

**Public Discourse, Public Opinion and Private Behavior:
Debate Over Single-Parent Families, Working Wives and Mothers,
and Family Size in the Twentieth-Century United States**

**Dissertation Proposal
Margaret L. Usdansky
March 2001**

Dissertation Committee:
Sara McLanahan, Chair
Paul DiMaggio
Viviana Zelizer
Larry Bartels

INTRODUCTION

The Role of the Media in Public Discourse

A long line of commentators on American society have held that the press plays a critical role in our democracy by providing citizens with information beyond their immediate experience. But many have charged that the press is not up to this job. “If newspapers are useful in overthrowing tyrants, it is only to establish a tyranny of their own,” James Fenimore Cooper complained in 1838 (Schudson 1978:13). Over the next century and a half, the expansion of newspapers and magazines, the invention of radio, television and the Internet, and the consolidation of ownership of journalistic outlets transformed the press into the mass media and heightened concern among social scientists about its role in society. “Ideally, a media system suitable for a democracy ought to provide its readers with some coherent sense of the broader social forces that affect the conditions of their everyday lives,” Gamson and his collaborators asserted in 1992. “It is difficult to find anyone who would claim that media discourse in the United States even remotely approaches this ideal,” (Gamson et al. 1992:373).

Media discourse is only one of several forms of public discourse, including expert discourse and policy maker discourse, among others. But media discourse is arguably most influential in terms of shaping public opinion (Gamson and Modigliani 1989:2-3) and in negotiating what Walter Lippmann famously called “the world outside and the pictures in our heads” (Lippmann 1922:3). The media, however, don’t manufacture the news from whole cloth. Working within a culture specific to news gathering and production, they draw on “real-world cues,” such as demographic change in the family, and rely on expert sources, including academics. Contemporary scholars concerned about the media’s role in shaping public discourse often evaluate journalism based on its use of information from experts and its impact on public opinion (Page and Shapiro 1992; Zaller 1992). Among experts, academics play a particularly interesting role. Although the media may give equal or greater prominence to government officials and other, non-academic experts, those experts often rely on academic research. The weight given to academic research reflects the special status, as well as the special training, of scholars (Page and Shapiro 1992:347). Unlike experts whose work is identified with particular causes or organizations, most academics eschew overt partisanship and claim to be motivated by the independent pursuit of knowledge. This gives them greater authority to interpret the “facts” of social and political life.

This project takes up the longstanding question of the role of the media in the production of American public discourse but moves it beyond the realm of politics where scholarship on the impact of the media on public opinion has traditionally focused (See, for example, Cook 1998; Hetherington 1992; Neuman, Just and Crigler 1992; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Instead, this project examines the production of public discourse regarding three key developments in twentieth-century American family life that have more often been the subject of public hand-wringing than concrete legislative proposals. They are the rise in single-parent families, the increase in wives and mothers working outside the home, and the decline in family size interrupted temporarily by the baby boom.

Single-Parent Families, Working Wives and Mothers and Family Size

Collectively, these developments revolutionized American family life. They are among the most profound and most widely cited developments among the many events that reshaped the American family during the twentieth century, and they provide evidence of enduring change in American values regarding family life (McLanahan and Casper 1995; Bumpass 1990). These three developments are also particularly interesting to examine because they involve changes that occurred over the course of the entire century. In contrast, some important developments in American family life have taken place over a shorter period of time, for example, the rise in cohabitation before marriage. Other developments probably occurred throughout the century but cannot be measured decade by decade due to lack of data, for example, rising individualism. Perhaps because the trends in single parenthood, labor force participation by wives and mothers and family size changed during every decade of the twentieth century, they also stirred intense debate during every decade, inspiring heated public discourse long before the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.

In this project, I examine public discourse regarding single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size in two forums, the media and academia. Popular magazines provide the basis for analyses of media discourse, social science and social work journals for parallel analyses of scholarly discourse. Both forms of discourse are analyzed in relationship to behavioral change within families and public opinion about that change in order to examine how interaction among the media, scholars and the general public shape public discourse. This project addresses the following central questions: 1) What causes the quantity of media and scholarly discourse about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size to change over time? 2) How important are behavioral trends, constraints within journalism and academia, competition from other news events and social problems, the status of women, and interaction between scholars and journalists in explaining change in the quantity of this discourse over time? 3) How does the content of media discourse about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size compare and relate to the content of scholarly discourse on these topics over time? 4) How do changes in the content of media and scholarly discourse on these topics relate to changes in public opinion about them?

