UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

BEYOND THE WELFARE QUEEN: THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF SINGLE MOTHERS IN AMERICAN NEWS MEDIA

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

KATHERINE L. EAVES
Norman, Oklahoma
2018

BEYOND THE WELFARE QUEEN: THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF SINGLE MOTHERS IN AMERICAN NEWS MEDIA

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
GAYLORD COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

BY

Dr. Ralph Beliveau, Chair

Dr. Charles C. Self

Dr. Meta G. Carstarphen

Dr. Ann M. Beutel

Dr. Jensen Moore

DEDICATION

To my parents, Kenny and Cathy Eaves, for their unyielding love, support, and encouragement. And to my daughter Lola—this is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. In this way, a dissertation is not so unlike a child, as this project is the product of many minds, not just my own. Without the guidance and support of this scholarly village, my research might never have come to fruition.

I would first like to acknowledge my advisor, Ralph Beliveau, for sticking with me through this extended process. His encouragement, wisdom, suggestions, and sense of humor helped me stay the course. I took a number of detours along the way, but I never doubted his belief that I could prevail. Thank you for all your help.

My committee members also deserve a special "thank you" here. To Meta, Charles, and Ann: Thank you all for your guidance and willingness to support my continued candidacy through a number of personal and professional challenges. The courses I took with each of you provided the foundation of my academic career and have made me a better person. I am grateful for the perspectives you have brought to this project. And to Jensen, your willingness to join my committee at such a late stage puts me in your debt.

My sister Jane has been an unwavering, sometimes borderline annoying, source of optimism throughout my doctoral studies. Her ceaseless positivity is usually the perfect antidote to my sometimes overly pessimistic personality. But her ability to make me laugh and see the bright side is unmatched, and for that, I'm grateful.

Finally, I am forever thankful for my parents and daughter. They are the reason I have gone from a delinquent teenager to a Ph.D. candidate. I cannot begin to articulate how much I appreciate their support, love, encouragement, and steadfast belief that I can do whatever I put my mind to. They are my eternal cheerleaders, and I am lucky to have them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This research employed a critical rhetorical lens to examine the construction of single mothers in American news media during four discrete but interconnected historical representative anecdotes that reflect periods of high interest in single mothers: after Dan Quayle's *Murphy Brown* speech; during the 1996 welfare reform legislation; surrounding the Bush administration's marriage initiative; and the calendar year 2012. I examined the ways in which media discourses perpetuate moral regulatory discourse and employ heteronormative, hegemonic, patriarchal ideals of family and mothering to single-mother families. This research found that news media narratives about single mothers largely support a decades-long project of moral regulation undertaken by political and social elites who have a vested interest in maintaining the patriarchal status quo. This research further found that the voices of single mothers are largely absent from news media discourse, which instead gives space to politicians, academics, political pundits, and others who contribute to negative stereotypes about single-mother families. Moreover, single mothers are often rhetorically positioned in relation to men, and only recently have they begun to articulate their identities for themselves within news media discourse.

Keywords: Critical Rhetoric, Motherhood, Single Mothers, Marriage, Poverty, Welfare Reform, News Media, Moral Regulation

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

> We are seeing it. We are seeing the fabric of this country fall apart, and it's falling apart because of single moms.
>
> What we have is moms raising children in single-parent households simply breeding more criminals.
>
> — Rick Santorum, 1994

According to the United States Census Bureau, the number of American households headed by women with children increased from 19.5% in 1980 to 29.5% in 2008. The percentage of births to unmarried women in the United States rose from 18.4% to 40.8% during that same time period (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2012). Single-parent families, whether headed by women or, less commonly, by men, are no longer a rarity but a fixture in this country. But the prevalence of single-mother-headed families has not translated into their widespread acceptance, as public opinion of single mothers remains overwhelmingly negative. According to a 2010 report published by the Pew Research Center, 69% of respondents said the trend toward more single women having children is bad for society, and 61% said a child needs both a mother and a father to grow up happily (Taylor, Parker, Wang, Morin, Horowitz, & Cohen, 2010). A more recent study supported these conclusions, finding that never-married custodial single mothers are viewed less positively than their male counterparts in terms of personal characteristics and parenting abilities (DeJean, McGeorge, & Stone Carlson, 2012).

