance, found a greater

prevalence of female characters and less stereotyping after the activism of the 1970s than before (Clark, Lennon and Morris 1993; Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993; Gooden and Gooden 2001). Similarly, most analyses of women's magazines found changes towards more egalitarian themes after 1970 in both fiction (Loughlin 1983; Demarest and Garner 1992; Peirce 1997) and non-fiction content (Brown 1978; Geise 1979).

Longer analyses of content spanning a century, show that changes have not always been in a unilinear feminist direction. Studies of the first half of the twentieth century found *declines* in egalitarian content. Friedan's classic *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) was based in part on evidence that female characters in women's magazine fiction had become *more* stereotypical between 1939 and the 1950s. Griffith (1949) found a similar shift away from careers towards housewives for an even earlier time period of women's fiction. Similarly, Johns-Heine and Gerth (1949) found a shift towards more traditionalist values in the 1930s compared to the "the post-World War I expansiveness and optimism."

This earlier downward trend in the career-oriented content of women's magazines is corroborated by the curvilinear results found in counts of female characters in children's books. Both Grauerholz and Pescosolido (1989) for 1900 to 1984 and McCabe et al. (2011) for 1900 to 2000 found that a U-shaped curve best fit the trends in the prevalence of female characters. They attribute the high points in the early and late parts of the century to the rise of women's movements at the time; in contrast, the low point in the middle of the century coincided with the political eclipse of these movements. By extension, the decline of feminist protest after the 1982 defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (Costain 1992; Minkoff 1997; Barakso and Schaffner 2006) might lead us to expect a retreat from the feminist themes of the 1970s media. This

downward trend in feminist themes was exactly what Faludi's *Backlash* argued had happened in the 1980s.

While suggestive of the nonlinearities of gender trends in popular culture, the content analyses of women's magazines and children's books have rarely examined more than the presence or absence of female characters. We seek to extend these types of quantitative methods to reflect themes identified by media analysts' more qualitative analyses. We borrow from the quantitative analyses their emphasis on systematic sampling and coding, but the content we focus on is the theme of distressed working mothers identified by the more qualitative media analysts. We compare trends in these distressed working mothers themes against alternatives, for example, the more conventional feminist advocacy of the benefits of the self-fulfillment of careers, the successful role models this work provides for their children, and the frustrations for both mothers and children of mothers' lives circumscribed by purely family concerns at home.

Methods

Sample

We selected articles from the *New York Times* between 1981 and 2009 to track working mother themes over time. The *Times* is, of course, a narrow slice of elite culture, and we make no claim for its representativeness. It might be argued that the *Times* is a "cultural gatekeeper" (Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie 1997) and thus especially worth of early attention. But the relationship between trends in the *Times* and in less elite newspapers or in the many other popular culture media that Faludi reviewed must remain an issue for future study.

We interpret the *Times* mainly as a particular *sample* of elite media culture, not necessarily as a specific agent of cultural change. It was not so much that people read distressed working mother themes in the *Times* and then changed their expectations about combining work

and motherhood, only that trends in the *Times* likely reflect (and perhaps anticipate) more general trends in popular discussions of working mothers. It is these more general expectations about working mothers that may have an inhibiting effect on gender equality. Our cultural sampling interpretation would seem more plausible than making causal claims about any impact of this one newspaper.

A computer search in Lexis/Nexis of the *Times* for articles with any mention of either working mothers or stay-at-home mothers identified 7953 possible articles.¹ The articles included daily news articles, op-ed opinions, letters to the editor, book reviews, articles in the *Times Magazine*, and everything in the Metropolitan section whether for the New York, New Jersey, or Connecticut editions. In most of these articles, the mention of working mothers or stay-at-home mothers was only incidental. For example, a biographical article might say, “his mother worked as a baker.” To focus on articles that would be most likely to reveal the qualitative descriptions we sought, we limited the sample to articles where the search terms appeared at least three times. That restriction identified 859 *Times* articles that were read and coded. Of these, 40 were eliminated because they were not relevant to working or stay-at-home mothers despite including the word “work” close to “mother” (e.g. “Mother Teresa worked...”); 11 others were duplicates of articles in other editions of the *Times*.

Of the remaining 808 articles, 347 had at least one coded mention of the problems or benefits for mothers or children of mothers’ working or staying home. Articles with coded references are spread over all 29 years of the sample, varying from only one article in 1991 to 29 in 2006. Per year, therefore, these are small samples so the pattern over individual years

¹ The exact search string used in the Lexis/Nexis database was: (work! OR employ! OR career OR housewi! OR homemaker OR stay at home) w/2 (mom OR mother!)

includes much random noise. We resolve this, as do almost all quantitative analyses of trends in media content, by calculating averages over a number of years, in our case calculating a moving average of the number of stories in the previous five years. Our measure for the year 1995, for example, is the average number of stories coded for each theme between 1991 and 1995.

Coding

Each article was coded for eight themes related to working or stay-at-home mothers. Our principal focus is on the problems encountered by working mothers. We compare this theme to other themes about the benefits for working mothers, problems and benefits for stay-at-home mothers, and problems and benefits for children of either stay-at-home mothers or working mothers. Code definitions and specific examples are provided more fully in Internet Table 1. Figure 1 provides an overview of how the eight themes are related. Four codes described problems or benefits of work for the mothers themselves; four described problems or benefits for their children. Four described issues about working mothers; another four about stay-at-home mothers. And four described problems while four described benefits.

--[Figure 1 about here]--

Articles usually have more than one code. For example, a 1997 article describes one working mother, “She did not enjoy being a homemaker and is happier now that she is back working full time as the marketing manager” (*New York Times* 1997). This sentence is coded for both “problems for stay-at-home mothers” and “benefits for working mothers.” Although an article might contain several paragraphs with the same theme coded, counts were simplified to presence or absence in each article and then aggregated to the year-level to produce an annual count of the number of articles that contained each theme. We considered developing percentage based measures of these themes, but decided to focus on absolute counts of articles because of

the difficulty of defining a denominator (all *Times* articles? all *Times* articles referencing working mothers?) and because concerns about the relative prevalence of a given theme are best addressed as comparisons of the prevalence of different, contrasting themes for which absolute counts are the best measure. The following describes our eight codes in more detail.

1) *Problems for working mothers*. The most basic code incorporates Faludi's emphasis on the "stress, guilt, or other problems for the mothers from combining work and parenting; any mention of worry or stress from trying to do both roles." For example, a 2003 article on the guilt mothers have from working provides this first-person description: "And the working wives, well, you know what they feel guilty about. At least 50 percent of me -- in spirit -- is always at home," Mrs. K said, 'wondering what the kids are doing and worrying about them'" (*New York Times* 2003). An article had to cite more than just the difficulties of combining work and family – it also had to claim that the difficulties resulted in some stress or guilt for the mother.

This code was also disaggregated into four sub-codes indicating whether working mothers' problems originated in the home or at work: 1) the problems originated at home, 2) problems originated at work, 3) problems originated at both home and work, and 4) the location of the problems was not specified as home or work. Belkin's much discussed 2003 *New York Times Magazine* article about opting out, for instance, actually downplayed the maternal draw theme but, instead, recognized that the mothers were escaping impossible work demands:

"...the exodus of professional women from the workplace isn't really about motherhood at all. It is really about work. 'There's a misconception that it's mostly a pull toward motherhood and her precious baby that drives a woman to quit her job, or apparently, her entire career... As often as not, though, a woman would have loved to maintain some version of a career, but that job wasn't cutting it anymore. Among women I know,

quitting is driven as much from the job-dissatisfaction side as from the pull-to-motherhood side.”

2) *Problems for stay-at-home mothers.* An opposite theme from problems for working mothers are stories describing problems for at-home mothers. Problems for at-home mothers were the major theme of Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique*: “boredom or frustration from not having a career or sufficient interaction with other adults; longing for the excitement or challenge of work.” A 1985 article provides an apt example: “Women who are bound to the home and who feel themselves victims of what Dr. Pearlin calls ‘role captivity,’ suffer the strongest psychological symptoms, partly because they feel helpless and unable to change their lives” (*New York Times* 1985).