This project advances research on the production of public discourse in several ways. First, it tracks the quantity and content of media discourse not just by itself, but also in relation to the quantity and content of scholarly discourse and public opinion. Second, it combines quantitative and qualitative approaches rather than relying on one or the other. Third, it focuses on major social, rather than political, developments, permitting us to assess the extent to which models formulated on the basis of the latter are of more general applicability. Fourth, it evaluates public discourse and public opinion against a backdrop of quantified demographic change in familial behavior, providing a baseline for evaluating the sufficiency of media depictions of demographic change. Fifth, it brings together several literatures that are rarely considered jointly but which all make critical contributions to understanding the production of public discourse. These include reflection theory, production of culture theory, constructionism and frame theory within sociology, and agenda-setting and public opinion theory within political science. Finally, because this project spans an entire century and examines three related but distinct trends

in American family life, it provides an unusual wealth of data with which to assess how interaction among the media, scholars and the general public have shaped public discourse over time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reflection Theory

Several scholarly traditions in sociology and political science bear on the study of the quality and impact of media coverage. Within sociology, reflection theory and production of culture theory have provided alternate means of conceptualizing the relationship between social structure and culture (Peterson 1994:164-5). Reflection theory, developed by anthropologists early in the twentieth century, holds that culture mirrors or reflects social structure (Peterson 1994:164-5; Griswold 1981:740). Often applied in the sociology of literature, reflection theory has been criticized as deterministic and inattentive to institutional mediations between social structure and culture (Peterson 1994:164-5; Segal 1982:1162-5). Nevertheless, as Griswold has argued, reflection theory recognizes the existence of direct links between society and culture that cannot reasonably be ignored (Griswold 1981:760-2).

In this project, I use reflection theory to provide a baseline hypothesis that media and scholarly discourse reflect and are shaped by actual demographic trends in single parenthood, female labor force participation and fertility. For example, I expect that the rate of change in these demographic trends will be positively correlated with the amount of discourse about them. I expect the rate of change in these trends to be more significant than their absolute levels because rates are typically more volatile. In the case of single parenthood, the availability of demographic data may also have important effects on public discourse, particularly in the media, since journalists rely heavily on official sources and are less likely to undertake original research than academics. Increases in divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing have both contributed to rising single parenthood, but while data on divorce have been available throughout the twentieth century, the federal government did not publish annual statistics on out-of-wedlock childbearing until 1940 (Ventura 1995:1). Thus, I hypothesize that scholarly discourse on single parenthood due to illegitimacy will be more common than media discourse prior to 1940.

Production of Culture Theory

Developed partly in reaction to reflection theory, production of culture theory argues that cultural products are “shaped by the social, legal and economic milieu in which they are produced” (Peterson 1982:143). Production of culture theory has been applied in many studies of the organization and character of American journalism (Mukerji and Schudson 1986:58; Turow 1984; Gitlin 1980; Gans 1979).

In this project, I use production of culture theory to develop hypotheses about the impact of the changing constraints and incentives under which journalists and scholars work. For example, I hypothesize that the professionalization of social work increased scholarly discourse about single-parent families as social workers sought to establish their authority as the arbiters of acceptable and deviant behavior. Similarly, I hypothesize

that the expansion of women's magazines increased media discourse about the family. I also pay attention to the ways in which journalistic and academic conventions shape the content of discourse. For example, I explore how the premium journalism places on newness in definitions of newsworthiness affects magazine coverage of such longstanding demographic trends as the rise in single parenthood and the increase in working wives and mothers.

The Social Construction of Problems

Research on the social construction of problems examines the processes through which we come to regard certain social conditions as problematic, while ignoring others (Schneider 1985). Constructionists hold that an almost infinite number of social conditions could be construed as social problems, but only a relative few are so defined (Schneider 1985). According to this argument, particular conditions are defined as social problems when individuals or interest groups acting as "claims-makers" lobby for public recognition of putative problems and compete to define the nature of those problems (Kitsuse and Spector 1973; Spector and Kitsuse 1973). The pioneers of constructionism insisted on the irrelevance of presumably objective conditions to the definition of social problems, focusing instead on the processes through which advocates of would-be problems seek and win public attention (Kitsuse and Spector 1973; Blumer 1971). But some recent proponents of constructionism have argued for a "contextual" rather than a "strict" constructionist approach, taking "real-world" circumstances into account (Best 1995; Troyer 1992; Rafter 1992).

In an important extension of constructionism, Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) posit that potential social problems and the people who promote them must compete for a scarce resource—public attention. In Hilgartner and Bosk's formulation, would-be social problems compete for public attention in the same way that plants and animals compete for niches in an ecosystem. Some potential social problems fail to find a niche and never become part of the public agenda. Others find a niche temporarily, while yet others find a semi-permanent place on the public agenda. Taking account of Hilgartner and Bosk's ecological model, I seek to explain variation in the degree of attention paid to single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size in media and scholarly discourse as a function of competition for attention from rival social problems and as a function of the status of women, whom I expect to act as claims-makers on family issues. I will also examine the role of academic experts, non-academic experts and members of interest groups in promoting and shaping media attention to these issues through an analysis of sources cited in media discourse.