Despite the significant increase in single mothers during the past several decades, scant academic literature exists that examines how they are discussed in news media contexts. The few investigations in this realm focus almost exclusively on representations of single mothers in stories about poverty and welfare policy (Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Huda, 2001; Williams, 1995). A handful of studies have examined

representations of single mothers in other contexts, such as popular television shows (Larson, 1996), movies (Valdivia, 1998), popular fiction (Silbergleid, 2002), as well as magazines and social science journals (Usdansky, 2003, 2008, 2009).

Research Goals and Purpose

Previous research has identified two predominant foci in single mother discourse: poverty and morality. One or both of these themes seem to permeate nearly every discussion of single motherhood I have encountered both academically and personally. The goal of this research is to further examine the articulation of these themes from a critical perspective. I also identified the discursive contexts in which various definitions of single motherhood are articulated. Much of the academic work on single motherhood—intentionally or not— plays into negative stereotypes of single mothers because the focus is on poverty or morality. However, and importantly, not all single mothers are on welfare, and not all people on welfare are single mothers. But the disproportionate volume of literature examining single mothers specifically and exclusively in the context of welfare policies and poverty would lead one to believe as much. By analyzing news media constructions of single mothers, I aimed to explore the connections between institutional power and public discussions of single mothers. Moreover, mainstream media discourses tend to impart dominant sociocultural values and ideologies. In doing so, they can serve as effective tools of moral regulation (Hier, Lett, Walby, & Smith, 2011; Hunt, 1999). In this dissertation, I argue the relationships between prevailing institutional attitudes about single mothers and news media coverage of these various strains of discourse align with negative public opinions about single mothers like those represented in the aforementioned Pew Research Center report.

Further, I examined the ways in which these discourses seek to impose heteronormative, hegemonic, patriarchal ideals of family and mothering to single-mother

families. Put another way, it is likely the voices prevalent in stories about single mothers are not overwhelmingly those of single mothers themselves, but rather voices of representatives from various social and political institutions whose interests lie in regulating the behavior of single mothers and defining the condition of single motherhood as morally and financially problematic. A critical feminist theoretical perspective is useful in examining the ways in which single mothers and their allies have pushed back against the dominant lines of discourse the same way Murphy Brown used her platform as a news anchor to push back against Dan Quayle. New media technologies have increased access to blogs, web forums, and other venues of public discourse where mothers, single or otherwise, can "talk back" to the mainstream media and voice approval or dissent. Because I examined discourse about this topic from 1992 to 2012, a timeframe encompassing multiple significant political and social discussions about single mothers, developments in mediated communication play a critical role in the dissemination and proliferation of media and popular culture dialogues. Examining if and how single mothers have leveraged these platforms to confront stereotypes and issue counter-narratives is also valuable.

Research Questions

This research sought to explore the following questions with regard to news media discourse about single mothers:

1. How is the definition of single mother articulated rhetorically within news media?

2. What are the overarching themes associated with discourse about single mothers in news media?

    2A. In addressing the already-identified theme of poverty, what common sub-themes or stereotypes routinely appear?

    2B. In addressing the already-identified theme of (im)morality, what common

sub-themes or stereotypes appear?

3. How are media discourses about single mothers connected to larger sociocultural, policy, and political institutions?

3A. Are these connections implicit or explicit?

3B. How are these connections articulated?

3C. Are certain ideological positions favored over others?

3D. Does ideological positioning vary by the historical period being examined?

4. Do stories about single mothers primarily feature the voices of single mothers?

5A. If so, what are these women saying?

5B. If not, who is featured instead?

5. In counter-discourses, how do single mothers and their allies discuss themselves and the condition of single motherhood?