3) *Benefits for working mothers.* Another contrast to the problems for working mothers theme is the benefits mothers receive from working, especially “mothers’ sense of fulfillment or self-confidence provided by work.” A 2008 article about a working mother diagnosed with cancer was typical: “Ms. Cuevas, 39, [a factory worker] so relished the independence afforded her by working that a few years ago she took a second job” (*New York Times* 2008).

4) *Benefits for stay-at-home mothers.* The final mother-focused code complements the first code’s problems for working mothers by identifying the benefits for stay-at-home mothers. Most commonly, articles referred to a “strong sense of identity, pride, or accomplishment as a mother; the stimulation of working with and developing children; appreciates freedom of controlling own day; satisfactions of maternal instincts; motherhood as a great calling.” For example, a 1996 story about former business women who quit their jobs noted that, “these days, Ms. Forest takes pride in just making a trip to the post office with her daughters, Jocelyn, 20 months, and Gabrielle, 3 months.” (*New York Times* 1996a)

5) *Problems for children of working mothers.* This code recognizes “any educational, emotional, interpersonal or other problems for children of working mothers; less supervision or quality interaction with children by working mothers.” For example, an editorial from 1987 on teenage suicides raises problems for children of working mothers as a “legitimate concern”,

“What explains the recent teen-age suicides in New Jersey? With mothers gone to work, no one has time to talk to young people. Why do children in day care show higher insecurity than children at home? Institutional care can never replace mothering. If only women weren't working, there'd be less drug abuse, less isolation in modern life. These are legitimate concerns” (*New York Times* 1987a).

6) *Benefits for children of working mothers.* In contrast, the benefits to children of their mothers' work, was coded for her being a “role model, children's pride in mother's accomplishments; increased independence or sense of responsibility of children of working mothers; positive benefits of day care for children.” A 1996 article on company policies quoted Vice President Gore's claim that, “female employees who are supported in the workplace usually repay with loyalty and efficiency and project a positive image for their children” (*New York Times* 1996b).

7) *Problems for children of stay-at-home mothers.* Another contrast to problems for children of working mothers is a mention of problems for children of stay-at-home mothers, for example, “educational, emotional, interpersonal or other problems for children of stay-at-home mothers; poor child-care quality because of stay-at-home mothers' emotional state.” Illustrating this theme, an article from 1988 about intensive parenting concludes, “You can find damaged children in families where the mother stays home. Haven't you seen it before? The mother is at

home, but her head is someplace else, and she can't mother the kids properly” (*New York Times* 1988).

8) *Benefits for children of stay-at-home mothers*. The final child-focused code identifies benefits for children of stay-at-home mothers. This code is defined as “specific or general benefit to children if mother does not work.” A mother in a 2009 article articulates this theme, “This morning, we baked cookies together. I have time to help them with homework. I'm attending church. The house is managed by me. Just a lot more homemaker-type stuff, which I think is more nurturing to them” (*New York Times* 2009)

These eight codes capture much of how the *Times* discusses working and stay-at-home mothers. These codes enable us to compare the trends in these distressed mother themes with trends in more conventionally feminist themes or with themes that formed the earlier defense of the traditional family. For ease of presentation, we generally collapse the eight codes into four types. The pairs of codes along each of the diagonals of Figure 1 represent similar critiques or defenses of working mothers. Articles on the problems for working mothers imply much the same message as do discussions of the benefits for mothers of staying home. These are the two sides of the same narrative about working mothers.

The distressed working mother code combined with the benefits of stay-at-home mothers code can be contrasted with codes celebrating the benefits of work for mothers or criticizing the limitations of staying home. We label this second theme the feminist defense of working mothers. A third theme identifies articles discussing either the problems for children of working mothers or the benefits for children of stay-at-home mothers. Like the negative distressed working mothers narrative, these two codes carry an anti-feminist message, but they reflect what we believe is an older resistance to feminism that focused on problems for children rather than

for the mothers themselves. We label this third theme the conventional family critique of working mothers. Finally, the codes for benefits for children of working mothers and for problems of the children of stay-at-home mothers carry a pro-feminist message, but they are usually a secondary feminist argument, often made in response to accusations about the dangers of mothers' work for children. We label this the feminist defense of children of working mothers.

Inter-coder Reliability

All articles were coded by the first author. Half of the original sample of 859 articles were re-coded by two undergraduate students to estimate reliability, each student coding a separate subset of articles. Table 1 reports the moderate levels of inter-coder reliability for each of the four themes. The coders agreed on between 80 percent and 90 percent of the articles for each of the codes. But because all coders found that most of the articles had none of the themes, we can expect high inter-coder agreement by chance given these marginal frequencies. Cohen's kappa controls for agreement due to chance (Cohen 1960) and shows moderate levels of reliability. There is no noticeable pattern of some themes being more reliably coded than others or better agreement with one of the two student coders. Another standard measure of association, gamma, shows a higher level of association but also reveals no patterns across themes or student coders.

--[Table 1 about here]--

Results

Table 2 presents the total counts of articles for each of the eight codes and four themes across the 808 articles and 29 years. Problems for working mothers, the distressed working

mothers theme, is easily the most common of all the themes in the *Times*. 210 of the articles included some mention of problems for working mothers (or benefits for stay-at-home mothers). Problems for the children of working mothers is the next most common code, found in 90 articles. It should not be a surprise that the news concentrates more on current problems than current benefits.

--[Table 2 about here]--

Distressed working mothers

The distressed working mothers theme includes discussions of working mothers' stress, guilt, or other problems, the most common of the eight codes, as well as the less common references to benefits for mothers of staying home with their children. The benefits for mothers of staying at home only appeared 12 times throughout the three decades compared to 210 times for the problems for working mothers code. As predicted by earlier media analysts, this distressed working mothers theme arose more often than the three other themes combined. However, our primary interest is not in the totals over the whole period but in the trend over time (see Figure 2). A steady increase in the number of distressed working mother articles began only in the mid-1990s. The previous decade had witnessed a stable average rate of about six such articles per year. That stability ends in the mid-1990s when the frequency of these articles increases quite steadily until 2009, the end of our observations. This increase reached a temporary peak in the early 2000s at about 10 articles per year and then rose again so that by the late 2000s the *New York Times* wrote about problems for working mothers close to 12 times per year on average, over twice as often as in the mid-1980s.

--[Figure 2 about here]--

Figure 2 also shows that the early 1980s had even fewer articles on problems for working mothers than the late 1980s, suggesting that the increased attention to distressed working mothers may have begun in the 1980s as Faludi asserts. It is impossible to evaluate this for certain without data from the more feminist 1970s, before easily searchable online versions of the *Times* are available. But even if the first examples of distressed working mothers against “trying to have it all” could be seen in the 1980s, it is clear that only after the mid-1990s did this theme grow into a steady increase that dominated the discussion of working mothers.

The sub-coding of problems for working mothers, whether those problems originated at work or home, provides a more in-depth analysis of how the theme changed over time. Almost half of the “problems for working mothers” occurrences were sub-coded as problems working mothers were having at home (47 percent) whereas only 11 percent were coded as originating at work. The remaining occurrences were split evenly between the number of times the problems focused on both work and home or the problems did not specify work or home (23 percent and 19 percent). This “family-centric” emphasis is consistent with Kuperberg and Stone’s (2008) and Williams et al.’s (2006) analysis of opting-out stories in the media.

Nevertheless, over time there is a shift in focus from problems that mothers were having in the *home* to problems they were having at *work* because they were primary caregivers. The 1980s were characterized by a focus on the problems coming from the home and how home was a priority over work. Out of the 28 articles that were identified as problems originating only in the home or only at work in the 1980s, 25 of these had at least one sub-code of “problems working mothers were having originated at home.” For example, typical statements from mothers in the *New York Times* in the 1980s say, “Will we miss our children's best moments? Will they suffer because we aren't always there?” (1987b). However, the mid-1990s increase in

references to problems for working mothers arises from more articles on problems mothers face in the workplace such as getting fired or struggling to move up the corporate ladder. 21 of 28 articles with a sub-code as “problems originated at work” appeared after the mid-1990s. For example, an article from 1996 says,

“If only corporate America would make it easier for women to take care of their duties at home, they could at last compete on an equal footing with men in the workplace -- and rise to the top.”