Frame Theory

Frame theory, developed from the work of Goffman (1974), studies the processes through which journalists, members of social movements and others present issues in public discourse. Snow and Benford define a frame as "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (1992:136-7). Gamson and Modigliani define a frame as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events"

(1987:143). They identify five framing devices: metaphors; historical examples; catchphrases; depictions; and visual images (Gamson and Modigliani 1989:3-4).

Wilmoth and Ball apply frame theory to the study of media discourse on overpopulation (1995, 1992). In this project, I use frame theory to study patterns in media and scholarly discourse about single parenthood, working wives and mothers and family size over time. I anticipate that some frames will appear only during certain periods. For example, a “race suicide” frame emphasizing variation in fertility by nativity, race and class appeared prominently in media discourse on family size during the early decades of the twentieth century but disappeared before World War II. In contrast, other frames may remain prominent throughout the twentieth century despite changes in the demographic trends underlying those frames and in public attitudes toward those trends. For example, what might be called the “harm-to-children” frame played a prominent role in media discourse regarding single parenthood throughout the century even as single parenthood rose dramatically and gained public acceptance.

This project will trace the evolution of frames used to discuss single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size and will probe the circumstances under which old frames disappear and new ones appear in public discourse. Among the hypotheses I test is the possibility that frames that are broad enough to encompass favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward family trends will be more successful than frames that imply approval or disapproval of a trend. Drawing on Wilmoth and Ball (1995), I also test the hypothesis that frames that suggest solutions to social problems are more likely to appear frequently and over a long period of time than frames that do not suggest solutions.

Media Effects: Agenda-Setting and Public Opinion

Within political science, the power of the media to sway public opinion in favor of or against particular policies has been the subject of debate. Recently, some scholars have argued that inconsistent evidence of media effects on public opinion reflects measurement error and methodological problems rather than the absence of media influence (Bartels 1993). There is stronger consensus on the media’s ability to shape the public agenda. “The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it [may be] stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about,” McCombs and Shaw noted (1972:177), quoting Cohen (1963).

Recent proponents of agenda-setting theory have expanded it to consider the impact of “real-world cues,” phenomena such as the divorce rate that influence media coverage and may also mediate its impact on public opinion (Neuman 1990; Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller 1980). Agenda-setting theory suggests the importance not only of the content of media coverage of particular issues, but also of its quantity, since the repetition of particular themes over time appears to play an important role in moving issues onto the public agenda (Zaller 1992:14; Behr and Iyengar 1985:38). This project incorporates agenda-setting theory by studying major shifts in public opinion about the family and attempting to link them to behavioral change, media discourse and scholarly discourse. These shifts include growing acceptance of labor force participation by mothers of young children and the developing norm of the one- and two-child family.

Public opinion theorists have been interested in the impact of experts, whose ideas are conveyed to the public primarily through the media. Page and Shapiro suggest that experts may have relatively greater power to affect public opinion than most other news sources (Page and Shapiro 1992:341-354; Page, Shapiro and Dempsey 1987). Zaller argues that experts and other elites are most likely to shape the opinions of citizens who are not engaged with the issue at hand (Zaller 1992:42-45). This project will draw on these lines of inquiry to explore the role of one particular group of experts, family scholars, on media discourse and public opinion.

Uniting Several Theoretical Approaches

While all of the approaches outlined above contribute to our understanding of the production of public discourse, each is inadequate when considered alone. Most studies that employ a single theoretical approach examine either quantity or content of media discourse, and most study media discourse alone or in conjunction with expert discourse or public opinion—not both. A central contribution of this project is its use of multiple theoretical approaches, which allow me to consider interrelationships among media discourse (as represented by popular magazines), scholarly discourse (as represented by academic journals) and public opinion. In addition, by drawing on multiple theoretical approaches and creating a unique time series of data spanning a century, I am able to perform both quantitative analyses of the amount of media and scholarly discourse and qualitative analyses of the content of discourse over an unusually long period. This allows me to consider whether the processes through which the media, scholars and the public shape public discourse have changed over time.

Following Gamson, who argues that media discourse and public opinion interact, this project will examine the possibility that media discourse and scholarly discourse not only shape, but are shaped by public opinion (Gamson 1989: 2). I hypothesize that public opinion on social—as opposed to political—issues may be particularly likely to influence media and scholarly discourse since individuals are more likely to have direct experience with social issues than with political ones, and journalists and scholars may give more credence to public opinion on social issues for this same reason. Rather than attempt to test causation directly, I will examine associations among the frames used in media and scholarly discourse and the sequence of changes in public opinion in order to evaluate the plausibility of competing hypotheses regarding who's influencing whom among the media, scholars and the general public.

DATA SOURCES

This project makes use of four main sources of empirical data spanning the period from 1900 to 1998.¹ They are the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*; a group of major scholarly journals in the fields of social science and social work; the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research iPOLL data base; and federal government publications on

¹ The data on public opinion about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size cover the period from the late 1930s until 1998 because earlier public opinion data on these topics are not available. Similarly, some of the demographic data are not available for the early part of the century.

national demographic trends in divorce, out-of-wedlock childbearing, female labor force participation and fertility. These data sources and their use in this project are described below.