Selection of Historical Representative Anecdotes

To address these research questions most effectively, I focused my analysis narrowly on a series of historical representative anecdotes in which discussions of single mothers became prominent in media. In "The Grammar of Motives," Burke (1969) identified the representative anecdote as an approach to identifying symbolic patterns within discourses (Engstrom, 2012; Harter & Japp, 2001). Harter and Japp (2001) interpret Burke's (1969) definition of a representative anecdote as "an idea that is both representative (i.e. broad enough to be diffused throughout the discourse in question), yet reductive (i.e., the essence of the discourse is condensed into a concise and readily understood equation)" (p. 412). Brummett (1984) and Harter and Japp (2001) articulate representative anecdotes as

consistent themes and stories that are broad enough to encompass the overall qualities of the discourse that includes its dialectical tensions and oppositions.

> When one engages in the search for a representative anecdote, he or she is looking for a stable form or set of relations that pervade a discourse, one that appears and reappears in different guises or variations on a theme. Therefore, a representative anecdote reveals the fundamental characteristics of a discourse and fuses its essential values. (Harter & Japp, 2001, p. 412)

Summarily, a representative anecdote is essentially a "nutshell version of what narratives have in common, and gives us a way of talking about a range of discourses that say essentially the same thing" (Engstrom, 2012, p. 3).

In looking for these representative anecdotes, I was principally interested in understanding the rhetorical and ideological constructions of single mothers in news media contexts. The selection of these anecdotes stems from the consideration of both chronological and rhetorical factors detailed below.

The analysis begins with an examination of the discourse surrounding single mothers following Dan Quayle's infamous 1992 *Murphy Brown* speech. This speech was an unprecedented convergence of popular culture and politics, which blurred the lines between fantasy and reality (Benoit & Anderson, 1996). Cloud (1998) also identified this particular piece of rhetoric as a site of significant political and ideological discourse as it related to family values—a salient theme during the 1992 presidential election. Quayle's speech also ignited a tidal wave of discourse about the growing number of single-mother families in the United States and the impact these families had on various aspects of culture and society.

The second representative anecdote selected for analysis is the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996. This

legislation, signed by Democratic President Bill Clinton, is significant for three reasons. First, it fundamentally altered the entitlement structure of the American social safety net. Second, low-income single mothers were disproportionally affected by the implementation of its reforms by design, as the legislation specifically sought to reduce rates of "illegitimacy" and wean "welfare queens" off the government teat. Third, there is both a political and ideological relationship between the "family values" rhetoric deployed by Dan Quayle a few years earlier and the welfare reform rhetoric of the PRWORA era. Both used the rhetoric of "personal responsibility" and "dependency" to justify criticisms of single mothers with little consideration of the structural factors that cause and perpetuate single motherhood and poverty. Although congressional and public debates about welfare policy spanned many years and took different forms, the passage of the PRWORA represents a profound shift in the sociopolitical climate in which low-income single mothers live their lives.

The third representative anecdote took place during the early 2000s, when President George W. Bush designated $150 million annually to support marriage promotion projects and fatherhood initiatives. These programs were explicitly designed to further the objectives of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the cash assistance program created under Clinton's welfare reform legislation years earlier. While governmental involvement in marriage was not new, unambiguous state promotion of marriage was. It was also controversial. Conservatives largely applauded the measure, while feminists and most liberals saw it as an unnecessary intrusion into the private lives of Americans and a potentially dangerous form of coercion directed toward vulnerable women. The selection of this anecdote is related, both conceptually and pragmatically, to welfare reform legislation, as the PRWORA created space for the federal government to establish and fund marriage and fatherhood promotion efforts.

