

Soccer Moms, Welfare Queens, Waitress Moms, and Super Moms: Myths of Motherhood in State Media Coverage of Child Care

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Throughout the evolution of American social policy, political debates surrounding child care have centered on competing maternal ideals, making mothers the primary target population for policy in this area. The construction of the “deserving” mother in child care policy debates has changed over time depending on particular economic circumstances and cultural norms during each era. The competition among different constructions of mothers has proven especially vigorous in the later decades of the twentieth century as evidenced by the media-driven “Mommy Wars.” Conflicting social, political, and cultural values have pitted the stay-at-home “Soccer Mom” against the career-oriented “Super Mom.” The mythical “Welfare Queen” and working poor “Waitress Mom,” in contrast, are not even on the radar in this battle for the ideal construction of motherhood. While pundits and scholars continue to debate the implications of various formulations of American motherhood, the majority of mothers are now working both outside and inside of their homes.

The provision of safe, affordable, high-quality child care could potentially serve as an incentive for peace in these raging ideological debates. Theoretically, at least, mothers and families across racial and class divisions hope to provide their children with the best possible care. In reality, debates about motherhood and child care continue to reflect persistent cultural discord regarding issues of work, family, and gender. The absence of a coordinated national child care policy in the U.S. further complicates this public debate by sending mixed messages to women who differ in race, class, and family/employment decisions. The 1996 welfare reforms, however, did include a new government child care program called the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) that focuses primarily on meeting the child care needs of mothers transitioning from welfare to work. Importantly, though, this federal child care program is administered by state governments. The federal devolution of child care authority via this CCDF program thus allows each state to resolve the “Mommy Wars” over child care in its own way, as state governments now have unprecedented flexibility in deciding which groups of mothers to target for child care benefits. In such a political context, we must understand current child care debates (and, ultimately, the policies that emerge out of such debates) in the vocabularies by which state-level political actors conceptualize motherhood and child care.

This working paper will explore, both theoretically and empirically, how myths of motherhood are constructed, reinforced, and/or debunked in the context of these contentious child care debates. First, the paper will provide an in-depth exploration of the multi-disciplinary scholarship on competing constructions of maternal myths in American society in order to flesh out the important cultural and political implications of such stereotypes. This paper will also present findings from a content analysis of state-level newspaper and television stories on

motherhood and child care to examine more concretely how maternal myths are shaped by mass media outlets. Given the growing importance of the media in the policymaking process—primarily through its influence on popular opinion (Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller 1980; MacKuen & Coombs 1981; Behr & Iyengar 1985) and political elites (Cohen 1963; Cook et al. 1983; Manheim & Albritton 1984; Linsky 1986; Rogers and Dearing 1988; O’Heffernan 1991)—this analysis of media coverage should provide important information about how the media constructs and/or translates the myths of motherhood that shape political discussions of child care.

MOTHERS AS “TARGETS” IN THE CHILD CARE DEBATE

When we debate child care policy in this country, we are simultaneously arguing about societal values concerning maternal employment and family structure. It is no coincidence, for instance, that the central public debate on American child care is often referred to the “Mommy Wars.” While most pundits and scholars interpret this label as a battle between different groups of mothers (primarily between employed and full-time stay-at-home mothers), it can also be read as a war against all mothers in that, the false dichotomy between working and non-working mothers leaves nearly all groups of mothers feeling attacked and on the defensive. This ongoing competition between different ideologies and mythologies of motherhood tends to degrade and minimize maternal choices about work, family, and child care (Villani & Ryan 1997). Thus, while mothers as a group comprise the primary target for child care policy, mothers have also become the primary target for criticism and blame in the context of child care debates, regardless of their personal choices and constraints. An important first step in reducing this counterproductive “motherblame” is to acknowledge and assess the competing myths of motherhood that continue to drive modern debates about American motherhood and child care (Eyer 1996).

This paper will explore how such myths about different groups of mothers affect child care policy by using a variation of political scientists’ Schneider and Ingram’s (1997) target population framework. For Schneider and Ingram, a society’s conceptualization of policy target groups, coupled with the political power of these groups, is the most significant force in how a public problem is defined. Their typology of target populations categorizes groups on two dimensions, how they are socially constructed and the amount of political power they are purported to have (see Figure 1). Schneider and Ingram define target populations as “stereotypes about particular groups of people that have been created by politics, culture, socialization, history, the media, literature, religion, and the like” (1993: 335). These images are highly malleable over time and because they both shape and reflect political and cultural values, target populations are a particularly important theoretical construct.

Figure 1. SCHNEIDER AND INGRAM’S TARGET POPULATION TYPOLOGY

	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS	
<i>POLITICAL POWER</i>	<i>DESERVING</i>	<i>UNDESERVING</i>
<i>STRONGER</i>	Advantaged Business The Middle Class Scientists Senior Citizens	Contenders Gun Owners The Rich Savings & Loans CEOs
<i>WEAKER</i>	Dependents Mothers Children Native Americans The Poor	Deviants Gangs Criminals The Homeless Homosexuals

In Schneider and Ingram’s model, however, mothers and children as a group are placed in the “weak, yet deserving” category labeled “dependents.” Given the existence of cross-cutting cleavages—such as mothers who are middle class and therefore in the “advantaged” category or mothers on welfare who are often constructed as undeserving “deviants”—Schneider and Ingram’s categorization of all mothers as “dependents” is overly broad. Consequently, my analysis will disaggregate mothers into four distinct groups to more accurately reflect the political and social status of American mothers. The four subgroups of mothers included in this study are: welfare mothers, working poor mothers, middle to upper class working mothers, and full-time stay-at-home mothers (See Figure 2).

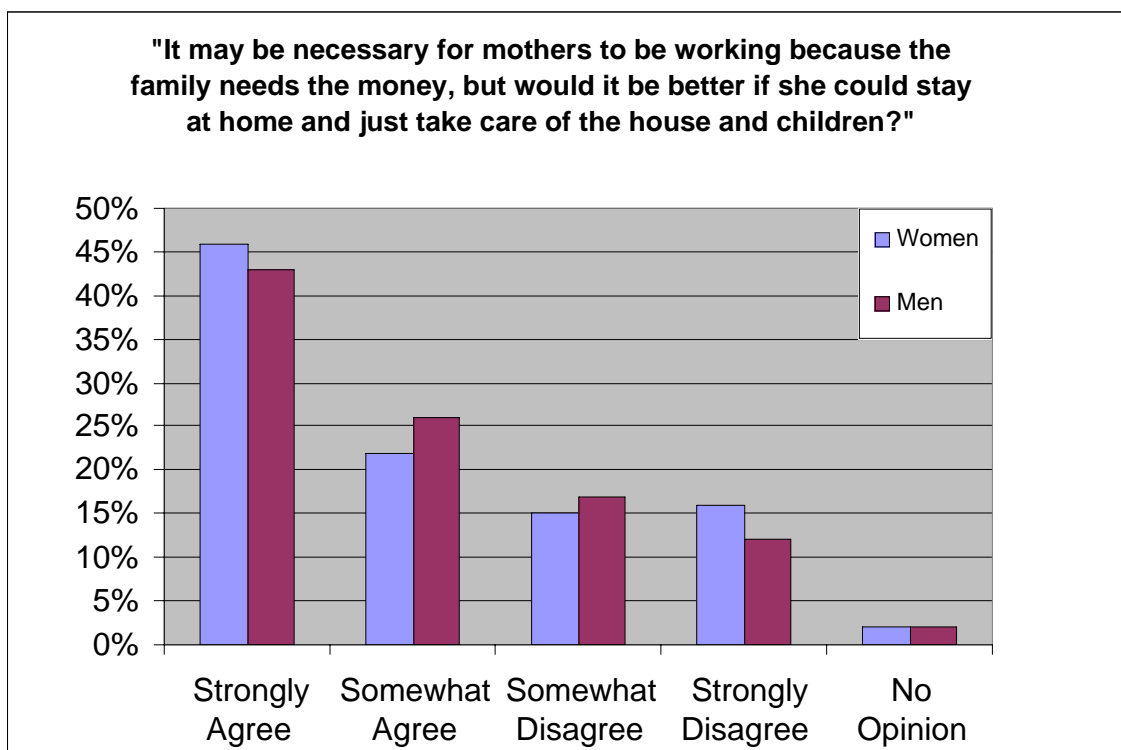
Figure 2. TARGET POPULATIONS FOR CHILD CARE POLICY

	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS	
<i>POLITICAL POWER</i>	<i>DESERVING</i>	<i>UNDESERVING</i>
<i>STRONGER</i>	<i>Advantaged</i> Middle to Upper Class “Soccer” Moms	<i>Contenders</i> Middle to Upper Class “Super” Career Moms
<i>WEAKER</i>	<i>Dependents</i> Working Poor “Waitress” Moms	<i>Deviants</i> “Welfare Queen” Moms

To more vividly differentiate the four types of mothers in this analysis, I have also matched each target population with the socio-politically constructed stereotype or myth most commonly associated with each type of mother. These four stereotypes include “Soccer Moms,” “Welfare Queens,” “Waitress Moms,” and “Super Moms” and will be discussed in depth below. Very little empirical work has been done to explore the content of these maternal stereotypes and yet, as Ganong and Coleman point out, “knowing the stereotypes about different types of mothers should allow policy makers to develop policies for mothers, children, and families that will be socially acceptable and workable within the context of American social values (1995: 497).