The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature

My first data source is the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, the most comprehensive index of popular American magazines. I have used the *Reader's Guide* to create a file of citations for the universe of magazine articles (over 10,000 in all) about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size published between 1900 and 1998.² I will use this citation file to draw a representative sample of twentieth-century magazine discourse on these topics.

To construct the citation file, I “mapped” my three topics to relevant *Reader's Guide* subject headings after conducting an intensive search of the *Reader's Guide* indices for likely subject headings. Research on American family history guided this work, and I made use of the cross-referencing system within the *Reader's Guide*. A list of *Reader's Guide* subject headings included in this study can be found in the appendix. *Reader's Guide* conventions in subject heading use necessarily influenced my definitions of single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size. Because the *Guide* does not classify articles under the heading “Single-Parent Family” until late in the century, I have included citations for articles indexed under headings pertaining to divorce and illegitimacy as well as single parenthood. Similarly, prior to the 1930s, the *Guide* included articles about working mothers under more general subject headings regarding working women, so I have included articles indexed under headings pertaining to working women.³

The *Reader's Guide* is widely used by scholars of media discourse and offers important advantages over newspaper and television indices as a source of media discourse on social issues. The *Reader's Guide* indexed more than 100 popular magazines in most years between 1900 and 1998, including virtually all of the largest circulation magazines published in the United States and many smaller ones.⁴ It represents a broad range of publications varying not only in subject matter, but in political leaning and in the socio-economic status of their audiences. No comparable index of American newspapers exists, forcing most researchers of newspaper discourse to

² Originally this file included a small number of articles from scholarly journals, which the publishers of the *Reader's Guide* gradually phased out as separate indices of scholarly journals arose. I eliminated these articles in order to make the file representative of the universe of popular magazine articles, the overwhelming focus of the *Reader's Guide*. Some of the scholarly journals indexed by the *Reader's Guide* will be included in my data file of scholarly articles described below. I have also eliminated double-counting of articles that occurred when an article appeared under more than one *Reader's Guide* subject heading relevant to my topics of study.

³ As discussed further in the data analysis section, I will design the sample of articles about working wives and mothers so as to eliminate articles about single, childless working women.

⁴ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *Reader's Guide* indexed approximately 60 popular magazines, a figure that grew rapidly with the expansion of the magazine industry. By century's end, the number of indexed magazines reached 240. The analyses in this project take into account the growth and changing composition of the *Reader's Guide*, factors that have often been ignored in previous research (Zollars 1994).

rely on analyses of one or two newspapers. In addition, magazines have traditionally paid greater attention to social issues than newspapers, which typically emphasize daily news events. Television news would be poorly suited to this research project because it did not exist during the first half of the century, and its relative brevity and greater focus on daily news limit opportunities for analyzing social issues. Since time and funding constraints prevent me from undertaking multiple media analyses, I rely on the *Reader's Guide*. It cannot be assumed, however, that media discourse about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size would be uniform across media types (Woolley 2000).

Scholarly Journals in Social Science and Social Work

My second data source is scholarly journals in social science and social work. Based on a search of the Princeton University library catalog and advice from historical sociologists, I have tentatively identified 11 social science journals and four social work journals for use. The journals, followed by the years each was published during the 1900 to 1998 period, are: 1) *The American Journal of Sociology* (1900-1998); 2) *the American Sociological Review* (1936-1998); 3) *the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1900-1998); 4) *the American Statistician* and its precursor, *the Bulletin of the American Statistical Association* (1935-1998); 5) *the Journal of the American Statistical Association* and its precursor, *the Quarterly Publication of the American Statistical Association* (1919-1998); 6) *Sociology and Social Research* and its precursor, *the Journal of Applied Sociology* (1916-1992); 7) *Social Forces* and its precursor, *the Journal of Social Forces* (1922-1998); 8) *Social Problems* (1953-1998); 9) *Demography* (1964-1998); 10) *The Journal of Marriage and the Family* and its precursor, *Marriage and Family Living* (1941-1998); 11) *Social Psychology Quarterly* and its precursors, *Social Psychology* and *Sociometry* (1937-1998); 12) *Social Service Review* (1927-1998); 13) *Social Work* (1956-1998); 14) *Survey, Survey Graphic* and their precursors, *Charities and the Commons* and *Charities* (1900-1948); 15) *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* and its precursor, *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections* (1901-1930).

I expect these journals to contain the most influential social science and social work research relevant to single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size published in scholarly journals between 1900 and 1998. I use journals, rather than books or conference papers, because journal articles are more current, undergo peer review and are often available on-line. I will use these data in a similar manner to the *Reader's Guide* data. First, I will construct a file of the universe of citations of scholarly articles about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size published in these journals between 1900 and 1998. Then, depending on the number of articles in this citation file, I will either use it to construct a representative sample of scholarly articles on these topics or collect the universe of such articles.