The final representative anecdote spans the calendar year of 2012, which was a point of convergence for discourse about single motherhood in the contexts of family values rhetoric, welfare reform, and marriage promotion. This year marked the 20th anniversary of Dan Quayle's *Murphy Brown* speech and thus functions as an ideal point of rhetorical comparison. Also, some of the most stringent policies enacted under the PRWORA were rolled back by President Barack Obama in 2012, resulting in renewed discourse about welfare reliance and, by proxy, single mothers. Third, multiple reports were published in 2012 reviewing the outcomes of the Bush marriage initiative projects, sparking increased media scrutiny of government funding for such programs.

From a rhetorical perspective, these historical representative anecdotes characterize four discrete periods of increased interest in single-mother families. Moreover, they are ideologically connected: one period of discourse informs the next, building on previous narratives about the ways in which single mothers deviate from social norms of family, marriage, and accepted practices of mothering.

Sampling Procedures

To best address the previously articulated research questions, I looked primarily, but not exclusively, to three of the nation's top five print media outlets—*The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Washington Post*—and their associated electronic platforms. The bulk of texts for this analysis were identified using two archival media databases, ProQuest and LexisNexis Academic, because they allow for similar search parameters. If a sufficient sample was not available via one database, the second was consulted. Searches were conducted for news and feature articles within these three publications using keywords related to each of the anecdotes.

To collect texts for the first chapter, which looks at the timeframe surrounding Dan

Quayle's *Murphy Brown* speech, I searched LexisNexis Academic using the keywords "Dan Quayle," "Murphy Brown," "single mom," and "single mother" for articles between May 1, 1992, and December 31, 1993. This led to a total of 551 results, which were then further narrowed by publication name. The sample for this chapter thus consisted of 50 *New York Times* articles, 45 *Washington Post* stories, and 39 *USA Today* articles. In addition, using the same databases, I identified a further grouping of significant texts published by mainstream, nationally circulating monthly magazines. This subsegment of the sample includes prominent feature stories published in *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *Essence*, *The National Review*, and *U.S. News & World Report*.

For the second representative anecdote, which focuses on discourse surrounding the 1996 welfare reform legislation, my sample consisted of newspaper articles identified using procedures similar to those outlined above. Using keyword searches for "single mom," "single mother," "TANF," and "welfare" for texts published between January 1, 1996, and December 31, 1997, I identified 159 results from *The New York Times*, 116 from *The Washington Post*, and 25 from *USA Today*. To supplement this sample, I also identified 35 radio and television news stories in LexisNexis that focused specifically on single mothers in the context of welfare reform. These programs aired on National Public Radio, CBS, ABC, and CNN.

The third representative anecdote examines discourse surrounding President George W. Bush's marriage and fatherhood promotion program. This sample required casting a broader net than previous samples, as the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative was discussed in media for years before it was officially enacted. To collect texts for this sample, I used keyword searches in LexisNexis and ProQuest for "single mom" or "single mother" and "marriage promotion" or "marriage initiative" or "fatherhood" for the

entire span of Bush's presidency—January 1, 2001, to January 20, 2009. The collection of this sample was complicated by debates about gay marriage occurring at the time, which is why the keyword "fatherhood" was also used to identify texts relevant to the marriage promotion efforts. Many articles that contained "single mom" or "single mother" as well as "marriage promotion" focused not on single mothers or marriage promotion programs, but on discussions about gay marriage and related laws being enacted and considered by legislatures at the time. I was able to limit this sample to 28 *Washington Post* stories, 31 *New York Times* stories, and 16 *USA Today* articles. Again, to supplement, I conducted a similar keyword search for television and radio news programs. This yielded an additional 129 combined results from ABC, NBC, CBS, and NPR.

For the final representative anecdote, which examines discourse for the calendar year 2012, the procedure was essentially the same as for the prior anecdotes. Time- and publication-limited keyword searches yielded 416 *New York Times*, 342 *Washington Post*, and 83 *USA Today* stories. The number of results for this timeframe bolsters my argument about this particular year as a representative anecdote for discourse about single mothers. For comparison, in the calendar year 2008 only 30 stories in total featuring the same keywords appeared in *The New York Times*.