The new picture starting in the mid-1990s portrayed women trying to work, but having difficulties there. The problems with childcare and the guilt from working were still present in the *New York Times* after the mid-1990s, but the changed trajectory resulted from additional discussions of the problems working mothers faced at work.

It may seem surprising that the increase in distressed working mothers stories results more from work problems than family problems when much of the sociological analysis has emphasized the growth in intensive mothering (Hays 1996) and concerted cultivation (Lareau 2003). But Stone’s (2007) interviews with “opting-out” mothers showed that while mothers often first framed their choices to leave as the pull of home factors, more probing usually revealed problems at work such as demanding and imperious bosses. Sarah Damaske (2011) reveals the same pattern of women explaining their choices in terms of *family* needs when empirical analyses reveal that it is more often *work* demands that shape mothers’ labor force participation decisions. The 1990s shift in the *Times* also picked up this priority of work factors in creating stress for working mothers. The shift also coincided with the passage of the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which helped turn attention to the inflexibility of work arrangements as a source of mothers’ stress.

The Conventional Family Critique of Working Mothers

The trend over the three decades in stories about problems for *children* of working mothers (or the benefits for children of stay-at-home mothers) is dramatically different than for the problems for mothers themselves. This code covers educational or emotional problems children have because of their mothers' work. Discussions of less time or quality interaction with working mothers are typical. In the 1980s, these themes are almost as common as problems for the mothers themselves. In the 1990s the two trends diverge: while "distressed working mothers" increase over time, the "conventional family critique of working mothers" began decreasing (see Figure 3). Stories mentioning problems for children of working mothers or benefits for children of stay-at-home mothers averaged about five per year in the late 1980s, but then declined to about three times a year on average in the mid-1990s where they have remained. Stories about distressed working mothers are now two to three times as common as stories about problems for their children.

--[Figure 3 about here]--

This decline after the mid-1990s supports Faludi's insight that the critique of working mothers shifted to problems for the mothers themselves rather than the more conventional reservations that working was harmful for her children however fulfilling a career might be for her. The new critique argued that working was bad also for her, and as this backlash against working mothers waxed, the earlier critique waned. The newer attention to problems of trying "to have it all" may have provided a more compelling argument against combining work and family than did the familiar reservations about children. But the emphasis on working mothers' own problems also reflected the growing concern with U.S. work-family policy in order to relieve the "second shift" American women faced.

The divergence between problems for working mothers and problems for their children mirrors the convergence between the two codes focused on children. As stories on problems for working mothers' children declined in the late 1990s, their frequency converged with stories about benefits for these children. In the late 1980s stories on problems appeared almost twice as often as did stories on the benefits for children of working mothers, seven times per year compared to four times per year. Previous research has noted that the media portrayed group childcare negatively during this period (Brewster and Padavic 2000). But after the decline in the late 1990s of these stories, the *Times* ended up with almost equal references to the benefits to children of working mothers as to the problems the children faced.

The Feminist Defense of Working Mothers

On the opposite side of the distressed working mothers theme is the conventional feminist advocacy of working mothers: a sense of fulfillment provided by work in contrast to the problems of boredom faced by stay-at-home mothers. This classic feminist theme showed yet a third pattern over the three decades. Feminist arguments declined gradually throughout the 1980s until the mid-1990s, the only theme of the four considered here that showed a consistent decline in the 1980s. However, these feminist themes enjoyed a short revival just as the distressed working mothers theme began to grow in the mid-1990s. The similar pattern of increases in stories about both problems and benefits for working mothers might have been a journalistic attempt at balance. In fact, these seeming opposites do often occur in the same story. Of the 87 articles that were coded for benefits for working mothers, 46 also were coded for problems for working mothers. It appears that after the rise of distressed working women, the feminist argument resurfaced as a counter-balance.

But this attempt at balance did not last long. As the problems for working mothers continued to become the predominant focus of stories about motherhood in the new century, the feminist theme was eventually eclipsed. While never falling back entirely to the low levels of two stories a year as in the early 1990s, feminist themes never rose much above their late 1990s high of four stories a year. Meanwhile, stories with the distressed working mothers theme continued to increase so that recently they outnumber the feminist stories by 2- or 3-to-1.

The Feminist Defense of Children of Working Mothers

While much of the feminist advocacy for working mothers centered on the benefits to the mothers themselves, feminists also argued a working mother provided an excellent role model for her children who often took pride in their mother's accomplishments. The children often enjoyed a new sense of responsibility because of their increased independence. These themes could be found in the *Times* at a remarkably even pace of two to four stories a year on average since 1990. There had been a small increase in the mid- to late-1980s, but since then the range has been fairly narrow in comparison to the changes for the other three themes already discussed. As noted above, the maintenance of these low levels led to a convergence over time so that since the mid-1990s there have been about equal number of articles criticizing and defending the children of working mothers.

Discussion

The four themes about working and stay-at-home mothers show four different patterns since 1980. The distressed working mothers theme has appeared more often than the other codes and is the only one to rise almost continuously since the mid-1990s. In contrast, the feminist arguments on behalf of working mothers, which had been declining in the 1980s, briefly revived

in response to the mid-1990s rise of the distressed working mothers theme, but feminist themes fell back again in the new century and are now consistently less common. The more traditional critique of feminism, that mothers' work might harm their children, rose briefly in the 1980s but then declined and remained at a lower level as the critiques of distressed mothers came to predominate in the *Times*. Finally, the feminist defense of children of working mothers shows a steadier if lower level of frequency, at least since the late 1980s.

The steady rise in the distressed mothers theme since the mid-1990s is particularly interesting since this increase coincided with the end of the long rise in mothers' labor force participation. In this discussion, we address the possible causal relationships between these cultural and structural changes (Vaisey 2009). That discussion prompts us to place the distressed mothers theme in a larger cultural context of similar schema that also supported the mid-1990s stall in the gender revolution. First, however, we review some important methodological questions raised by our content analysis.

Methodological considerations

Content analyses of the popular media have a long history in sociology. Two distinct approaches have competed over the years. One is a careful analysis of a small sample of popular culture that digs deeply into the meaning of some carefully selected cultural products. In this approach, sampling is less important and tracking change over time is difficult because of the small and often unrepresentative texts analyzed. The other approach takes larger samples to track changes over time, but the content that is studied is necessarily somewhat superficial such as the counts of female characters in children's books. The current wave of interest in "big data" takes this approach to new extremes.

In our own analyses, we have tried to chart a course somewhere between these two poles. We have drawn a more systematic sample, but not the thousands of cases used in the century-long analyses of children's books or the millions of cases available with "big data." However, we have paid more attention to the content of our samples than is possible with those very large samples. Our approach builds on the past success of both small- and large-sample approaches and could not be successful without their contributions. The specific codes derive from the insights of the more intensive qualitative analyses such as Faludi's or Douglas and Michaels's, and the historical context is provided by the more quantitative analyses of large samples. We believe that this systematic coding of a well-defined sample of cultural products provides great promise for content analysis research.

Although our middle ground of qualitative codes of large samples offers promise for tracking cultural change, much is left for future work. Our single news source, the *New York Times*, is certainly not representative of all media. Indeed, it has been shown to have a liberal slant on political coverage (Puglisi 2011), and its readership is disproportionately white, middle class, Eastern, and older (Peiser 2000; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007). Analyses of other news sources could test the generality of the trends reported here and would also alleviate the problem of the small annual samples that prevent finer detail on timing.

Moreover, other media – women's magazines, television shows, "expert" parental advice, novels, and films – have been useful in the past for content analyses of gender norms and should be equally revealing for tracing trends in themes about working mothers. Each medium samples the popular culture in somewhat different slices, so much is to be gained by broadening the design. Extending the analysis back to the 1950s would also promise important insights. Faludi

contended that the backlash rose in the 1980s, but the easily searchable samples available on Lexis/Nexis only begin in 1981 so we cannot compare our results to earlier eras.