Roper Center iPOLL Data Base

My third source of data is the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research iPOLL data base of more than 350,000 questions from public opinion surveys since 1935, including those of the nation's largest academic, media and commercial survey organizations. The Roper Center's iPOLL data base allows full-text searches of surveys

by subject and key word. I will use the iPOLL data base to collect public opinion data on single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size. This data file will cover the period from 1935 to 1998. In order to maintain consistency over time, I will focus on a limited number of surveys and survey questions that have been repeated over time and have maintained identical question wording. Among the surveys I will use are those taken by the Gallup Organization, the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center and the Monitoring the Future survey conducted by the University of Michigan.

Government Publications

My fourth data source is government publications containing statistics about national demographic trends in divorce, out-of-wedlock childbearing, female labor force participation and family size. I have used data from the National Center for Health Statistics, the Bureau of Labor Force Statistics and other federal agencies to create a computer file of demographic trends related to single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size. This file includes the number of divorces per 1,000 women age 15 and above from 1900 to 1998, the number of births per 1,000 unmarried women age 15 to 44 from 1940 to 1998, the number of women in the labor force per 1,000 women age 16 and above from 1940 to 1998 and the number of births per 1,000 women age 15 and above from 1909 to 1998.⁵

I use divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing rates to represent demographic trends in single parenthood first because increases in divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing—not parental mortality—drove the rise in single parenthood. (Not only has parental mortality declined, but until 1970 this decline counterbalanced rising divorce and kept the rate of marital dissolution stable (Cherlin 1992).) Second, statistics on the proportion of families with children under 18 headed by a single parent are available from the U.S. Census Bureau only since 1950. I use total female labor force participation rates because labor force participation rates for wives and mothers are not available until the 1970s.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative Time Series Analyses

These analyses examine change in the quantity of discourse in popular magazines and scholarly journals about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size from the early twentieth century until 1998.⁶ The unit of analysis is the year. I

⁵ The out-of-wedlock childbearing rate is also available from census data for the years 1920 and 1930, and the female labor force participation rate is also available from census data for 1900, 1910, 1920 and 1930. I have included these data in my file and, in some cases, have used them to interpolate rates for years between censuses as discussed further in the data analysis section.

⁶ In the analyses of both media and scholarly discourse, I contend with the lack of annual data for some demographic rates in the early part of the century. In the media analyses that I have already performed, I analyzed the quantity of discourse about family size from 1909 to 1998 since this only reduced the number of cases by 10. For the analysis of media discourse about single-parent families, I compared models with and without interpolated demographic data in an attempt to maximize the number of cases. Since the

perform two sets of quantitative time series analyses. The first set predicts the quantity of media discourse about each of my three topics. The second set predicts the quantity of scholarly discourse on these same topics. The analyses are roughly parallel.

The dependent variables in the quantitative analyses of media discourse are the annual number of articles about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size indexed by the *Reader's Guide*, which I derived from my file of *Reader's Guide* citations.⁷ The dependent variables in the three time series analyses of scholarly discourse will consist of the annual number of articles about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size published by the scholarly journals I examine, which I will derive from my file of citations of scholarly articles. Both sets of dependent variables will be scaled to adjust for growth in media and scholarly discourse over the century. In the media analyses, I divide the annual article counts by the number of pages in the *Reader's Guide* that year, a proxy for the number of articles indexed by the *Guide*, which is unknown. In the scholarly analyses, I divide the annual article counts by the total number of articles included in the journals under study.

The independent variables for the quantitative time series analyses of media discourse, which I have performed and am revising, include: the relevant demographic rates (divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing for the single parenthood model, female labor force participation for the working wives and mothers model and fertility for the family size model); the number of magazines indexed by the *Reader's Guide* and the number of women's magazines and specialty magazines indexed by the *Guide*; a dummy variable indicating the timing of the first and second women's movements and the percentage of Congress members and governors who are women; the unemployment rate and a dummy variable indicating whether the U.S. entered, exited or remained in a foreign war; and the quantity of scholarly discourse on the topic under study in each model.

The demographic variables test whether the quantity of media discourse is driven by trends in single-parenthood, female labor force participation and fertility as predicted by reflection theory. The magazine variables test whether quantity of discourse is driven by change in constraints and incentives within the magazine industry as predicted by production of culture theory. The women's activism variables test whether the quantity of discourse is a function of women's efforts to put family issues on the public agenda as constructionism would suggest. The unemployment rate and the warfare dummy variable are proxies for potential news stories that are hypothesized to compete with family topics for attention within media discourse. They test whether the quantity of media discourse is a function of competition as ecological models would predict. The scholarly discourse

interpolated data did not appear to alter the findings, I included them. Interpolation allows me to include the years from 1920 to 1998 in the analysis of single parenthood and from 1900 to 1998 in the analysis of working wives and mothers.