These stereotypes of American mothers each developed at a specific time in our history and yet, have proven exceedingly resilient despite demographic and experiential evidence to the contrary. In fact, both public opinion and social science research confirm that the image of a “June Cleaver” housewife in the 1950s continues to serve as the most dominant myth of American motherhood. This is particularly surprising, in that full-time motherhood is actually an historical anomaly both across the globe and in American society (Cootz 1992; Thurer 1994; Hays 1996). Nevertheless, the June Cleaver image, with a few modifications along the way, has endured. In fact, a recent study by the Families and Work Institute found that 50% of married working mothers agreed that “it is much better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children” (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg 1998: 54). Moreover, approximately 68% of respondents in a 1997 poll on child care agreed that the best family structure was one where a mother stays home to raise her children full time (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. PERSPECTIVES ON MOTHERS AND WORK



Source: Public Agenda Poll, 1998

In her comprehensive review of the past decade's research on motherhood, Terry Arendell (1999a) confirms that the dominant myth of the ideal mother at the dawn of the second century is still a full-time mother engaged in "intensive mothering." Other scholars similarly place the full-time mother at the top of socially-constructed motherhood hierarchies by including the stay-at-home mom in the "most appropriate" category (DiLapi 1989) or in the "conformist" category (Hattery 2001) when discussing contemporary motherhood (See also Tuominen 1991 & 1992). Arendell (1999b) argues, however, that this enduring construction of the ideal mother as one who functions exclusively in the home has evolved into a state of "hegemonic motherhood." When one ideology or construction dominates, alternative ideologies of motherhood are typically discussed using "deviancy discourses." Race, class, and employment status have been the central characteristics that have been used to differentiate various types of "deviant" mothers.

This state of hegemonic motherhood is particularly insidious given the apparent mismatch between the idealized myth and the realities most mothers now face. Currently, the majority of American mothers work outside the home and yet the majority of American mothers also believe that the best mother is still a full-time at-home mother (See Figure 3). This contradiction between idealized motherhood mythologies and the actual experiences of many mothers reaffirms the conflicting values and messages contemporary American mothers must confront. Pope, Quinn, & Wyer acknowledge this contradiction and note that "in the collision of reality with mythology, it is the mythology that tends to prevail" and moreover, that "the ideology of mothering can be so powerful that the failure of lived experience to validate often produces either intensified efforts to achieve it or a destructive cycle of self- and/or mother-blame" (Quoted in Bassin et al. 1994: 3). To better understand how we have reached this rather unsatisfying and ultimately, damaging impasse regarding American motherhood, a brief historical review of how motherhood mythologies and stereotypes have changed over time should provide some important insights.

THE EVOLUTION OF MATERNAL MYTHS & STEREOTYPES

As socially-constructed ideologies, myths of motherhood have proven highly volatile and subject to cultural, political, and economic influences (Hare-Mustin & Broderick 1979; Bassin, Honey, & Kaplan 1994; Abramowitz 1996; Chira 1998). Historically, the locus of the motherhood debate has centered on the ideal "Good Mother." Shari Thurer (1994) offers a particularly far-reaching exploration of how "culture reinvents the good mother" by examining the construction of this maternal ideal in Stone Age society, in Ancient Egypt, during Medieval Times, and on through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Diane Eyer (1996) conducts a similar historical analysis that focuses on how Americans have conceptualized the "Good Mother" throughout the nation's history. With Colonial *fathers* as the first "Good Mothers" in American history, Eyer argues that the idealized American mother gradually morphed into a "hearth angel" after the Industrial Revolution, into a professionalized "housewife" in the 1950s and then became "Super Mom" in the 1980s.

"Super Mom"

As mothers entered the workforce in record numbers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, June Cleaver no longer held the same cultural resonance and the mythological Super Mom gradually surpassed Mrs. Cleaver in popularity. This new maternal ideal embraced the dual roles of worker and mother, while also implying that it would take superhuman powers to do so: "The

definition of Supermom implies that to have it all, a woman must do it all—work for pay, keep the house, raise the kids, nurture the marriage” (Villani & Ryan 1997: 119). Even from its inception then, this myth of motherhood set up most mothers to fall short of this newly constructed ideal of the “Good Mother.” In 1978, just as the Super Mom stereotype was gaining momentum, newspaper columnist Ellen Goodman offered this caricature of her:

“Superwoman gets up in the morning and wakes her 2.6 children, feeds them a grade-A nutritional breakfast, and then goes upstairs and gets dressed in her Anne Klein suit, goes off to her \$25,000-a-year job doing work which is active and socially useful. Then she comes home after work and spends a real meaningful hour with her children because after all, it’s not the quantity of time, but the quality of time. Following that, she goes in to the kitchen and creates a Julia Child 60-minute gourmet recipe, having a wonderful family dinner discussing the checks and balances of the United States government system. The children go upstairs to bed and she and her husband spend another hour in their own meaningful relationship.” (Quoted in Villani & Ryan 1997: 30)

This new Super Mom then, was expected to do all of June Cleaver’s chores while also fulfilling her new professional responsibilities. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild exposed the inequity of this double-duty expectation and argued that moms who were employed were still expected to work a “second shift” in their households and had to do so within the constraints of a “time bind” (1989; 1997). In fact, a recent analysis of the Super Moms of the 1990s offers strong empirical support for Hochschild’s “second shift” argument and found that employed mothers performed nearly the same number of daily household and child care activities as full-time mothers (DeMeis & Perkins 1996).

Given the near impossibility of actually attaining Super Mom status, it is not surprising that the discourse surrounding this maternal ideal gradually began to include concerns about a “Super Mom Syndrome” that was perceived to be harmful to mothers, children, and families. The backlash to maternal employment was propelled by a number of different critics including child development “experts,” the Religious Right, the media, and occasionally social science research. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, child development research on attachment theory and more recently, on infant brain development has been used as the primary ammunition against working mothers (Eyer 1996; Holcomb 1998). Dr. Terry Brazelton, a popular parenting expert, even went so far as to argue that if women did not stay home with their infants for at least the first year, they were at risk for raising future “terrorists” (Quoted in Eyer 1996: xi). Such proponents of attachment theory argue that children with working mothers will not bond appropriately with their mothers resulting in a lifetime of social disabilities as adults. Psychologists promoting this interpretation of attachment theory were implying then, that mothers who work full-time are in essence, impeding their child’s development.ⁱ

Conservative members of the increasingly influential Religious Right also attacked working mothers for defying their biologically predetermined roles as full-time mothers. This call for a return to “natural motherhood” is often couched in the language of “family values” and is reminiscent of the rhetoric Nixon used when vetoing the 1971 federal child care legislation (Chira 1998). As an explanation for his surprise veto, Nixon argued that federal involvement in child care policy would “Sovietize the family” (Berry 1993: 142). The “natural motherhood” camp attributes the influx of mothers into the workforce to the devaluation of full-time

motherhood in the wake of the feminist movement. Conservative psychologist Dr. James C. Dobson has been a strong proponent of this view and argues that:

“Motherhood is an honorable profession that didn’t have to be defended for thousands of years. But in the last few decades, young women have been made to feel foolish if they even dared mentioning homemaking as a goal... There is no more important job in the universe than to raise a child to love God, live productively and serve humanity. How ridiculous that a woman should have to apologize for wanting to fulfill that historical role! (Quoted in Villani & Ryan 1997)

This appeal to a mother’s “natural” or “innate” sensibilities has proven appealing for mothers, sometimes labeled “Modern Madonnas,” who wanted to leave their careers to return to full-time motherhood as an expression of their religious values (Keller 1994: 97). The natural motherhood argument, while empowering to some mothers, simultaneously implies that mothers who continued to work, whether by choice or economic necessity, are somehow “unnatural.”

The popular media have also helped to diminish the luster of the Super Mom ideal by labeling career-oriented mothers as selfish or uncaring: “In congressional testimony, glossy magazines, news stories, and Op-Ed pieces, moms with successful careers were reviled as selfish and materialistic, putting their own ambitions ahead of their children’s needs” (Holcomb 1998: 20). The news coverage surrounding Marcia Clark, a prosecutor in the O.J. Simpson trial and divorced mother of two, provides a particularly vivid example of how the media began to promote increasingly negative constructions of working mothers. When Marcia Clark’s ex-husband filed for custody of her children during this pinnacle of her prosecutorial career on the grounds that she was putting her work before her children, New York’s *Newsday* published a headline that exclaimed, “Bad Mom, Good Prosecutor” (Chira 1998: 167). Not surprisingly, the media and the public were not especially concerned with offering similar pronouncements about the working fathers who participated in this trial. The debate surrounding Marcia Clark’s work and family choices warned career-oriented mothers that combining professional ambition and achievement with effective mothering was difficult and even risky in some cases.