The Stalled Gender Revolution

In the 1990s, many economic and social gender indicators unexpectedly stalled from their previous upward trajectories (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2004; Gerson 2009; England 2010). In 1997, the labor force participation rate for married mothers aged 25 to 54 peaked at 73 percent after almost a half century of steady increases. It has remained within one or two percentage points of this peak ever since. A broad range of other gender indices revealed a similar mid-1990s stall.

Many of the structural trends associated with the spread of gender equality in the 1970s did not change significantly backwards in the 1990s. For example, neither contraceptive availability nor fertility rates changed much as they had earlier (Goldin and Katz 2002). Nor was there a shift in the occupational or industrial structure away from the “female jobs” that had expanded earlier to pull women into the labor force (Oppenheimer 1973). There was no economic recession in the 1990s pushing women out of the labor force. And gender differences in education (Smith and Ward 1984) were one of the few trends that failed to stall in the 1990s (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006) so human capital explanations are unlikely to offer an explanation for stalls in other gender trends.

Political changes might have been a better explanation if the gender revolution had stalled in the more conservative 1980s under Reagan and after the 1982 defeat of the ERA. But gender attitudes diverged from broader conservative political ideology during the 1980s (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). As political culture returned to more traditional values, gender

attitudes maintained their egalitarian trend and married mothers continued to enter the labor force in increasing numbers (Mason and Lu 1988; Cotter et al. 2011).

Legislatively, the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 might have been expected to increase, not inhibit, mothers' labor force participation. But, weak in comparison with European policy efforts to ease work-family conflicts (Gornick and Meyers 2003), the FMLA had little impact on mothers' labor force participation (Ruhm 1997; Klerman and Leibowitz 1999). While some have documented that extended parental leaves are often associated cross-nationally with *wider* economic gender gaps (Mandel and Semyonov 2005; Mandel and Semyonov 2006), it seems unlikely that the very weak American version of parental leave policy could have had such a direct impact. Because so few working mothers used their new (unpaid) parental leave, women's loss of human and social capital and employers' use of statistical discrimination against women would not have changed much either.

However, our results suggest yet another pathway by which family policy might have had an inadvertent negative impact on gender equality: the cultural prominence of the distressed working mothers theme that supported agitation for better work-family policy also supported the conservative message that working mothers "can't have it all." The post-1995 shift within the working mothers' problems theme to problems at work rather than problems at home may have reflected the growing feminist concern with inflexible work. But without significant reform of work arrangements and with fathers' contributions to housework also stagnating in the mid- to late-1990s (Bianchi et al., 2012), the conservative implications of the distressed working mothers theme may have convinced women and their employers alike of the difficulties of combining careers and motherhood.

The 1990s rise in the distressed working mother theme coincides remarkably well with the stall in married mothers' labor force participation and the stagnation in favorable gender attitudes. Although Faludi dated the backlash to the 1980s, our analyses suggest that the prevalence if not the origin of these themes is better located in the 1990s. While an earlier rise in the distressed mother theme might have lent greater credibility to a causal explanation for cultural change, the near simultaneity of the two shifts suggests that the distressed working mothers theme may have played both a motivational and an interpretive role in the stalled gender revolution (Vaisey 2009).

Cultural Schema

Our results demonstrate that the analysis of trends in a theme such as distressed working mothers should be placed within the context of alternative schema such as feminist themes of the benefits of combining work and family. The correlations among these themes over time are not immediately predictable. The initial growth of the distressed working mothers theme seems to have temporarily reignited rather than smothered the contrasting feminist theme about the benefits of working. And the rise of an emphasis on the problems of working mothers coincides with the decline of an earlier, seemingly similar, anti-feminist theme about problems for *children* of working mothers.

If culture is best understood as a collection of conceptual tools people draw from to understand their lives (Swidler, 1986) rather than a unitary whole that everybody shares (Swidler 2001), then content analyses of the media need to capture this full range of available themes circulating in society. And because people can hold simultaneously conflicting ideas and reject other consistent ideas, we should not be surprised that the rise of any particular theme in the media can also stimulate greater attention to its cultural opposite.

Extending the analysis beyond the four issues coded here would enrich our understanding of the full cultural foundation supporting the stalled gender revolution. For example, media coverage of the so-called “opt-out revolution” (Belkin 2003; Williams et al. 2006; Kuperberg and Stone 2008) probably reinforced an image of stressed out working mothers. Additionally, the rise of *intensive mothering* (Hays 1996) enhanced expectations for raising successful children and may have aggravated working mothers’ stress. The egalitarian essentialism of the 1990s (Charles and Grusky 2004), that combined a feminist emphasis on equality with traditional familism’s essentialism that women were different – more caring and nurturing – would also be consistent with greater stress on working mothers. Media analysts have also identified a “post-feminist” theme in claims that feminism had already accomplished its gender equality objectives so that feminism was no longer needed (e.g., Hall and Rodriguez 2003). The “mommy wars” that erupted from the differences between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers (Douglas and Michaels 2004) may have eclipsed the earlier generational conflicts between working mothers and their parents.

Our preliminary analyses show that media attention to these other themes – opting out, intensive mothering, egalitarian essentialism, post-feminism, and mommy wars – may also have risen in the 1990s at the same time as the rise of the distressed working mothers theme. While each theme has distinct content and each is grounded in somewhat different institutional changes, together they form an identifiable cluster of themes that mutually reinforce each other (Bachrach 2013). Alone, each theme might not have sustained itself on an upward trajectory since the mid-1990s. Together, they represented a coherent challenge to both the dominant feminism of the 1970s and the domestic familism of the 1950s.

The dominance of a new idea often depends on its capacity to incorporate elements of past conflicting frames. We believe the backlash against working mothers succeeded in part because instead of taking clear sides in the culture wars between feminism and traditional familism, it provided a third alternative that was distinct from both and yet validated elements of each. The backlash borrowed from feminism the idea that women should have the freedom to make the important choices in their lives (Williams, 1999). And it borrowed from traditional familism mothers' essentialist need to nurture children (the need to care for husbands rarely entered into the discussion in the 1990s as it had in the 1950s). Because of this seeming compromise in the debates about work and family, the backlash themes eventually eclipsed both the traditional critique of mothers' work and the feminist advocacy of working mothers.

Themes about fathers' positions in work and family life are also important to trace over time in the popular culture. Gender equality requires the movement of both women into the workplace and men into home responsibilities (Goldscheider 2000), but during the quarter century of change after 1970, most of the movement came from women (England 2010). Content analyses of magazine discussions of fathers' involvement in the home (Milkie and Denny 2012) show that mention of its benefits for mothers peaked in the 1980s but have declined since. So, just as the popular culture was emphasizing the problems for mothers trying to combine work and home, it also seems to have been de-emphasizing the role of fathers in easing that burden.

Our analysis has also neglected the class and racial/ethnic origins of the women being discussed in the media. Policy debates about gender equality depend on the class position of the women being addressed (Shalev 2009; Mandel 2011, 2012). Part of the growth in media attention to mothers' problems may have been a shift in focus from the welfare debates of the

1980s and 1990s to the middle-class angst more common in today's coverage (Kuperberg and Stone 2008). Middle-class married mothers ended their trend towards increased employment at the same time as poor and working-class single mothers were being pushed back into the labor force. Media attention to the welfare debates may have conveyed an unintended message that mothers' work was a stigma to be avoided rather than the feminist image of a career that is status-enhancing.

The opportunity for these cultural influences may have been enhanced by the lack of strong structural forces supporting more gender equality. The decline of feminist protest in the 1990s removed one of the imperatives for further gender change that had energized the 1970s (Costain 1992; Minkoff 1997; Barakso and Schaffner 2006). Policy initiatives no longer emphasized equality in the work place but instead sought a better work-family balance that turned out to have little impact on increased employment (Burstein and Bricher 1997). The disproportionate growth of female occupations had ended (Cotter et al. 1998). Many middle-class occupations had become well integrated by the mid-1990s while working-class gender integration continued to be hindered by the apprenticeship routes to entry (Bergmann 2011) and by the lack of growth in high-paying blue-collar jobs (England 2011).