⁷ As noted above, my file of citations of magazine articles about working wives and mothers currently includes an unknown number of citations of articles that discuss single, childless working women rather than working wives and mothers. Once I have collected the representative sample of the universe of magazine articles on my topics, I will use the sample to create an annual estimate of the proportion of all articles about working women that are concerned with working wives and mothers. These estimates will then replace the current dependent variable in the time series model of the quantity of media coverage of working wives and mothers.

variable tests whether the quantity of media discourse is driven by the quantity of scholarly discourse as agenda-setting theory might predict.

A similar set of independent variables will be employed for the quantitative analyses of scholarly discourse, including: demographic rates; the annual number and type of journals included in the analyses, and the size of relevant scholarly specialties and subspecialties; the women's activism variables; the number of scholarly articles about particular subjects expected to compete with familial topics for attention within scholarly discourse; and the quantity of media discourse on the topic under study in each model.

I employ standard time series techniques in these models. These include logging variables that require scaling, incorporating a lagged version of the dependent variable on the right-hand side of the equation, taking first differences of variables when associations may be spurious and lagging independent variables when warranted by the hypothesized time sequence of the model. Based on preliminary tests indicating that no autocorrelation remained after making these adjustments, I used ordinary least squares regression for the media discourse analyses. If autocorrelation is present in the scholarly discourse analyses, I will employ more specialized regression techniques.

The quantitative time series analyses described above will address my first two central questions regarding the causes of change in the amount of media and scholarly discourse about the family over time. But they won't shed any light on the content of media and scholarly discourse. For that, I turn to the qualitative time series analyses described below.

Qualitative Time Series Analyses

These analyses examine change in the content of media and scholarly discourse about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size between 1900 and 1998. These analyses will be based on two data files, one containing a representative sample of popular magazine articles about these topics, the other containing a representative sample (or possibly the universe) of scholarly articles about these topics published in a set of major social science and social work journals. In consultation with representatives of Princeton's Survey Research Center, I am currently refining a plan for creating a representative sample of magazine articles from the universe of articles about my three family topics. Dependent on available funding, the popular magazine sample will contain between 500 and 800 articles.

A stratified sampling plan will be employed to ensure adequate representation of articles on each of my three family topics over time. Articles from women's magazines will be over-sampled because, although women's magazines consistently represent only about 10 percent of all magazines over the century, I expect them to play an influential role in agenda-setting on family issues. Articles from the three major news weeklies (*Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*) will also be over-sampled to allow for a comparison of discourse in feature and news magazines. The sample will be stratified by year of publication, with 10 to 15 articles sampled from 50 randomly selected years. Sampling a larger number of articles from a smaller number of years will minimize variance in trends over time, which are more important to this research project than variance within a given year. Based on previous experience in locating popular magazine articles, I estimate a response rate of 95 percent. The sample will be designed

so that all the sample cases have a known probability of selection and can be weighted accordingly. If the universe of scholarly articles proves too large to analyze in its entirety, I will collect a representative sample of this universe as well.

I am developing two instruments for use in the content analyses. These instruments will be pre-tested using two convenience samples of approximately 30 articles each from the files of magazine and scholarly article citations. The pre-tests will establish the reliability of the content analysis instruments and provide a basis for any necessary adjustments of the data collection procedures. Two Princeton University sociology students will be recruited to assist with the pre-tests in order to measure inter-coder reliability.

The content analyses of media and scholarly discourse will focus on frame analysis. The content analyses will provide a decade-by-decade catalog of the most frequently used frames in media and scholarly discourse and a detailed description of these frames, with a particular focus on the attitudes toward single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size that these frames convey. Drawing on Hilgartner and Bosk's ecological model, these analyses will examine the circumstances surrounding the birth of new frames, the death of old ones and the dynamics of competition among frames. I hypothesize that frames that are broad enough to encompass shifting approval and disapproval of the family trends under study will outlive frames that imply specific attitudes toward those trends. For example, the race suicide frame, which was prominent in media discourse on family size during the first half of the twentieth century, implies disapproval of declining fertility. In contrast, the harm-to-the-children frame, which was prominent in media discourse on single parenthood throughout the century, is broad enough to have remained relevant as single parenthood became increasingly widely accepted.

The content analysis of media discourse will include a typology of the types of sources used in each magazine article, including government officials, academic experts, non-academic experts (in such fields as law, medicine and business), interest group members and non-experts or private individuals. The degree to which particular types of sources are linked to the use of particular frames and specific attitudes toward single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size will be analyzed. The names and institutional affiliations of sources will also be recorded to allow for analysis of expert networks in this or future research. The content analysis of scholarly discourse will include information about the types of data analyzed in each journal article and the academic field and sub-field of the researchers and how these characteristics relate to the use of particular frames.