Another high profile trial that sparked additional attacks on professional mothers was the trial of young British au pair Louise Woodward, who was accused of murdering the child of a wealthy Massachusetts couple. Instead of focusing exclusively on the actions of the au pair, the media and public debated the actions of the toddler’s mother, Deborah Eappen, who worked full time as a physician: “the verdict: Guilty—of careerism, of callousness, of hiring someone to do a job only a mother should do” (Chira 1998: 3). In fact, some pundits even went so far as to accuse Dr. Eappen of contributing to the death of her child simply by choosing a career over full-time motherhood.

This is not the first time in recent history that working mothers have been blamed for child abuse or neglect that was committed by child care providers in their absence. Feminist authors such as Susan Faludi (1992) as well as many social scientists (Keller 1994; Eyer 1996) have argued that the “day care hysteria” fomented by a few highly salient child abuse cases was primarily a means for scaring and criticizing already conflicted working mothers. Empirical evidence challenging this perceived epidemic of child abuse, however, was typically ignored by the popular media, including a major university study that found abuse to be much more likely in a child’s home rather than in day care centers (Faludi 1992; Keller 1994; Thurer 1994). Unfortunately, the public, the media, and many working mothers themselves have, quite unfairly,

begun to hold working mothers at least partially responsible for the crimes committed by abusive child care providers.

As the attacks on working mothers proliferated, feminist scholars mounted a spirited defense. Such authors often presented evidence showing that maternal employment did not harm children and moreover, that children can actually benefit from observing their mother engaged in fulfilling work (Shreve 1987). Some defenders of working mothers, however, ended up resuscitating the fading Super Mom ideal. To more effectively deal with the stresses of their dual worker-mother role, working women were urged to try a variety of different strategies including “juggling” (Crosby 1991), “balancing and weaving” (Hattery 2001), choosing “the mommy track” at work (Glenn, Chang & Forcey 1994), and “quality time” (See Holcomb 1998 for a discussion of this parenting strategy: 20-21). Such coping mechanisms, however, did not challenge the core assumption of the Super Mom myth: that working women must do it all to have it all. Moreover, social scientists and the media have dismissed many of these strategies as ineffective or unfair.ⁱⁱ

Most recent scholarship though, has acknowledged the need to develop alternative strategies for supporting working mothers, their children, and their families. Not surprisingly, the most popular approach suggested is for the U.S. government to acknowledge the need to create a more effective child care system (Eyer 1996). Many advocates are also urging employers to develop more family-friendly work environments and to address persistent gender inequalities both in the workplace and in the home (Shreve 1987; Berry 1993; Holcomb 1998). Despite these pleas for greater support of working mothers, the Mommy Wars continue to rage with the idealized full-time mother dominating this ideological battle.

“*Soccer Mom*”

The current leader in this conflict over the ideal “Good Mother” appears to be the Soccer Mom stereotype that first emerged during the 1996 presidential election. While the 1994 mid-term elections were coined the year of the “Angry White Men,” the 1996 campaign between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole appeared to hinge on the votes of America’s Soccer Moms. While pollsters and the media debated the precise definition (especially in terms of employment status) of this new and influential voting bloc during the campaign, the Soccer Mom stereotype is now readily identified as a white, married, politically moderate to conservative, suburban, stay-at-home mother—“She’s June Cleaver in a minivan” (*Anchorage Daily News*, November 3, 1996).ⁱⁱⁱ She has even been immortalized in a 1996 poem (loosely defined) by J. Warner Ralls entitled “Soccer Moms”:

Recent years in the USA have provided a new way to designate
certain active mothers.

These soccer moms are little youngish women who daily wear
athletic shoes and dress.

They tool around in station wagons, pickup trucks and vans
to provide rides to others.

Getting heirs and heiresses to practice and performance is a
labor of love they confess.

(International Poetry Hall of Fame, <http://www.poets.com/JWarnerRalls.htm>)

Though clearly lacking in grace (and poetic meter for that matter), this poem vividly demonstrates one of the primary ways the Soccer Mom has differentiated herself from June Cleaver—the Soccer Mom always puts her “heirs and heiresses” first. This new myth of motherhood is “not about staying home to be helpmeet [sic] for your husband or devoting yourself to making your floors spick and span; it is about making sure your babies are the best they can be” (Chira 1998: 18). While June Cleaver was a “housewife” or “homemaker,” the Soccer Mom is a “full-time mother” with her housekeeping responsibilities noticeably absent from her new title.

The Soccer Mom has also clearly distinguished herself from working mothers plagued with the Super Mom Syndrome, by making her priorities quite clear: while the Super Mom struggles to be a successful worker, mother, wife, and homemaker simultaneously, the Soccer Mom is unquestionably a mother first, with all other roles as secondary. In this way, the Soccer Mom myth has provided a somewhat clearer ideal for mothers who have tried unsuccessfully to meet the Super Mom ideal. In fact, most women who have chosen to leave their careers to raise their children full-time very consciously view the Soccer Mom lifestyle as an alternative to the more stressful life of the Super Mom: “Soccer moms of the 1990s were the ‘supermoms’ of the 1980s. Many of them have kicked off their high heels and replaced them with Keds to watch their kids” (Chira 1998: 207). These new stay-at-home moms then, are no longer primarily conservative Christian proponents of the “natural motherhood” ideology—the Soccer Mom is decidedly more mainstream.

While more politically moderate and popular than the full-time mothers of the 1980s, stay-at-home Soccer Moms are not nearly as common as reported. Despite media reports that this “new cult of domesticity” or “new feminine mystique” is a significant demographic trend, staying home full-time is not possible or even desirable for many contemporary mothers (Chira 1998). In fact, the *Wall Street Journal* (July 23, 1993) and the *New York Times Magazine* (November 15, 1998) both ran articles labeling the stay-home mother as the new “status symbol” of the 1990s. In this sense, the Soccer Mom is now perceived as “lucky” to get to stay home with her children (Holcomb 1998: 43). Despite this clear endorsement of the stay-at-home Soccer Mom as the current maternal ideal, many full-time mothers struggle with many of the same conflicting pressures as working mothers.

In their longitudinal study of stay-at-home mothers in 1978 and 1995, Villani & Ryan (1997) found that many full-time mothers still feel the pressures of Super Motherhood despite their choice to “simplify” their lives by leaving their careers. They also found that some full-time mothers can experience a “mother crisis” when their perceived failure to meet the “Good Mother” ideal reaches a distressing level. There is also evidence that full-time mothers are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety than employed mothers (See Arendell 1999a for a discussion of this psychological literature). While there is no current discussion of a “Soccer Mom Syndrome,” it is important to note that stay-at-home mothers have not been entirely immune from public critique.

With the majority of mothers now working, full-time mothers are still in the elite minority and consequently, are often compelled to justify their choices. Indeed, many stay-at-home mothers are still asked the ubiquitous and rather insensitive question, “So, what do you *do* all day?” To counteract such criticisms, particularly from working mothers, full-time mothers have developed a variety of responses and supports in the context of the Mommy Wars. Many

stay-at-home mothers, for instance, have organized local support groups and two national support groups, Mothers-at-Home, and FEMALE, have been gaining in popularity and membership. It is interesting to note that when FEMALE was founded in 1987, the acronym stood for “Formerly Employed Mothers at Loose Ends”; in 1991, the acronym was changed to “Formerly Employed Mothers at the Leading Edge” (Villani & Ryan 1997; Holcomb 1998). This seemingly minor linguistic shift vividly shows how full-time mothers have become more confident in promoting their vision of motherhood.

The use of the phrase “I am my child’s mother” by conservative radio host Dr. Laura Schlessinger, and many of her callers, is another way language has been used effectively in the Mommy Wars. This statement reinforces the central characteristic of the “Soccer Mom” ideal—that she always puts children first. This phrase, as well as the bulk of “Dr. Laura’s” commentary, simultaneously praises full-time mothers while chastising employed mothers for choosing careers over the well-being of their children. Many full-time mothers, however, are still made to feel defensive about their choice to not pursue professional fulfillment through employment. Some full-time mothers respond to this critique by reminding the public that they are engaged in the important work of child development and rearing, which requires a P.H.D. or “parent home daily” (Keller 1994: 108). While seemingly rather light and witty in tone, such sound bites have been effective weapons in the ideological battles between employed and full-time mothers.