Without sufficient economic or political pressure to advance a gender revolution, a space may have opened up for a cultural backlash. The development of a cultural frame that did not directly challenge gender equality (as had traditional familism), but nevertheless supported a retreat from employment, gave working mothers a new "tool" to explain their distress and provided employers a convenient rationale for discrimination. Moreover, concerns about the inflexibility of American workplaces lent the distressed working mothers theme an additional feminist support that appealed to a quite different political agenda than a conservative backlash.

This enhanced image of distressed working mothers could easily have discouraged mothers' employment. As the employment trends stalled, the media theme of stressed mothers became a more plausible explanation of mothers' choices.

This scenario of mutually reinforcing cultural backlash and stalled gender revolution was never inevitable, nor is it necessarily predictive of the future. The response to work-family stresses in Europe has been to adjust public policies, not the cultural understanding of working mothers. One can also imagine scenarios in which men responded to work family stress rather than public policy or mothers absorbing most of the change. But neither of these alternatives is prominent in today's discussions of working mothers. Tracking these cultural shifts in a more systematic manner to incorporate the full multidimensional array of alternative themes is one of the challenges for the future.

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Figure 1. Schematic representation of eight codes for problems and benefits of working and stay-at-home mothers.

For Mothers	Problems	Benefits
Working Mothers	Problems for working mothers of combining work and family	Benefits of work for working mothers
Stay-at-Home Mothers	Problems of not working for a stay-at-home mother	Benefits of being home for a stay-at-home mother

For Children	Problems	Benefits
Working Mothers	Problems for children of a working mother	Benefits of a mother's working for their children
Stay-at-Home Mothers	Problems for children caused by a mother's not working	Benefits for children of a mother's staying home

Figure 2. Counts of Articles Including a Distressed Working Mothers Theme in the *New York Times*: 1981-2009.

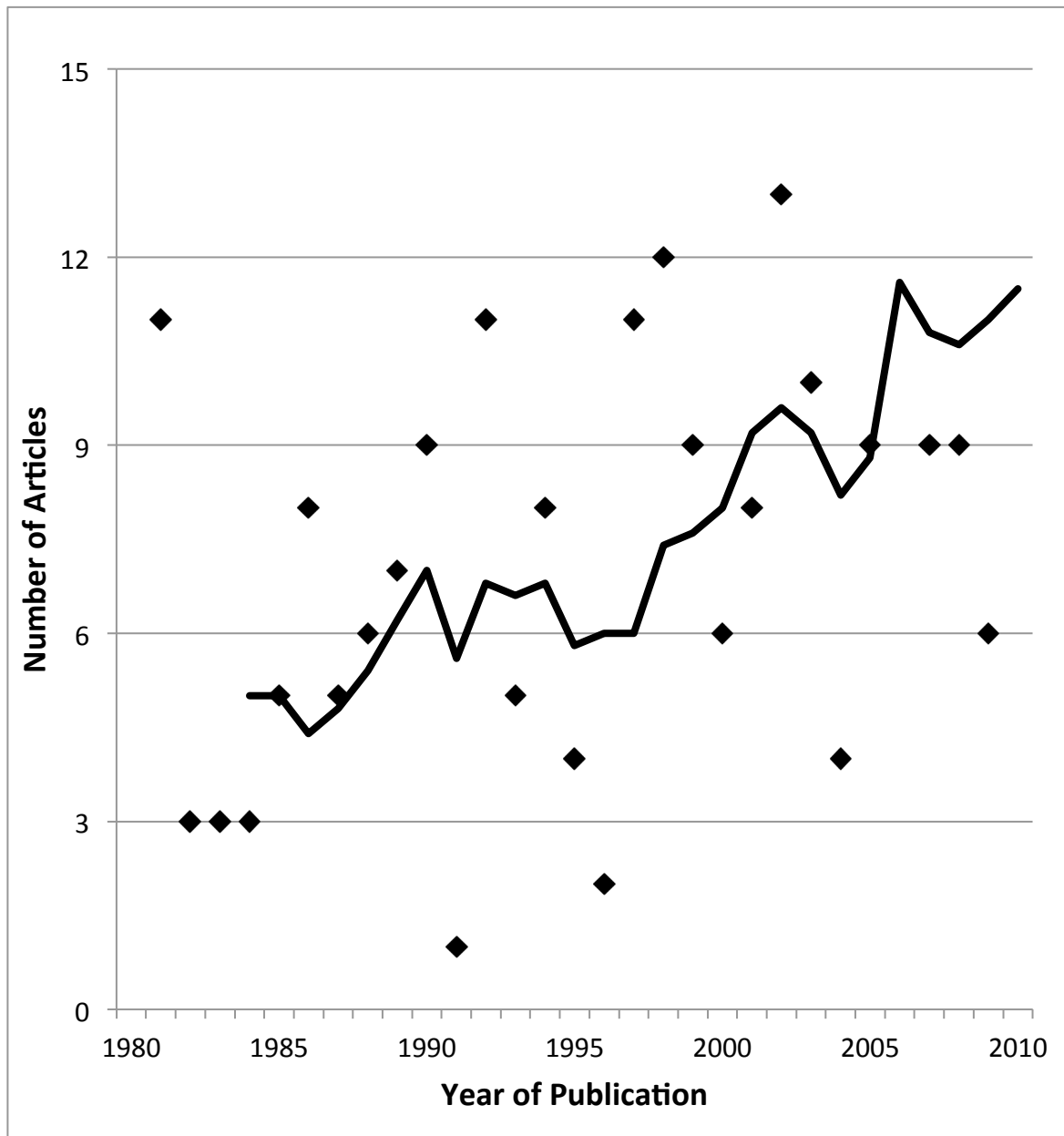


Figure 3. Five-Year Moving Averages of Counts of Articles with Four Themes about Working Mothers.