Comparative Analyses

These analyses will begin with a description of change over time in public opinion about single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size. Special attention will be paid to variation in public opinion by race, sex and socio-economic status. This assessment of public opinion will provide a basis for a set of comparative analyses of the relationships among media and scholarly discourse and public opinion regarding single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size.

One analysis will evaluate the extent to which the same frames appear in media and scholarly discourse over the course of the century. A second analysis will classify frames as implying favorable, unfavorable or neutral attitudes toward single-parent families, working wives and mothers and family size. The frequency with which favorable, unfavorable and neutral frames appear in media and scholarly discourse over the century will then be compared with change in public opinion about each family trend to gauge whether the use of favorable frames rises as public opinion becomes more accepting of the trends. A third analysis will explore whether any correlation exists between change in the quantity and the content of discourse. This analysis will identify turning points in the quantity of media and scholarly discourse and investigate whether large increases or decreases in media and scholarly attention to these issues are associated with similarly timed changes in the content of discourse.

Conclusions will be based on correlations and on the temporal sequence of frame adoption and change in public opinion. Although these techniques won't prove causality, they are expected to rule out certain causal hypotheses regarding the direction of influence among media and scholarly discourse and public opinion and make other hypotheses more probable. For example, the absence of significant covariance in the use of frames about family size in media and scholarly discourse would disprove a hypothesis that media discourse drove the use of frames in scholarly discourse on this topic. In contrast, surveys indicating that public acceptance of labor force participation among mothers of young children increased sharply one year prior to a large increase in the use of media frames favorable to working mothers would provide evidence for the possible influence of public opinion on media discourse.

Through these analyses, I will attempt to identify characteristics that appear to promote the exchange of frames across the two types of public discourse, exploring the possibility that media discourse may be particularly likely to borrow frames from particular academic fields and that the likelihood of adoption of media frames in scholarly discourse may depend on the type of magazine espousing the frame. For example, frames used in news magazines may be more likely to appear in scholarly discourse than frames used in women's magazines. These analyses will answer my research questions regarding the relationships among the content of media discourse, scholarly discourse and public opinion over time. They will also identify potential relationships between the quantity and content of discourse.

PLAN FOR COMPLETION OF THE DISSERTATION

This research project represents a large undertaking, but it is made more manageable because I have already completed substantial work. To date, I have completed secondary research on family sociology and history, public discourse and public opinion. I have completed the data file of demographic trends. I have also completed the file of citations of magazine articles and have performed the quantitative time series analyses of media discourse. I am now revising a paper based on those analyses, which will form part of one chapter of my dissertation. I am in the process of developing sampling plans and protocols for the content analyses of media and scholarly discourse. I plan to complete the remaining research as follows:

March – June 2001 (No NSF funds required)

- Revise quantitative time series analyses of media discourse
- Finalize sampling plans and protocols for qualitative time series analyses of media and scholarly discourse
- Collect sample of journal articles and perform content analysis of scholarly discourse

July 2001 – February 2002

- Collect and analyze public opinion data
- Collect magazine articles for content analysis of media discourse
- Perform quantitative time series analyses of scholarly discourse
- Draft chapters on theory and methods
- Draft chapter on findings from quantitative time series analyses

March – June 2002

- Perform media content analysis
- Perform comparative analyses of media and scholarly discourse and public opinion
- Draft chapter on findings from qualitative time series analyses

July – December 2002

- Draft chapter on comparative analyses
- Draft introduction and conclusion
- Revise dissertation
- Prepare job talks and interview