This repartee between proponents of full-time motherhood and supporters of working motherhood fuels the media-driven Mommy Wars. What is glaringly absent from this struggle over the construction of motherhood is any real discussion of mothers who are not middle class or white. The battle between the Super Mom and the Soccer Mom is ultimately, an elite battle between white, upper middle class mothers for whom working or not working is a “choice.” Low-income mothers, single mothers, teen mothers, minority mothers, and welfare mothers are rarely, if ever included in the Mommy Wars, as they typically “have to work”; their “deviant” status makes such mothers invisible in this gender role debate. Indeed, as Chira (1998) notes, “all the crocodile tears shed over the rights of children to a mother at home are largely tears saved for the middle class” (210). The “need to work” argument has proven to be a particularly resonant rationalization for explaining why many lower income and minority mothers do not meet the “hegemonic” maternal ideal of a full-time mother. Such lower income working mothers, however, are still typically discussed under a deviancy rubric, as are the other groups of mothers listed above who are excluded from the Mommy Wars debate.

“Waitress Mom”

While career-oriented Super Moms are criticized for selfishly choosing their own professional development over their children, low-income, working Waitress Moms are pitied for needing to financially support their families. The Waitress Mom stereotype emerged in the 1998 mid-term election as a low-income, hard-working, occasionally single, but usually married, mother with little formal education and a low-paying job or jobs; the character Alice from the television sitcom *Mel’s Diner* is a fictional representation of this stereotype (See Figure 4 for a media caricature of the Waitress Mom). Democratic pollster Celinda Lake officially coined this phrase and characterized Waitress Moms as a potentially important voting bloc concerned about “bread-and-butter family issues and possibly too exhausted to vote” (Salon.com November 3, 1998). The Waitress Mom also played a prominent role in the 2000 presidential election with Al

Gore profiling his own mother as a Waitress Mom working two jobs to support her family in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention.

Figure 4. “THE ATTACK OF THE 60 FOOT WAITRESS MOM”



Source: Salon Online Magazine, November 2, 1998

Despite her arrival on the popular media scene, the Waitress Mom has not yet received commensurate scholarly attention. With the majority of feminist scholarship on the experiences of white middle class women, many scholars are now beginning to study the long overlooked experiences of minority and lower income mothers. The work of sociologist Patricia Hill Collins on the intersections between race, class, and motherhood is representative of this turn to a more inclusive study of motherhood and work (1989; 1994). There is also a growing body of ethnographic research on various groups of low-income mothers that examines the work and family lives of Chicana factory workers, African American hospital personnel, and Japanese domestic workers (See Lamphere et al. 1993, for a review of this growing anthropological literature). Irene Browne’s impressive volume *Latinas and African American Women at Work* also explores the working lives of minority mothers in four major American cities (1999). By documenting the challenging experiences of these Waitress Moms, this research shows that while middle and upper middle class mothers debate the efficacy of combining full-time work with motherhood, these lower income mothers have quietly become the new Super Moms, attempting to “juggle,” “weave,” and “balance” their multiple roles.

The Super Mom label, however, is rarely used to describe minority or working class women, even when they take on the same work and family responsibilities as this mythic mother.^{iv} The Waitress Mom label does allow low-income and minority mothers to avoid some of the cries of selfishness and greed that are leveled at wealthier career-oriented Super Moms. The public tends to view Waitress Moms as simply too busy or too financially insecure to suffer from the Super Mom Syndrome.

Another reason that Waitress Moms are not attacked on the basis of their labor force participation is that the American public has historically viewed low income and minority mothers as workers first and mothers second—a decidedly different standard than the “children first” mandate for more financially stable Super Moms and Soccer Moms (Abramovitz 1996; Michel 1999). While Super Moms have struggled to combine their mother and worker roles, minority and working class mothers throughout American history have had to blur the line

between these two roles. The separate spheres concept used by many feminist scholars to explain historical changes in status of American mothers then, does not readily transfer to minority mothers as “work and family have rarely functioned as dichotomous spheres for women of color” (Collins 1994: 58).

Because the Waitress Mom has no choice but to combine her mother and worker roles, she confronts the same work-family balance challenges as Super Mom, but with significantly less power and support. Taking the superhero metaphor a step further, she is expected to do the work of Super Man, even though she only has the power of his mere human alter ego Clark Kent. However, as Collins notes, “more than do supermom doctors, lawyers, and corporation executives, working-class working mothers and their households represent the kinds of diversity, flexibility, and change that are becoming characteristic of American working families (1994: 58). While the Super Mom and Soccer Mom fight to become the reigning maternal ideal, the Waitress Mom has become reality for many of America’s mothers.

Although the Waitress Mom stereotype is more representative of the real-world experience of a growing population of working mothers, low-income working mothers have been noticeably absent from most political and cultural debates. Indeed, they appear to represent what Theda Skocpol calls the “missing middle” in American social policy (2000). A likely explanation for the apparent invisibility of the Waitress Mom in current social policy debates can be found in my earlier model of child care policy target populations, where low-income working mothers fit in the “dependents” category (See Figure 2).

According to Schneider & Ingram (1997), “dependent” populations are positively constructed, but lack political power and consequently, are rarely targeted for policy benefits or burdens. Alternatively, “contender” and “advantaged” populations vary in how they are constructed, but ultimately have the political power to successfully secure policy benefits while minimizing policy burdens. Interestingly, “deviant” populations are also more likely than “dependents” to elicit a policy response, but such responses are typically punitive in nature. According to this model then, Soccer Moms and Super Moms receive positive policy responses while Welfare Queens receive punitive policy responses—the Waitress Mom is simply ignored. As more and more low-income mothers enter the workforce with rapidly increasing child care needs, however, it is unlikely that the Waitress Mom will remain invisible for long.

“Welfare Queen”

In contrast to the rather minimal political and scholarly attention given to the Waitress Mom, the Welfare Queen stereotype has been analyzed extensively by the public, the media, scholars, and political actors. The Welfare Queen myth encapsulates a range of characteristics that crowns her the ultimate deviant mother in American culture: she is African American, she is “unwed” or single, she started child-bearing as a teen, and she does not put her children first though she stays home full time and does not work.^v

The Welfare Queen myth has proven to be an extremely potent rhetorical tool in a wide range of political settings. She has most famously been used as a justification for cutting government spending on a range of social policies. When Ronald Reagan first introduced America to this image of a scheming welfare recipient who illegally claimed benefits under a number of aliases while driving a “Welfare Cadillac,” he sparked a popular backlash against the Welfare Queen that enabled him to significantly cut AFDC benefits and introduce punitive work requirements. Though Reagan’s portrait of the Chicago-based Welfare Queen was found to be greatly exaggerated, the outrage over this perpetrator of welfare fraud was enormous and long-

lasting. This demonstrates the rhetorical power of the Welfare Queen myth—the *idea* of this conniving and evil “welfare cheat” was enough to affect public policy regardless of actual fact.

Despite the cultural resonance of Reagan’s Welfare Queen, there is little evidence that many women on welfare deserved this derogatory label. In fact, when Reagan drew public attention to the “problem” of Welfare Queens, the majority of welfare recipients were white and not black. Moreover, most welfare recipients are on assistance for less than a year and on average have fewer children than the average for the general population (See U.S. House Ways & Means Committee’s *2000 Green Book*). Social science research has also refuted the Welfare Queen stereotype by profiling welfare recipients who work hard to find ways to support themselves and their families in the face of substantial economic and personal obstacles (Edin 1997; Zucchini 1997; Lens 1997-1998). As Ange-Marie Hancock argues then, Welfare Queen is the “ultimate oxymoron” (2000: 7). This evidence disproving the purported Welfare Queen epidemic, however, has been overlooked by the media, politicians, and the public, as the story of the Welfare Queen fits much more readily with cultural expectations and beliefs about low-income minority mothers.^{vi}

The potency of this myth of motherhood lies in its explicit and implicit racial content. Unlike the other maternal stereotypes explored in this paper, the race of the Welfare Queen is always clear, even when it is not directly stated. In fact, Reagan never described the Welfare Queen in his speech as black, although as Eyer notes, “those promiscuous, lazy, TV-watching, imagine-them-to-be-black-and-overweight from eating so many tax dollars (nonvoting) ghetto females provided the perfect scapegoat” (1996: 20). In this way, the Welfare Queen imagery allows political actors to use racially-loaded rhetoric in a less explicit, more politically palatable manner. While conservative politicians including Reagan have argued that they do not use the Welfare Queen label to single out black women, but rather to expose welfare fraud, the racial implications of this stereotype simply cannot be avoided.