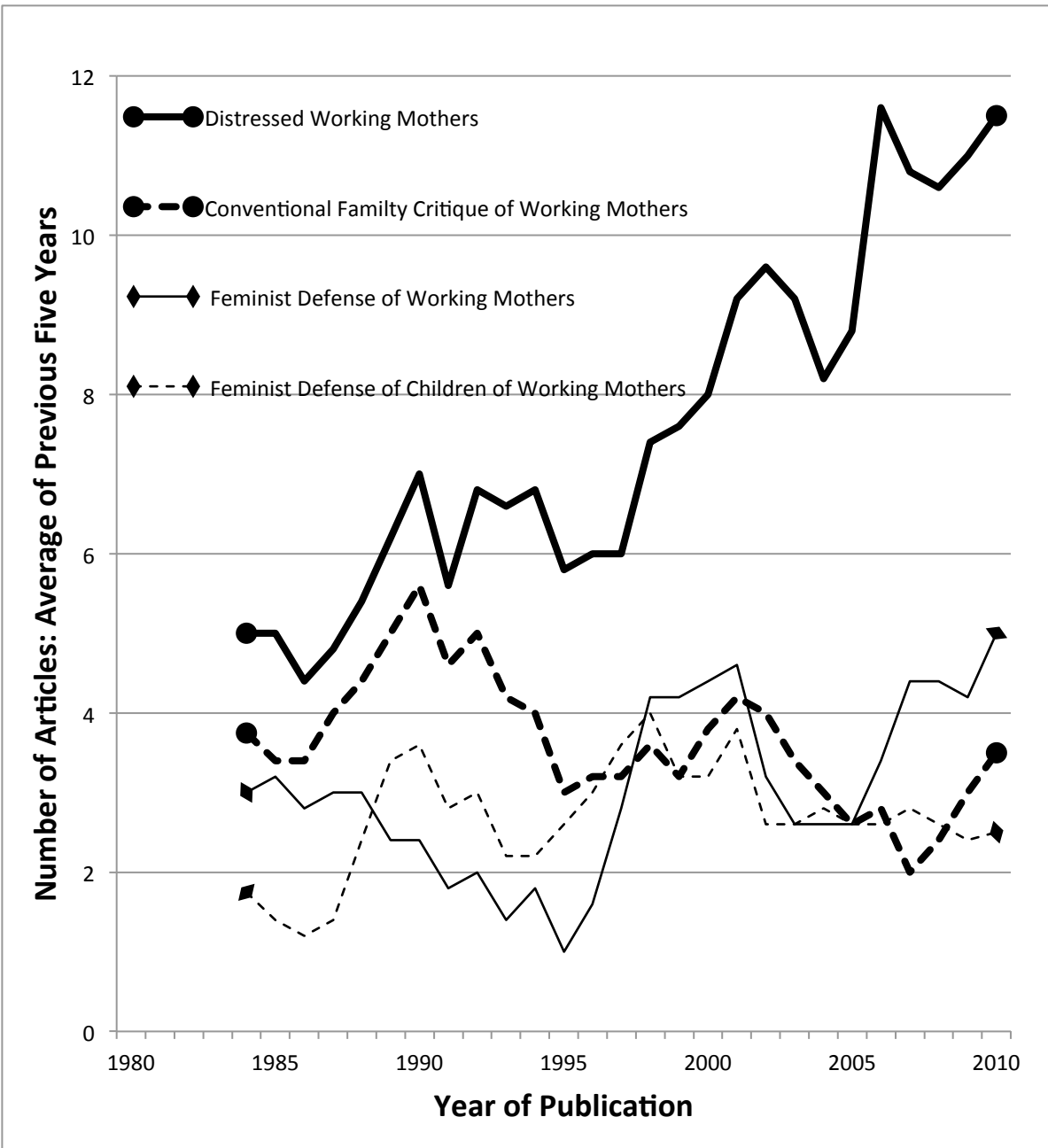


Table 1. Inter-coder Reliabilities for Four Themes.

Code	Author and Student 1, N=241					
	Number of Articles (Author)	Number of Articles (Student 1)	Agreement (percent)	Expected Agreement (percent)	Kappa	Gamma
Distressed Working Mothers	66	63	80.5	60.8	0.50	0.84
Feminist Defense of Working Mothers	24	30	90	80.1	0.50	0.93
Conventional Family Critique of Working Mothers	35	30	87.1	76.6	0.45	0.87
Feminist Defense of Children of Working Mothers	23	15	91.7	85.4	0.43	0.92

Code	Author and Student 2, N=209					
	Number of Articles (Author)	Number of Articles (Student 2)	Agreement (percent)	Expected Agreement (percent)	Kappa	Gamma
Distressed Working Mothers	55	69	82.8	58.1	0.59	0.91
Feminist Defense of Working Mothers	22	37	87.1	75.5	0.47	0.91
Conventional Family Critique of Working Mothers	27	33	88.5	75.4	0.53	0.91
Feminist Defense of Children of Working Mothers	17	32	89	79.1	0.47	0.93

Table 2. Total Number of Articles with Eight Codes and Four Themes.

	1981-2009 Annual Totals					
	Articles	Percent of Total	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1. Problems for Working Mothers	211	26%	7.24	4.13	1	21
2. Benefits for Working Mothers	50	6%	1.69	1.51	0	6
3. Problems for Stay-at-Home Mothers	46	6%	1.59	1.55	0	6
4. Benefits for Stay-at-Home Mothers	13	2%	0.41	0.57	0	2
5. Problems for Children of Working Mothers	91	11%	3.10	1.90	0	6
6. Benefits for Children of Working Mothers	73	9%	2.48	1.98	0	6
7. Problems for Children of Stay-at-Home Mothers	9	1%	1.59	1.55	0	6
8. Benefits for Children of Stay-at-Home Mothers	20	2%	0.66	0.77	0	3
1 or 4: Distressed Working Mothers	218	27%	7.52	4.19	1	22
2 or 3: Feminist Defense of Working Mothers	87	11%	3.00	2.20	0	8
5 or 8: Conventional Family Critique of Working Mothers	106	13%	3.66	2.02	0	7
6 or 7: Feminist Defense of Children of Working Mothers	77	10%	2.66	1.91	0	6
Total Number of Articles with Any of the 8 Codes ^a	347					
Total Number of Articles Coded	808					

^a The total number of articles with any of the eight codes is less than the sum of the articles with any of the eight codes because multiple codes can occur within one article.

Appendix Table 1. Examples of working mothers codes.

- 1. Problems for working mothers.**
- 2. Benefits for working mothers**
- 3. Problems for working mothers' children.**
- 4. Benefits for working mothers' children.**
- 5. Problems for stay-at-home mothers.**
- 6. Benefits for stay-at-home mothers.**
- 7. Problems for stay-at-home mothers' children.**
- 8. Benefits for stay-at-home mothers' children.**

1. Problems for working mothers.

- a. *Distress*. The most important code emphasizes Faludi's recognition of the new backlash theme of the stress, guilt, resentment, or other problems for mothers from combining work and parenting. But now, this code is limited to specific mentions of mothers' stress or guilt. Other, closely related, problems now have separate codes. Regrets of postponing having children are also coded here.

However, if only indecision about roles is noted, not distress or guilt, then code under "mommy wars: personal indecision" (see below).

Examples:

- In truth, many working mothers feel guilty about leaving their babies with someone else. They worry about the possible long-term effects of day care. They wonder whether the "quality time" spent with their children makes up for the quantity of time spent away from them. (NYT1981_02)
- Her book is nonetheless the stuff of 3 A.M. self-recrimination orgies. "A Mother's Work" is upsetting -especially in its harrowing portrait of life in mediocre day-care centers - simply because if you scratch a working mother, you will find not the smug narcissist Mrs. Fallows believes inhabits the corner office, but a thin-skinned, guilt- and ambivalence-riddled creature who is worried that her career will cause her children unhappiness. (NYT1985_01)
- Still, after-school isolation often means anxiety for both parent and child. Employers often say that productivity drops markedly after 3 P.M., when parents start to receive calls from their children at home, and studies have found that child-rearing problems contribute substantially to absenteeism and turnover. (NYT1987_24) ["anxiety" is coded for *working mothers' distress*; "Productivity drops" is coded for *working mothers' problems at work*. 1c]
- But other welfare experts argue that mothers forced into low-wage jobs that are unfulfilling might be resentful, overwhelmed by stress and unable to pay for quality child care. (NYT1994_04)
- "My husband's a great help watching our baby. But as far as doing housework or even taking the baby when I'm at home, no. He figures he works five days a week; he's not going to come home and clean. But he doesn't stop to think that I work seven days a week. Why should I have to come home and do the housework without help from anybody else?" (NYT1997_06)
- "I wonder, maybe people are feeling like it's too hard to combine work and children," Ms. Galinsky said. (NYT2000_09)
- HEADLINE: Angst and the Working Mother (NYT2002_23)
- Thirty years ago, the first generation of moms with careers were racked by guilt that they weren't being good hausfraus. But things have evolved: today's working mothers are racked by guilt that they aren't achieving enough professionally. (P.S.: They're still worried about being good moms, too.) (NYT2004_11)
- They expected to be both their mothers (or their rosy memory of what their mothers had been) and their fathers (who won the bread but never dreamed of baking it), and because that is an impossible task, they felt they had failed. The old guideposts were gone, and new ones had not been established. What was a good wife? (NYT2010_13)

2. Benefits for Working Mothers

- a. *Personal, non-economic benefits.* A working mother's sense of fulfillment or self-confidence provided by work. A mother's report that she enjoys work or is looking for fulfilling work.