Thus, this research analyzed approximately 841 unique media texts to identify, examine, and critique the ways in which these news outlets and their associated digital platforms discussed single-parent families. Given that representations of single-parent families vary widely between news and entertainment contexts, and that public opinion data and social science research all find evidence of negative attitudes toward single parents, a comprehensive investigation of depictions of single-parent families in network television news, public radio programs, and major American newspapers provide an additional

dimension to the existing literature. Moreover, because the studies of single mothers in news media have focused primarily on poverty and welfare, this study provides an opportunity to examine a wider array of contexts. Because no similar studies have been conducted, this study will fill a significant gap in the current body of research on mediated representations of single-mother families.

Analytic Procedures

I employed a critical rhetorical approach to the textual analysis for this research. In a theoretical sense, critical rhetoric blends the assumptions of both critical and rhetorical theories to analyze constructions of power and ideology in a text. First articulated by McKerrow (1989), critical rhetoric is both a theoretical perspective and a practical approach to rhetorical analysis that "seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power" (p. 91). Unlike initial iterations of ideological criticism that view power as an inherently repressive force, critical rhetoric views power as having the potential for liberation or freedom. "Power . . . is not repressive, but productive—it is an active potentially positive force which creates social relations and sustains them through the appropriation of a discourse that 'models' the relations through its expression" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 99). Further, discourse is viewed by critical rhetoric as not just a means by which juridical power is normalized and institutionalized, but also as a tool of freedom:

> The analysis of the discourse of power focuses on the "normalization" of language intended to maintain the status quo. By producing a description of "what is," unfettered by predetermined notions of "what should be," the critic is in a position to posit the possibilities of freedom. Recharacterization of the images changes the power relations and recreates a new "normal" order. (McKerrow, 1989, p. 100)

McKerrow argued for four generic features of a critical rhetoric. First, it shares the "critical spirit" of theories stemming from the likes of Gramsci, McGee, Habermas, and Foucault and is concerned with power, ideology, and rhetoric. Second, critical rhetoric serves a demystifying function, seeking to reveal the ways in which rhetoric conceals its relationship to power. Third, it does not seek objectivity as its aim; rather, critical rhetoric takes a position and provides an argument against something. Finally, critical rhetoric must have consequences. That is, it must either provide social judgments about courses of action or identify the possibilities for future action.

Unlike traditional approaches to criticism, critical rhetoric is interested in not only what is present in a text or set of texts but also, and perhaps more importantly, what is absent, such as the idea of the constructive capacity of power. In this way, the critic, in some sense, becomes the rhetorician. Rather than viewing the text as a complete entity in need of explanation, critical rhetoric allows the critic to view the text as "a collection of fragments from culture. The critic interprets for the reader the meaning of these fragments and identifies how they have been arranged in a meaningful way" (Borchers, 2006, p. 191).

In a pragmatic sense, my analysis consisted of a close consideration of each unique text through the lens of critical rhetoric. Using the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) outlined by Wood and Kroger (2000), I viewed each text "in relation to social problems; to social structural variables such as race, gender and class; and above all to power" (p. 21). When deployed as a methodology, CDA goes beyond the linguistic concerns characteristic of other discourse analytic methods to consider the ways in which discourses construct objects and subjects. Phillips and Hardy (2002) and van Dijk (1996) emphasize the use of CDA to help "describe and explain how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimated by the talk and text of dominant groups and institutions" (van Dijk 1996, p. 84).