The Welfare Queen is merely one of many racial stereotypes that have been applied to black mothers throughout American history. Stereotypes such as the nurturing “Mammy” image have been used to rationalize the exploitation of black women during slavery and eventually, to justify the employment status of black mothers as meagerly paid child care or domestic workers (Wallace 1990; Collins 1991; Jewell 1993; Wong 1994). The headstrong and promiscuous “Sapphire” or “jezebel” stereotype alternatively, has been used to justify treatment of black mothers as “deviants” in the context of social welfare policies (Wallace 1990; Collins 1991). This Sapphire imagery has proven especially enduring and reappeared in a slightly more flattering form as the “black matriarch” in the now infamous Moynihan Report of 1965 that began the “culture of poverty” debates (Benson-Smith 2000). In the wake of the perceived failures of the War on Poverty, a more sinister descendent of the black matriarch emerged to fuel the conservative backlash to government poverty programs: the Welfare Queen. Indeed, “Moynihan’s matriarch is the precursor to Ronald Reagan’s welfare queen (*Ibid*: 13). The Welfare Queen’s notorious family tree, which includes both Moynihan’s headstrong black matriarch and the promiscuous Sapphire stereotype, at least partially explains her near “demonic” status in contemporary American society (Lubiano 1992: 338).

In addition to her prominent minority status, the Welfare Queen has also been criticized for her status as a single or “unwed” mother. Here the Welfare Queen is not alone in her perceived deviancy, as single mothers across the globe have been almost universally scorned (Nave-Herz 1997). According to Phoenix, single mothers are typically characterized as “feckless” and “willfully responsible for the poverty that has been well documented to be a

feature of lone parenting...and undeserving of either public sympathy or economic support” (1996: 175). Because single mothers are much more likely than married mothers to be poor, single mothers are much more likely to become welfare recipients as well.

Linda Gordon explores the connection between single motherhood and welfare receipt in her comprehensive historical work *Pitied, But Not Entitled* (1994). She argues that the evolution of the American welfare state is best understood as a series of government responses to the “single mother problem.” While at first the single mother was constructed positively as a white widow deserving federal assistance, the single mother has gradually become associated with less deserving black mothers who are teenagers or who have never been married.^{vii} Thus, the “single mother,” even when differentiated from the Welfare Queen, is still assumed to be black, economically disadvantaged, and occasionally a “teen mom.”

In the 1990s, teenage pregnancy emerged as a significant public problem that was closely linked to the problem of welfare dependence in popular discourse (Harris 1997). Although teen pregnancies were increasing for all sectors of the population, the birth rates among low-income, black, teenage girls were rising at a particularly fast pace, thereby reinforcing the Welfare Queen stereotype (Kaplan 1997). Teen pregnancy, like welfare dependence and single motherhood more generally, is constructed as a black problem.

The racialization of the single mother as a broader category of mother was made dramatically clear during the Dan Quayle vs. Murphy Brown scandal. Ziegler describes this media event at length and notes that:

It is ironic that Quayle chose to pick on TV character Murphy Brown, who is portrayed as a single woman with an annual income of more than \$50,000 who made the choice to be a single parent, because Murphy does not fit the typical stereotype usually associated with single parenting, primarily and often profiled as an African American female who is on welfare. As a matter of fact, on the evening of the sitcom’s 1992 fall premiere where Murphy struck back at the vice-president, Quayle selected a group of African American single parents in Washington DC, to view the program with him to serve as a symbol of his support for single parenting. Unfortunately, Quayle’s choice of this racial composition for the audience opened the door for more comments regarding his motives. (1995: 81)

This political “blunder,” was “interpreted by many to give a coded racial message about who he considered as ‘typical’ lone parents (Phoenix 1996: 187).

Since its inception in the 1980s, the racially-loaded Welfare Queen stereotype has been used by political elites, including Dan Quayle, to chip away at America’s social safety net. While Reagan invoked her in the mid-1980s to build support for the Family Support Act, which added work requirements to the AFDC program, her latest appearance was during the debates surrounding the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This time, however, both Democrats and Republicans were calling for the end of the Welfare Queen’s reign. She was compared to both “alligators” and “wolves” by members of Congress and President Bill Clinton staunchly supported strict time limits and mandatory work requirements designed to punish the Welfare Queen for her years of dependency (Chira 1998: 211). The cry to “end welfare as we know it,” also implied that welfare reform should “end the Welfare Queen as we know her.”

In addition to her duties as a pawn in American welfare policy games, the Welfare Queen has been used as an effective rhetorical device in other political arenas. Particularly disturbing was the labeling of President Clinton's nominee for Assistant Attorney General of Civil Rights, Lani Guinier, as a "quota queen." This sound bite served as an effective euphemism for critics of Guinier who wouldn't dare accuse her outright of being too "pro-black." Instead, the phrase "quota queen" was used to subtly associate her with both an extremely unpopular affirmative action approach (that she did not actually support) and the extremely unpopular Welfare Queen image (Guinier 1994; Williams 1997).

The Welfare Queen imagery was also present during the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Wahneema Lubiano (1992) argues that stereotypes of black women, in particular the impoverished Welfare Queen and the genteel, middle class "Black Lady," served to differentiate Clarence Thomas from these negative images of African Americans and ultimately, to construct him as a black "hero":

Between the specters of Emma Mae Martin [Thomas' sister]—denounced by Thomas as an example of 'welfare dependency' (read: welfare queen)—on the one hand, and Anita Hill—embodiment of black-lady status—on the other hand, the confirmation of Thomas could be viewed as necessary to help save the life of the nation, which might otherwise go down the tubes trying to fight the pathology of the urban black poor dragging at its heels. (336)

Such invocations of the Welfare Queen myth make it easy to see why critics of such rhetoric view the use of this language as race-baiting and/or class warfare—the class and race status of the Welfare Queen stereotype cannot be separated from her "dependent" status as a recipient of government assistance.

As a testament to how universally loathed the Welfare Queen is in American society, this mythical mother is also frequently invoked by welfare recipients themselves, primarily as a way to demonstrate their own worthiness in contrast to the unworthy Welfare Queen. Research has shown, for example, that some teen welfare mothers "readily reproduced existing stereotypes of lone mothers (but not themselves) becoming pregnant for instrumental reasons" (Phoenix 1996: 180). In *Not Our Kind of Girl*, Elaine Kaplan (1997) also found that many welfare recipients and caseworkers believed that welfare mothers often were "too lazy to work" and had no real work ethic (133). The fact that many welfare recipients express the same moral outrage at the manipulative, lazy Welfare Queen as the general public is further evidence of how entrenched this myth has become in American culture. This somewhat counterintuitive finding—that the mothers most likely to refute the myth of the Welfare Queen based on their own contradictory personal experiences believe the stereotype themselves—is also an indication of the reach of the current hegemonic motherhood ideal.

Much like other working mothers, mothers receiving public assistance also appear to believe that the full-time stay-at-home mother is still the best mother. The irony here is that while middle class and wealthier Soccer Moms are praised for "staying home," welfare mothers are severely criticized for "sitting home all day." As noted above, lower income and minority mothers are constructed as workers before mothers and thus, the welfare mother is automatically labeled deviant because she does not work full time; the paid labor of single welfare mothers is perceived to have far greater societal value than their unpaid work as mothers. Some mothers on welfare, however, view public assistance as a way to temporarily meet the stay-at-home maternal

ideal despite the welfare stigma: “I wanted to spend the first two years at home...That’s the way I was raised. My mother didn’t work until we were in school” (Theresa Covington, welfare recipient, Quoted in Chira 1998: 215). The campaign by parenting gurus and proponents of attachment theory urging middle class mothers to stay home with their young children appears to have trickled down to impoverished mothers as well.

The disconnect between the stay-at-home maternal ideal and the day to day realities for mothers receiving welfare, however, is especially troubling for this group of mothers, who are struggling with basic material needs while attempting to be “good mothers.” In a 1983 hearing on the “feminization of poverty” in Northern California, for example, a welfare recipient perceptively exclaimed:

“I’m damned if I do and damned if I don’t. In other words, if I stay home and care for my children I’m accused of freeloading, but if I work I not only face economic sanctions but a society that tells me I’m a bad mother for abandoning my children to child care and neglecting my responsibility.” (Zimmerman 1983)

This mother’s testimony poignantly demonstrates the enduring tensions between motherhood and work that continue to plague all American mothers.

Although “deviant” mothers such as single welfare mothers, minority mothers, or low-income working mothers are not readily discussed in the context of the Mommy Wars over the construction of the maternal ideal, they are important players in this ideological battle. Moreover, based on Schneider and Ingram’s (1997) target population construction model, they are a positive construction away from becoming political “Contenders.” In this way, understanding the content of these different maternal stereotypes provides important information about how target populations compete for social policy benefits. A recent study on how the Welfare Queen and Soccer Mom stereotypes are used in transportation policy debates confirms the importance of these socio-political constructions in the policymaking process (Dittmar 2002).

The maternal stereotypes explored in this study then, are “not simply social taxonomies, they are also recognized by the national public as stories that describe the world in particular and politically loaded ways—and that is exactly why they are constructed, reconstructed, manipulated, and contested” (Lubiano 1992: 330). In the context of contemporary child care debates, the Mommy Wars between all four maternal stereotypes explored here provide the political battleground for competing stories of the ideal mother.