Examples:

- Most respondents who described themselves as feminists and a majority of the working women, however, said they felt that both parents working had had positive or no effects at all on families. Among the positive effects mentioned were fulfillment of working women, added financial security, improved family communications and independence for children. (NYT1981_04) [This quotation also includes codes for economic benefits (2b) and benefits for children (4a)]
- Several welfare recipients in New Jersey said that the new law gave them strong financial incentives to quit their jobs, but they added that they probably would continue working to maintain their self respect. (NYT1981_20)
- Psychological well-being in women is often enhanced by involvement in an interesting occupation and the most stressful experiences for women concern their family roles rather than problems on the job, they report. (NYT1985_06) [This second half of this quote is also coded for "Negative effects: distress" because of the stress from family roles]
- What - other than economic necessity - prompts a woman to go back to work after giving birth? Fear that she will lose her hard-won place in the corporate hierarchy? Fear of becoming dependent on her husband? Fear of being bored? It is not easy, after commanding respect and attention in the corporate world, to become "just a mother." (NYT1988_09) ["Fear of being bored" is coded for *non-economic benefits to working mothers*; "Fear that she will lose her hard-won place in the corporate hierarchy" is coded for *economic benefits* (2b); the last sentence "just a mother" is coded for *negative effects of being a stay-at-home mother* (5b). All are coded.]
- Dr. Paget said. "A mother who's been away from the work force for a few years may find new sources of energy and develop a higher sense of self-esteem by getting an outside job." (NYT1990_03)
- Yet many working-class mothers who have found that they are happy working treat it like a guilty secret. Mrs. Lencki dropped her voice almost to a whisper when she talked about enjoying her job, despite her guilt that her youngest son had not had her full-time presence. (NYT1992_02) [the combination of "enjoying her job" and "despite her guilt" results in codes for both *non-economic benefits*" and for *distress for working mothers* (1a).]
- Surveys of working mothers show that most value the independence and sense of mastery they derive from their jobs. (NYT1996_18)
- Yet the percentage saying they got a "great deal" or "a very great deal" of satisfaction from their family lives is somewhat higher for mothers who work than for those who don't; perhaps a busy life that combines employment and child rearing is also a fulfilling one. (NYT2004_02)
- Ms. Cuevas, 39, so relished the independence afforded her by working that a few years ago she took a second job, sewing curtains at night in her cramped living room while her sons, Argenis and Andy, slept in the next room. (NYT2008_12)

3. Problems for Working Mothers' Children

- a. *Working Mothers: Problems for Children*: Any educational, emotional, interpersonal or other problems of children of working mothers; less supervision or quality interaction with children by working mothers even if no evidence or assertion of harm; also, expressions of concern about the effects of mother's work on children, even without actual evidence. Problems for children from day care arrangements or complaints by children themselves are coded separately (see below, b and c for child care and d for complaints).

Examples:

- "Now," she explained, "the children don't know how to do many of the things I expect them to do. Thirteen-year-old John is eager to cook, but there is too little time to teach him. (NYT1981_03)
- Mrs. Fallows's first principle is that mothers who leave their children in others' care are jeopardizing their formative years. As she points out: "When both parents work, especially in nonroutine, professional positions, it's too often the case that the mother and the father have to cut corners with their children every day (NYT1985_01)
- Despite the new findings, some child development experts express concern about the possible hidden costs of children coming home to an empty house. "The latchkey arrangement has many problems, and the younger the child the greater the risks," said Thomas Long, director of the Center for Family Research at Catholic University. "There's physical risk from fire, for example. There's emotional risk, fear, loneliness and feelings of abandonment. And then there's the stress, especially if a youngster is responsible for younger kids." (NYT1988_31)
- "The rich, close relationships my family enjoys took hours and hours to develop," Mrs. Jones said. "In my day, women who didn't work spent hours creating things with their children, and those things are what my children remember now as adults. I'm in awe of my daughter's accomplishments, but I worry that the demands on her time might be detrimental to the next generation." (NYT1993_03)
- 1946 [edition of Dr. Spock's *Baby and Child Care*]: To work or not to work? Some mothers have to work to make a living. Usually their children turn out all right, because some reasonably good arrangement is made for their care. But others grow up neglected and maladjusted. It would save money in the end if the government paid a comfortable allowance to all mothers (of young children) who would otherwise be compelled to work.(NYT1998_31)
- Last week, in *Child Development*, the journal of the Society for Research in Child Development, a group of respected Columbia University researchers reported that children whose mothers worked more than 30 hours a week by the time they were 9 months old got lower scores on school readiness tests at age 3. (NYT2002_03)
- "Some children are spending evenings alone because their mothers work at night," Mr. Koido said, explaining that students' home environment had become a problem in recent years. "They can't focus in the classroom. They're late, not just by minutes but by hours." (NYT2006_43)

4. Benefits for Working Mothers' Children

- a. *Positive effects of mother's work on children.* Evidence of social and economic benefits to children of mother's work. Increased independence or sense of responsibility of children. Economic benefits for children are also coded here (and usually double-coded for *working mothers' economic benefits*.)

However, testimonials by children or a mother's assertion that her work sets a good example for her children are coded below in the closely related sub-code, *working mothers' role model for family*.

Examples:

- "The group with employed mothers were more peer-oriented and self-sufficient," Dr. Schachter said. "The group with non-employed mothers appeared more adult-oriented and dependent," demonstrating their dependency by soliciting help and protection from teachers. They were also jealous of the teachers' attention. (NYT1981_02) [The first sentence is coded for *positive effects for working mothers' children*; the rest is coded for the closely related *negative effects for stay-at-home mothers' children*.]
- Many child psychologists see important benefits [of mothers' working]. These children tend to have a more positive view of women than did previous generations, and they are exposed to a wider range of career possibilities... And the children may develop greater self-esteem as a result of their exceptional advantages: they attend the finest schools, are groomed for the best colleges and are offered a host of costly extracurricular activities. (NYT1988_02)
- But feminists in particular have tried to carve out a new definition, arguing that the traditional ideal held out an unrealistic standard of perfection and that a self-fulfilled mother has more to offer her children. (NYT1994_02)
- Ms. Mott, the Wall Street analyst, tells her children a similar story. "I work so we can have money for the things we enjoy," she tells them, like a vacation or a new bicycle. (NYT1997_01) [This is also coded for *economic benefits for working mothers*.]
- Peters makes a point that is interesting and true -- and that should have been self-evident eons ago: that responsible adults who are happy and fulfilled themselves make better parents than isolated, frustrated ones. (NYT1998_10)
- Perhaps writing, absorbing Alice [Munro] as it did, offered her daughters a protection, a gift. They were not her work, so they were freed from her manipulation. (NYT2002_32)
- Then there are the obvious financial benefits. When a mother works, average annual household income rises by \$10,000 per child in a two-parent home, and by \$11,000 in a single-parent home. For many children, these earnings are the difference between living in poverty -- or out of it. (NYT2003_01) [This is also coded for *economic benefits for working mothers*.]
- Poor children suffer no psychological damage when their mothers move from welfare to work, as millions of women have in recent years, a major new study says. Among adolescents in such families, the researchers say, mental health may actually have improved. (NYT2003_05)
- For generations black women have viewed work as a means for elevating not only their own status as women, but also as a crucial force in elevating their family, extended family and their entire race. (NYT2006_01) [also coded for *non-economic benefits for working mothers*]

5. Problems for stay-at-home mothers

- a. *Distress, isolation, boredom, lack of support.* Social or personal problems resulting from being a stay-at-home mother. Feelings of frustration, dependency, or lack of fulfillment without a job or career. Isolation and lack of contacts with other adults. Regrets that not working has hurt the women's movement. The text can be a self-report, a speculation by a working mother what staying home would be like, an academic study, an expert opinion, or the testimony of another family member (e.g., a daughter about her mother).

Examples:

- "I made the choice to stay home, but I like to know that if I wanted to get a job or finish college, when the kids get a little older, I could," said Bess Avalone of New Brunswick, N.J., a 28-year-old mother of three. "If I thought being a housewife was it for the rest of my life, I would probably feel like a prisoner." (NYT1983_01)
- Studies show that women who stay home with children are more prone to depression and stress-related illnesses than working mothers; (NYT1988_05)
- In "The Feminine Mystique," Ms. Friedan wrote of "the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women" - the fact that they were not satisfied even though they had all that society told them they needed for happiness: a husband, a home, a family. And many women did go into the workplace in a search for fulfillment. (NYT1989_05)
- The new full-time mother often suffers an attack of the postpartum blues. But are the blues caused by changing hormones or do they come from looking at the same walls for more than a week straight? (NYT1990_06)
- Mrs. Ornstein grew up in a middle-class family in the Mill Basin neighborhood of Brooklyn, where her father was a textile salesman and her mother stayed at home to raise her. "She was a very dependent person and I never wanted to be in that position." (NYT1992_01)
- Suzanne Page, 34, of Hastings-on-Hudson told of giving up her career as a research scientist. "I could never have predicted how sad I would feel," Ms. Page said. (NYT1996_06) - She did not enjoy being a homemaker and is happier now that she is back working full time as the marketing manager for Lucent Technologies' New England region. (NYT1997_02) [This is also coded for *non-economic benefits for working mothers* (2a).]
- And her spells on welfare have never lasted more than a couple of months. "I felt that was lazy, just sitting around getting a check," she said. "That would lower my self-esteem. I've always been a worker." (NYT1999_02)
- Many [Japanese] women over 50 found marriage to be a disappointment and motherhood to be a burden. They tell that to their adult daughters, and that makes their daughters want to stay single. They doubt whether husbands and children are worth it." (NYT2001_22)
- I see myself in a courtroom, arguing with people. I'd like to be home when my kids are little, but I don't think I'd give up work altogether -- I'd be so bored, have to give up so much I worked so hard for." (NYT2001_39)
- "It was wrenching for me to leave Channel 2," she says. "I miss being the lioness in the newsroom -- to walk through and have the interns say, 'There she goes.' ... I do feel somehow that I let the cause down." (NYT2003_11)

6. Benefits for Stay-at-Home Mothers

a. Fulfillment, enjoyment. Strong sense of identity, pride, or accomplishment as a mother; stimulation of working with and developing children; appreciates freedom of controlling her own day; satisfactions of maternal instincts; motherhood as a great calling; managerial skills developed by motherhood.