January 2003

- Dissertation defense

REFERENCES

- Bartels, Larry M. 1993. "Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure." *The American Political Science Review* 87:267-85.
- Behr, Roy I. and Shanto Iyengar. 1985. "Television News, Real-World Cues, and Changes in the Public Agenda." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 49:38-57.
- Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:611-39.
- Best, Joel. 1995. "Constructionism in Context." Pp. 337-54 in *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems* edited by J. Best. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1971. "Social Problems as Collective Behavior." *Social Problems* 18:298-306.
- Bumpass, Larry. 1990. "What's Happening to the Family? Interactions Between Demographic and Institutional Change." *Demography* 27:483-98.
- Cherlin, Andrew. 1992. *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cohen, Bernard. 1963. *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cook, Timothy E. 1998. *Governing With the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Erbring, Lutz, Edie N. Goldenberg and Arthur H. Miller. 1980. "Front Page News and Real World Cues: A New Look at Agenda-Setting by the Media." *American Journal of Political Science* 24:16-49.
- Gamson, William A. and Andre Modigliani. 1989. "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power." *American Journal of Sociology* 95:1-37.
- Gamson, William A. and Andre Modigliani. 1987. "The Changing Culture of Affirmative Action." Pp. 137-77 in *Research in Political Sociology*, vol. 3 edited by R. Braungart. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press Inc.
- Gans, Herbert J. 1979. *Deciding What's News*. New York: Pantheon.
- Gitlin, Todd. 1980. *The Whole World Is Watching*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of the Experience*. New York: Harper Colophon.
- Griswold, Wendy. 1981. "American Character and the American Novel: An Expansion of Reflection Theory In the Sociology of Literature." *American Journal of Sociology* 86:740-765.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 1996. "The Media's Role in Forming Voters' National Economic Evaluations in 1992." *American Journal of Political Science* 40:372-95.
- Hilgartner, Stephen, and Charles L. Bosk. 1988. "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model." *American Journal of Sociology* 94:53-78.
- Iyengar, Shanto and Donald R. Kinder. 1987. *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kitsuse, John I., and Malcolm Spector. 1973. "Toward a Sociology of Social Problems: Social Conditions, Value-Judgments, and Social Problems." *Social Problems* 20:407-19.
- Lippmann, Walter. 1922/1961. *Public Opinion*. New York: The MacMillan Company.
- McCombs, Maxwell E. and Donald L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36:176-87.
- McLanahan, Sara and Lynne Casper. 1995. "Growing Diversity and Inequality in the American Family." Pp. 1-45 in *State of the Union: America in the 1990s* edited by R. Farley. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Mukerji, Chandra and Michael Schudson. 1986. "Popular Culture." *Annual Review of Sociology* 12:47-66.
- Neuman, W. Russell, Marion R. Just and Ann N. Crigler. 1992. *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Neuman, W. Russell. 1990. "The Threshold of Public Attention." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 54:159-76.
- Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Page, Benjamin I., Robert Y. Shapiro and Glenn R. Dempsey. 1987. "What Moves Public Opinion?" *American Political Science Review* 81:23-44.

- Peterson, Richard A. 1982. "Five Constraints on the Production of Culture: Law, Technology, Market, Organizational Structure and Organizational Careers." *Journal of Popular Culture* 16:143-153.
- Peterson, Richard A. 1994. "Culture Studies Through the Production Perspective: Progress and Prospects." Pp. 163-189 in *The Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives* edited by D. Crane. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Rafter, Nicole H. 1992. "Some Consequences of Strict Constructionism." *Social Problems* 39:38-39.
- Schneider, Joseph W. 1985. "Social Problems Theory: The Constructionist View." *Annual Review of Sociology* 11:209-29.
- Segal, Alan. 1982. "Some Comments on Reflection Theory in Griswold's Study of American Novels." *American Journal of Sociology* 87:1162-1165.
- Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." Pp. 133-155 in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* edited by A. Morris and C. Mueller. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Spector, Malcolm, and John I. Kitsuse. 1973. "Social Problems: A Reformulation." *Social Problems* 20:145-59.
- Troyer, Ronald J. 1992. "Some Consequences of Contextual Constructionism." *Social Problems* 39:35-37.
- Turow, Joseph. 1984. *Media Industries: The Production of News and Entertainment*. New York: Longman.
- Wilmoth, John R. and Patrick Ball. 1992. "The Population Debate in American Popular Magazines." *Population and Development Review* 18:631-68.
- Wilmoth, John R. and Patrick Ball. 1995. "Arguments and Action in the Life of a Social Problem: A Case Study of 'Overpopulation,' 1946-1990." *Social Problems* 42:318-343.
- Woolley, John T. 2000. "Using Media-Based Data in Studies of Politics." *American Journal of Political Science* 44:156-73.
- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zollars, Cheryl. 1994. "The Perils of Periodical Indexes: Some Problems in Constructing Samples for Content analysis and Culture Indicators Research." *Communication Research* 21:698-716.

APPENDIX

Reader's Guide Subject Headings Included In This Study⁸

Topic 1: Single Parent Families	Topic 2: Working Wives and Mothers
Alimony	Children of Working Mothers
Baby Farms	Children of Working Parents
Broken Homes	Married Couples, Employment
Children of Divorced Parents	Married Women, Employment
Custody Kidnapping	Married Women, Occupations
Custody of Children	Maternity Leave
Desertion	Mommy Track
Divorce	Mothers, Employment
Fathers, Unmarried	Woman, Employment
Illegitimacy	Woman, Occupations
Marriage, Annulment	Working Girls and Women
Maternity Homes	Working Women's Clubs
Mothers, Unmarried	
No-fault Divorce	
Parents, Unmarried	Topic 3: Family Size
Paternity	
Runaway Husbands	Birth Control
Separation (Law)	Birth Rate
Single Fathers	Childlessness
Single Mothers	Children, Only Child
Single Parent Adoption	Children, Only Child Problem
Single Parent Families	Family Size
Stepparents	Only Child
Stepfamilies	Race Suicide
Support (Domestic Relations)	
Teenage Mothers	
Teenage Pregnancy	
War Babies	

⁸ Many of these subject headings include sub-headings, which are not listed here for the sake of brevity. For example, the "Divorce" heading includes such sub-headings as "Divorcees," "Divorce, United States," and "Divorce, Roman Catholic Church." A complete list of headings and subheadings is available from the author.