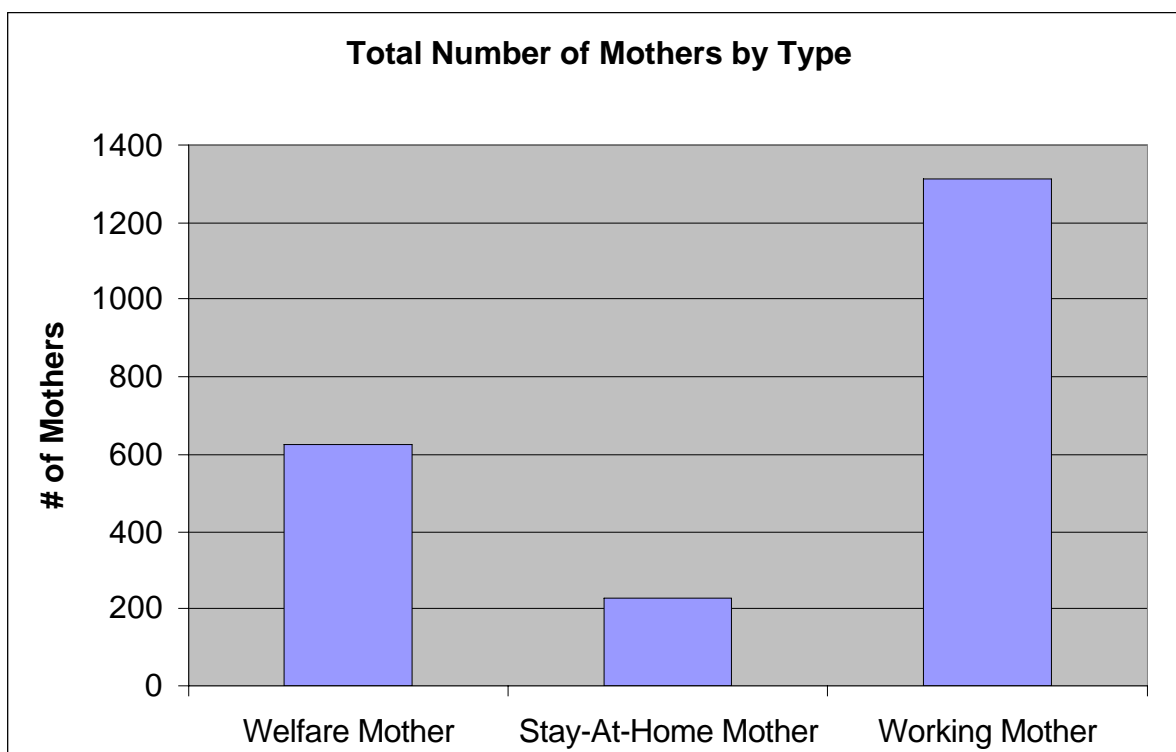
ANALYZING MEDIA CONSTRUCTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD

Using the well-developed theoretical literature on maternal myths as a foundation, I conducted an extensive content analysis of state-level newspaper stories and television broadcast transcripts that discussed motherhood in the context of child care. I selected, sampled, coded, and analyzed over 1,500 stories from media outlets in sixteen different states that were chosen with geographic and socio-political diversity in mind. The content analysis was done for a four-year time period, from 1993 until 1996, when a major piece of federal child care legislation, the Child Care Development Fund Block Grant program, was enacted.^{viii} An extensive coding scheme was developed to systematically assess how state media presented different dimensions of motherhood and child care.

The mothers discussed in the articles on child care were, not surprisingly, most likely to be working mothers, with a total of 1,311 working mothers mentioned (See Figure 5). About

half that number (625) were mothers participating in welfare programs with stay-at-home mothers mentioned only 227 times in the sampled articles. To some extent, these findings reflect the perceived demand for child care, as mothers who work or who are moving from welfare to work must find reliable child care arrangements to meet their professional obligations. Rather than a necessity, non-parental child care for stay-at-home mothers is typically perceived to be a helpful respite for full time mothers through programs such as “Mother’s Day Out” programs, enrichment programs, and summer camps. Thus, it is not surprising that the child care articles were most likely to include working mothers and welfare mothers in their discussions of this issue.

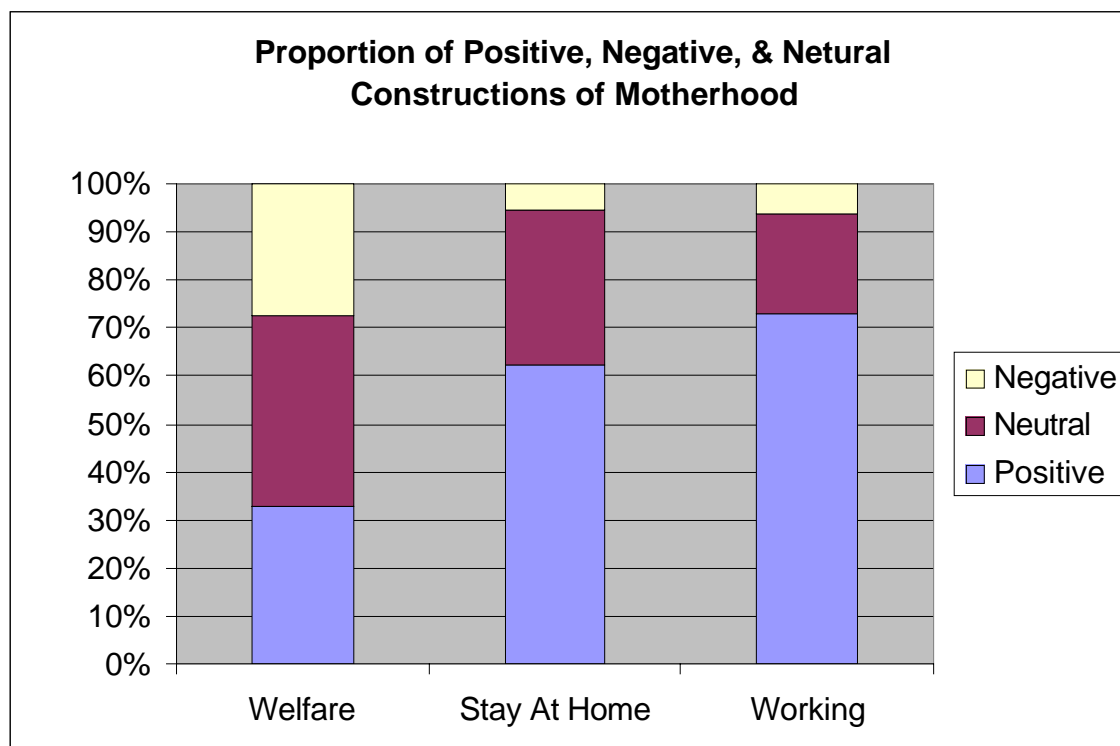
Figure 5. FREQUENCY OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF MOTHERS



What is surprising, however, is that the discussions of working mothers were overwhelmingly positive. Based on both theoretical and opinion poll findings about maternal employment, we would expect to find fairly mixed opinions about working mothers in these news stories. Instead, the vast majority of working mothers (73%) were constructed as a positive target population in the context of child care debates (See Figure 6). In fact, working mothers were slightly more likely to be constructed positively than stay-at-home mothers who embody the reigning maternal ideal. With 62% of stay-at-home mothers discussed in a positive light, though, they were still clearly a positively constructed target group.

Welfare mothers, however, elicited decidedly mixed opinions. The proportion of positive, negative, and neutral images was nearly equal for mothers receiving welfare, which confirms the media’s continued unease with this group of mothers. While these media outlets have made some headway in reducing unnecessarily negative portrayals of working mothers, the same cannot be said for their often unfounded negative portrayals of welfare mothers.