Examples:

My mother, born early in this century, took strength from her position as homemaker. This is the work she chose to do in life, not being an executive secretary, for which she had been trained, or a nurse, like her sister. Arranging my father's comforts and supervising and teaching us children was for her an honorable and productive goal. (NYT1981_29)

A 26-year-old second-year M.B.A. student at Harvard says: "My plans are to go out and prove my stuff in a traditional M.B.A. job for a few years. But I don't see myself staying there once I have a child. I see motherhood as a very special part of being a woman and I think when the kids are little it would be a lot of fun to be home with them." (NYT1986_02)

We're finally believing that our family responsibilities and concerns have added the managerial skills to our resumes that make us valuable. (NYT1990_20)

"The most important thing you're going to get in your life is your children," Mrs. Murdock said, explaining why the family has given up eating out, planning for a bigger house and having many other extras. "I just can't imagine giving that responsibility to someone else." (NYT1992_02)

"I'm proud of my daughter the doctor," said Mrs. Rosen, 72, a homemaker in Chicago. "But I think of all those latkes I fried, how excited the children were to help, how satisfying all that was to me. My mother did it, and her mother did it and I worry that my daughter is missing that joy." (NYT1993_03)

My children, my "projects," are my passion. I will risk overzealousness; whether they thank me or not, I will never look back on their childhoods with regret. (NYT1994_10)

Women who feel strongly that they want to be home usually are better off for doing so, said Janice Steil, professor of psychology at Adelphi University. (NYT1997_12)

Karenna says, her mother, at 52, is "a little bit sad" about her soon-to-be empty nest... "She loves being a mom," Karenna says. "She's so naturally maternal, and that's what she's best at and what makes her most happy." (NYT2000_32)

At the top of this parental literary class is Daphne de Marneffe's *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love, and the Inner Life* (Little, Brown, \$25.95), a refined discussion of "the eros of parenthood." Mothering is full of pleasure and desire, writes de Marneffe. (NYT2004_01)

Research is showing how hormones elevated in parenting can help buffer mothers from anxiety and stress -- a timely gift from a sometimes compassionate Mother Nature. (NYT2005_11)

More stay-at-home mothers give themselves better marks as parents than do mothers who work outside the home, according to an analysis released Thursday. (NYT2009_01)

7. Problems for children of Stay-at-Home Mothers

a. Personal problems, negative effects of stay-at-home mothers. Any emotional, educational, interpersonal or other problems of children of stay-at-home mothers; lack of independence; less quality time for children by stay-at-home mothers; over-bearing mothering.

Examples:

"The group [of children] with nonemployed mothers appeared more adult-oriented and dependent," demonstrating their dependency by soliciting help and protection from teachers. They were also jealous of the teachers' attention. (NYT1981_02)

"And depressed mothers have depressing effects on their children," she added. She believes that children are better off in a stimulating day-care environment than at home with depressed mothers. (NYT1984_01)

"The nub of it is what the attitudes of the parents are and how available they are to their children. I don't mean just hours - I mean emotionally. You can find damaged children in families where the mother stays home. Haven't you seen it before? The mother is at home, but her head is someplace else, and she can't mother the kids properly." (NYT1988_02)

Do we really need to be shown again that time spent with children is not the ultimate measure of good motherhood? That stay-at-home mothers who are bored, resentful, punitive, depressed or anxious about finances aren't going to be so great for their kids? It seems so. (NYT1998_04)

Conversely, the researchers said, when mothers leave the labor force, adolescent children are more likely to display behavioral problems. "Teenagers may express their feelings of disappointment or worry about finances as depression or anger when their mothers leave employment," the study said. (NYT2003_05)

The women's evolution [in a New York theater drama] takes the audience through their decision to stay at home, commuter marriage, sexual dry spells, depression and breaking points. Liza hides in the bushes outside her home to escape the kids. Alison slaps her daughter in a moment of anger. (NYT2004_04) [also coded for "Problems for Stay-at-Home Mothers"]

In the court decisions I read, stay-at-home mothers were often described as "smothering" and "without boundaries" while working mothers lacked sufficient "quality time" with their children. It seemed there was no winning. (NYT2005_23)

Bennetts [in her book *Feminine Mistake*] portrays the stay-at-home mother as a financial and emotional drain on her husband; a bad example for their children; and a disappointment to her gender, to society and, worst of all, to herself. (NYT2007_01)

8 P.M. (ABC) WIFE SWAP In this season premiere, Ro Drago is a stay-at-home mom in New Jersey who pays more attention to her doll collection than to her three children, who are allowed to do as they please. (NYT2010_15)

8. Benefits for Children of Stay-at-Home Mothers

a. A specific or a general benefit to children if their mother does not work. The benefit may be some improved characteristic of the child (e.g., school test scores, self-confidence), something material (e.g., home-cooked meals), something more intangible (e.g., good memories), or just more time and attention for the children. Not coded if the benefit is presented only as a "myth" or old-fashioned belief. Also, not coded if the supposed benefit is just a general *belief* that staying home is better for kids (that would be coded as normative acknowledgement of stay-at-home mothers); there should be a specific example of some child benefiting or some evidence for a general benefit.

Examples:

When we came in from school or the playhouse, she would ... set us to our studies, supervising, correcting, challenging. What she demanded in the way of performance, she was willing to help see through. Assuring that we all finished our homework was more important to her plans for the future than knitting a sweater or putting up 24 quarts of peaches. (NYT1981_29)

Much research on child care and development has focused on infant-mother attachment, a quality many psychologists consider a cornerstone of emotional and social development. This theory says children with a secure attachment, usually to the mother, in infancy are more likely to feel confident as they explore their surroundings, to have good relations with peers and teachers and to be more competent at solving problems, said Susan Spieker, a psychologist at the University of Washington. (NYT1992_03)

Margaret Koestner of East Northport, the bilingual assistant, had initially returned to work, leaving her daughter in her mother's care. But after a month on the job she decided to stay home, to give her child the "same memories I have from my mom, like the smell of fresh-baked bread when I came home from school. (NYT1996_19)

She senses that her younger children, with whom she spends more time reading and going on outings to places like museums, are more relaxed than her older children were when she was working. (NYT1997_02)

Eight-year-olds are deeply conservative.... And when it comes to their mothers, they are steadfastly retrograde, shunning the new, self-fulfilled model. Especially now, when 70 percent of mothers work, a stay-at-home mom has become the ultimate trophy, reflecting prosperity and proving to the children that they are, in fact, the center of the universe. (NYT1998_05)

Welfare let the many single mothers here give their children in time what they could not in material things (NYT2001_31)

When my children have questions, hurts or cause to celebrate, I'm right there. They don't have to wait until 6 p.m. (NYT2001_43)

"Being a corporate mom, you work a lot of hours, you feed them dinner -- maybe," she said. "This morning, we baked cookies together. I have time to help them with homework. I'm

attending church. The house is managed by me. Just a lot more homemaker-type stuff, which I think is more nurturing to them." (NYT2009_25)\