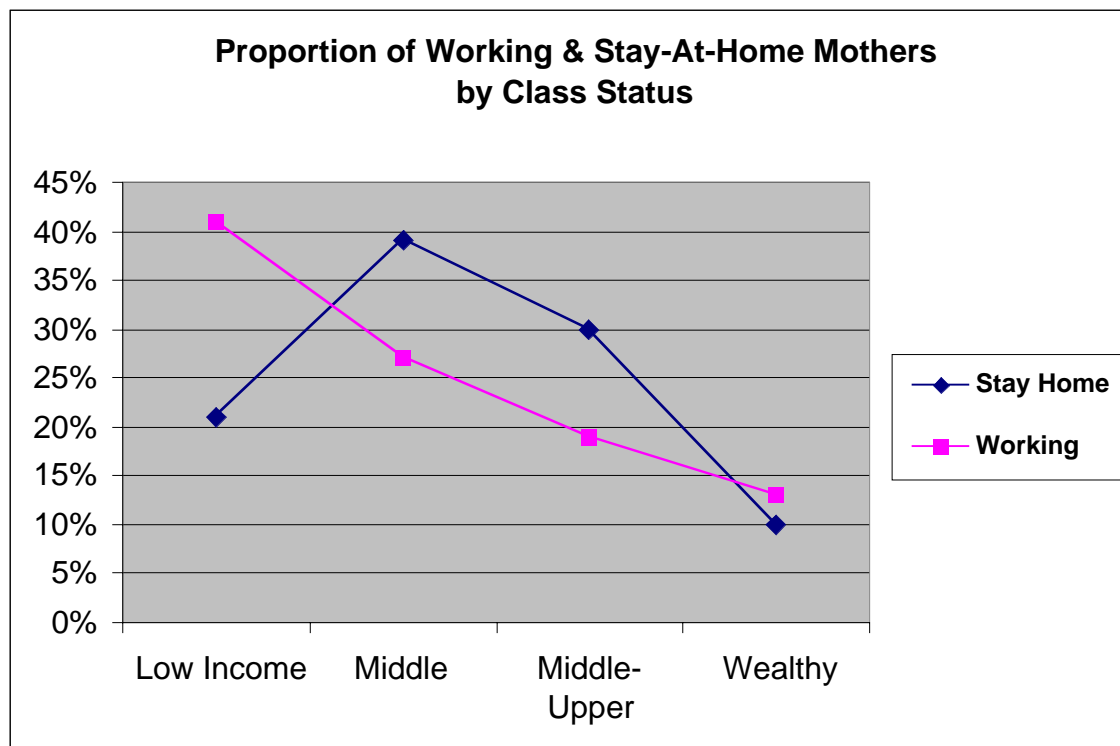
Figure 6. MEDIA CONSTRUCTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD



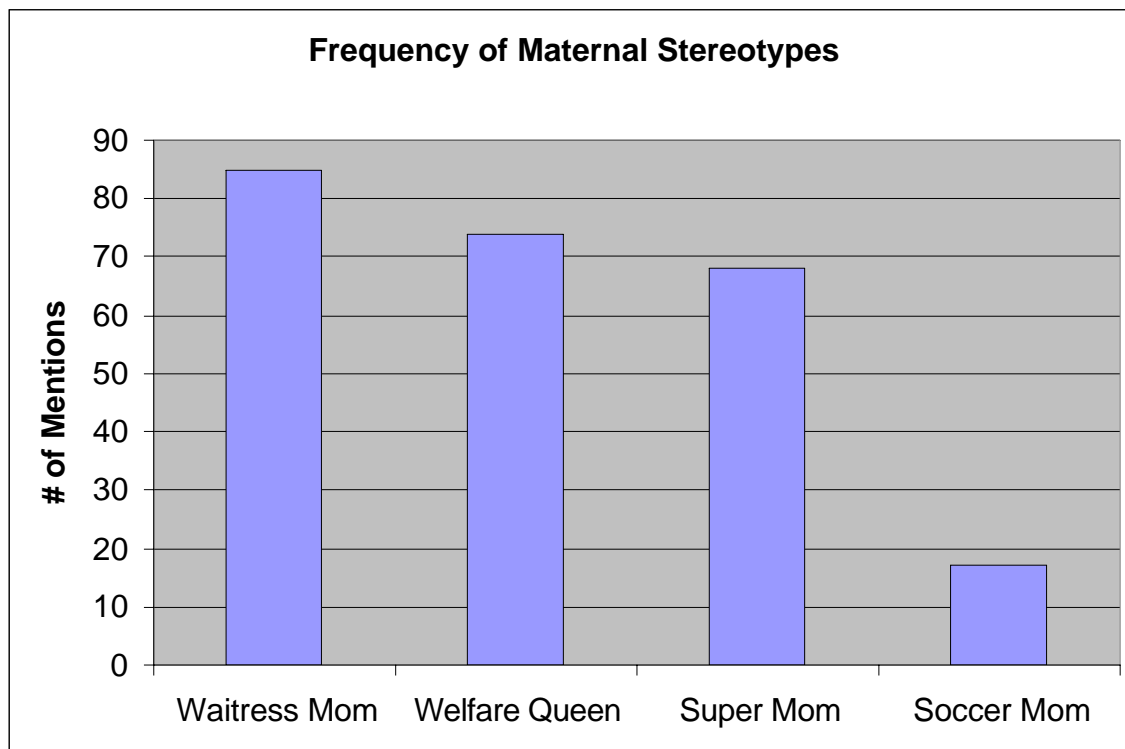
Based on previous research on media portrayals of welfare recipients (Gilens 1999), we would expect that the high number of negative welfare mother images could be at least partially attributed to racial discrimination. Interestingly, race was all but invisible in the text of the news stories analyzed in this study. In fact, the race of the mother was mentioned in only 37 out of the 2,590 total child care articles. This does not mean, however, that racial undertones were entirely absent from the child care articles. It is important to note that when Gilens (1999) conducted his groundbreaking research for his book *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, he focused his analysis on the photographic images of welfare recipients that were printed with news magazine stories on welfare and poverty. He found that these images were disproportionately of African Americans even though the majority of welfare recipients throughout his historical analysis were white. Thus, a purely textual analysis of stories about welfare recipients, or motherhood and child care, is likely to miss the racial cues that are typically made more explicit in media images.

The class status of the mothers in this content analysis, however, proved much more salient than their race; class status could be determined for almost half of all the mothers mentioned in the media stories. Stay-at-home mothers were much more likely to be middle class than working mothers, who were most likely to fall into the lower income category (See Figure 7). In fact, over 40% of all working mothers mentioned in the news stories could be classified as low-income or working poor. Stay-at-home mothers, on the other hand, were overwhelmingly middle class, with over 70% of full-time mothers falling into the middle and upper middle class categories. These findings provide support for the claim (made in both a 1993 *Wall Street Journal* article and in a 1998 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*) that the full-time, stay-at-home mother has become the new status symbol for middle and upper middle class families, and an unattainable luxury for most lower income families (July 23, 1993; November 15, 1998).

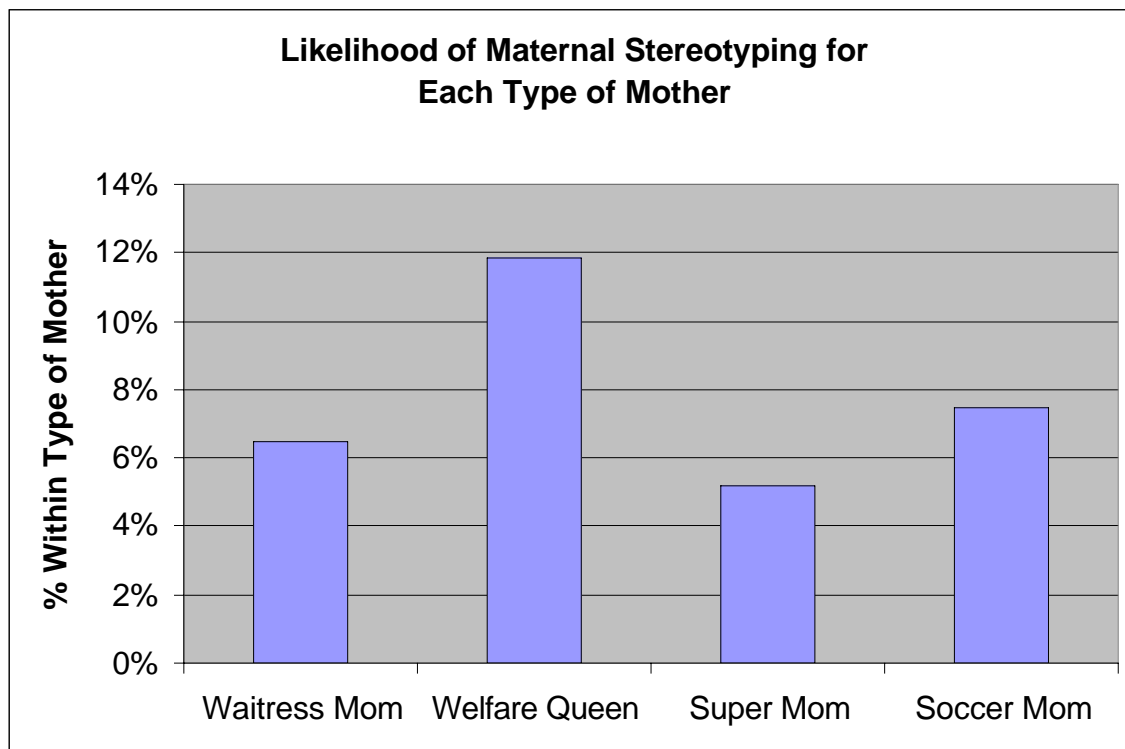
Figure 7. CLASS STATUS OF WORKING AND STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS



Because lower-income working mothers were the most frequently mentioned type of mother in the articles analyzed here, it is not surprising that the most frequent maternal myth invoked was that of the Waitress Mom (See Figure 8). The Waitress Mom was followed closely by the Welfare Queen stereotype, then the Super Mom, and, finally, the Soccer Mom as the least common maternal myth in the child care-oriented stories. The minimal references to the Soccer Mom myth may be at least partially attributable to the time frame of this content analysis, which ends in 1996—just as this new construction of motherhood was gaining broader cultural resonance. While this same logic would seem to follow for the Waitress Mom (which emerged as a linguistic label in 1998), the low-income working mother image—though without the catchy Waitress Mom label—has been a part of American culture for a much longer time period than the Soccer Mom. The Soccer Mom, in contrast, represents a more recent and significant reconceptualization of motherhood by transforming the 1950s-style June Cleaver stay-home mother into the minivan-driving, child-centered, full-time mother. Working mothers who fit the Waitress Mom stereotype (working one or two low-paying jobs to support her family financially, possibly single, usually white, etc.), however, have been represented in the media for a much longer period of time. Although the content analysis methodology used here did not require an explicit mention of the actual words “Waitress Mom” or “Soccer Mom,” but rather required explicit mentions of the specific qualities associated with these stereotypes, the results of this analysis do clearly show that stories on child care were most likely to be linked with the Waitress Mom maternal stereotype.

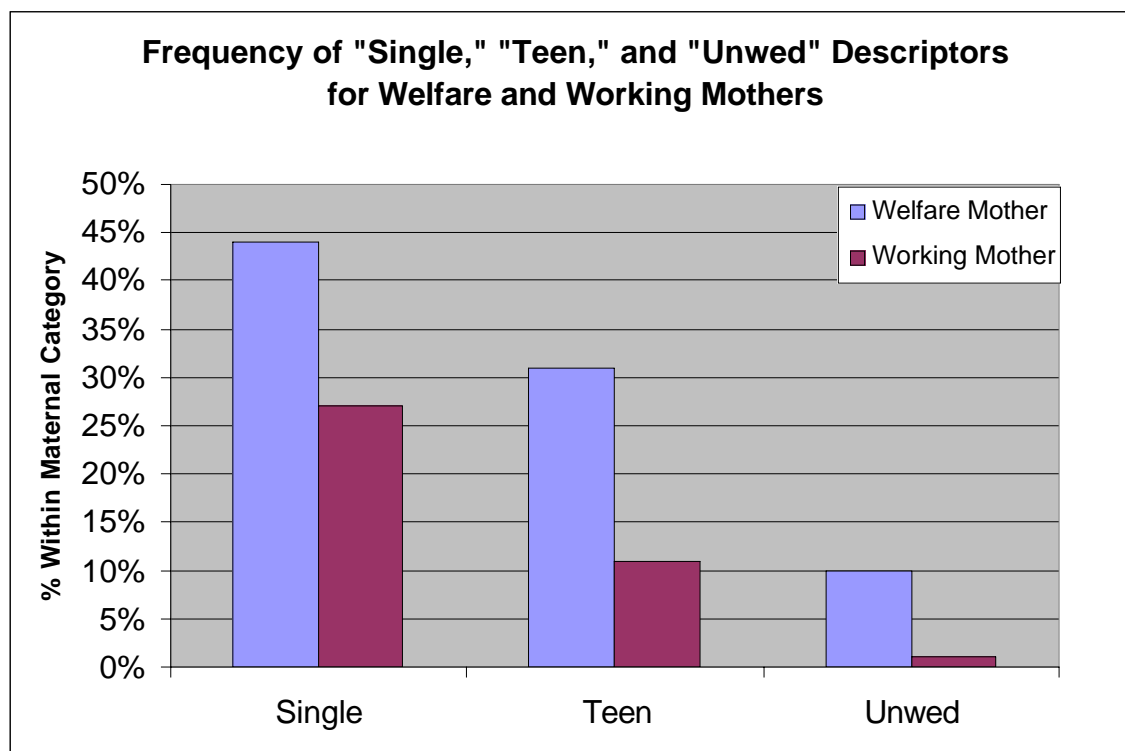
FIGURE 8. MYTHS OF MOTERHOOD IN THE MEDIA

It is also worth exploring why the Welfare Queen stereotype was the second most frequent maternal myth despite the fact that welfare recipients were mentioned half as often as working mothers overall. If we look more closely at the proportion of each type of mother that was associated with a maternal myth, it becomes clear that welfare mothers were significantly more likely to be stereotyped than the other groups of mothers. As Figure 9 demonstrates, approximately 12% of all mothers receiving welfare were labeled with the derogatory Welfare Queen stereotype while the other groups of mothers were less subject to either negative or positive generalizations.

FIGURE 9. MEDIA STEREOTYPING OF EACH TYPE OF MOTHER

In addition to being negatively stereotyped more frequently than the other subgroups of mothers included in this analysis, welfare mothers were also more likely to be labeled with other derogatory descriptors. As Figure 10 shows, welfare mothers were much more likely than working mothers to be identified as single, as teenagers, and as “unwed” mothers.^{ix} Given the clear negative implications of these adjectives as outlined in the scholarly literature reviewed above, these findings provide additional evidence that state media sources continue to view mothers receiving welfare as “deviant.”

Figure 10. NEGATIVE ADJECTIVES DESCRIBING WORKING & WELFARE MOTHERS



CONCLUSION

The findings of this content analysis directly confront many of the theoretical claims about motherhood that are reviewed extensively above. The conflicting and often overly negative portrayals of welfare mothers in this media analysis reinforce theoretical assertions that welfare recipients are much more likely than other types of mothers to be constructed as deviant by the media. Mothers receiving welfare were more likely to be stereotyped as Welfare Queens and to be linked with the similarly pejorative labels of single, teen, and “unwed.” This analysis also confirms that stay-at-home mothers are most frequently presented in a positive light by both print and television media, although Soccer Moms were mentioned much less frequently than all other types of mothers.

The portrayals of working mothers, in contrast, do not fit as readily with theoretical assumptions about maternal hierarchies and the reigning “ideal mother.” Based on the theoretical literature and contemporary opinion polls, we would expect media images of working mothers (both Waitress Moms and Super Moms) to be somewhat mixed, thereby reflecting the documented cultural discord concerning motherhood and employment. The media stories analyzed in this research, however, present an overwhelmingly positive view of working mothers regardless of their class status. Thus, both working and stay-at-home mothers were constructed as positive maternal ideals in the context of state-level child care debates in this analysis. The next step in this research project is to determine if these positive portrayals of working mothers actually lead to concrete child care policy outcomes. While this media endorsement of working mothers is certainly an important first step toward gaining greater overall cultural acceptance for the majority of American mothers, a more significant indication of progress will be child care policies that directly support all working mothers and their families.

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ⁱ This is not to argue, however, that infants and young children do not benefit from early brain stimulation or bonding experiences with caring adults. What is disputed here is the interpretation that only a full-time mother can provide these important developmental opportunities for their children.

ⁱⁱ The “quality time” approach was subjected to especially harsh critique by scholars such as Arlie Hochschild (1997) in her influential work *The Time Bind* and by popular print media that claimed to expose the “myth of quality time” (*Newsweek*, May 1997) and the “lies parents tell themselves about work, kids, money, day care, and ambition” (*US News & World Report*, May 1997) (See also Holcomb 1998, p. 21).

ⁱⁱⁱ Because the “Soccer Mom” is still relatively new to the American cultural and political scene, this stereotype continues to evolve in the eyes of the public. Many women who currently refer to themselves as Soccer Moms, for instance, often work full-time or part-time, although their mothering responsibilities are typically described as their primary focus. For the purposes of this project, however, the earlier stereotype of the Soccer Mom as a full-time mother will be used to more effectively differentiate the four types of mothers who comprise the most likely group of child care policy target populations.

^{iv} Michelle Wallace (1990) argues in her ground-breaking work *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman*, however, that the “Superwoman” stereotype has been applied to black women, but primarily as a means for rationalizing the persistent societal and governmental neglect of struggling black mothers throughout American history; the black Superwoman is “a woman of inordinate strength, with an ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy, distasteful work” (p. 107).

^v The only maternal construction that might possibly be classified as more deviant than the Welfare Queen is the “Crack Mother” stereotype, which often adds severe drug addiction to the Welfare Queen stereotype (Humphries 1999).

^{vi} The media have been especially remiss in presenting more accurate information about welfare mothers and have actually done much to contribute to the endurance of the mythical Welfare Queen. Martin Gilens (1999) reports in his *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, that the media dramatically over-represent African Americans in their stories and pictures on the topic of welfare leading the public to falsely believe that the majority of recipients are black.

^{vii} Numerous scholars have documented the racially-motivated changes in American social policy as the population of welfare mothers gradually shifted from white to black (Quadagno 1994; Mink 1995; Lieberman 1998).

^{viii} This time period was chosen for methodological reasons beyond the scope of this working paper. The broader research project that this working paper is a part of includes an analysis of how these 1993-1996 media constructions of maternal myths affect the design, enactment, and implementation of actual child care policies from 1997–2000.

^{ix} Teen mothers attending school full-time and not receiving welfare were coded as working mothers in this analysis in accordance with the U.S. Department of Labor’s definition of employment, which includes full-time students.