Drawing upon the work of Fairclough (1995a, 1995b), Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) present five features they believe are common among approaches to CDA. First, "the character of social and cultural processes and structures is partly linguistic-discursive" (p. 61). This essentially means that discursive practices are seen as a social practice, which contributes to the constitution of the social world and thus helps to construct the practices of everyday life. Second, "discourse is both constitutive and constituted" (p. 61), meaning that not only does discourse constitute the social reality, it is constituted by other social forces and practices. "It does not just contribute to the shaping and reshaping of social structures, but also reflects them" (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002, p. 61). Third, "language use should be empirically analyzed within its social context" (p. 62). To look at discourse outside of its proper social context does not allow one to fully understand the importance of what is happening or being said. Fourth, "discourse functions ideologically" (p. 63). A society's discourse about a given topic inherently works to create and reproduce widely accepted values and ideological standards. These ideological standards often lead to an imbalance of power between two or more social groups, such as social classes, men and women, racial and ethnic minorities, etc. Finally, "CDA does not understand itself as politically neutral but as a critical approach which is politically committed to social change" (p. 64). These five characteristics provide the backbone of any CDA. Ultimately, Phillips and Jorgensen define CDA as;

> . . . an explanatory critique. . . . that takes its starting point in a problem that the research should help to solve. This can either be a problem identified by individuals or groups in society, perhaps formulating an unmet need, or it can be identified by the researcher who may want to disclose a 'misrepresentation,' that is a mismatch between reality and the view people

have of this reality that functions ideologically (p. 77).

In addition to defining the four features of critical rhetoric, McKerrow (1989) also outlined eight principles of critical practice that should function as a guide for the critic. First, critical rhetoric is not a method but a perspective or orientation taken by the critic toward a rhetorical text. There is no recipe or formula for "doing" critical rhetoric. This, McKerrow (1989) argued, "maximizes the possibilities for what will 'count' as evidence for critical judgment and allows for creativity in the assessment of the 'effects of truth' upon social practices" (p. 102).

Second, critical rhetoric views the discourse of power as material. Or, put another way, power manifests itself in tangible rhetorical texts and discourses that are accessible via popular culture and thus have a profound effect on ideology and power (Borchers, 2006). Third, "rhetoric constitutes doxastic rather than epistemic knowledge" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 103). In other words, critical rhetoric is not so much concerned with questions of "truth" or "falsity," but it is instead interested in identifying how rhetorical symbols come to possess power. The focus of critical rhetoric is to "explain how symbols come to have a meaning that is more or less widely shared within a culture" (Borchers, 2006, p. 192). Fourth, naming is the central symbolic act of a nominalist rhetoric. The labels we create and use for objects should never be presumed to be fixed or static, since the naming is, in a rhetorical sense, an assertion of the unity of power and identity in a term. To the contrary, critical rhetoric sees the act of naming an object as a process that should be constantly evaluated and situated alongside other objects in the appropriate context. How we name things influences how we view them and respond to them (Borchers, 2006).

Fifth, critical rhetoric does not presume that influence is the same as causality. All symbols affect other symbols, but that does not mean that one symbol *causes* another. Critical

rhetoric is more concerned with the potential for influence that exists through symbol use. McKerrow (1989) used this example: "The potential for images of crime to influence the social reality of the elderly is present through the depiction of such symbolic acts on nightly crime drama" (p. 106). Sixth, *absence* is just as important as *presence* in understanding and evaluating symbolic action. As stated previously, a critical practice allows the critic to look at both what is being communicated as well as what is not being addressed by a text, under the assumption that what is not present often makes what is present more powerful or meaningful. Seventh, critical rhetoric presumes that meanings are polysemic or multiple, rather than monosemic or singular. This essentially means that a rhetorical text may mean different things to different people. Moreover, critical rhetoric "seeks to find the meaning that exists in a text that subverts or rejects the prevailing ideology of a culture" (Borchers, 2006, p. 192). While a text may have an obvious ideological perspective, critical rhetoric is more interested in finding its subversive meanings. Eighth and finally, critical rhetoric views criticism as performance. This allows the critic to take the role of an inventor or advocate for an interpretation of the fragments of a text. Going beyond the mere justification of a particular interpretation, critical rhetoric "moves the focus from criticism as method to critique as practice" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 108).

Critical rhetoric's concern with ideology, power, and discourse begs questions about how to go about identifying the presence of an ideology in a text. To be sure, in some cases the author of a text may express his or her ideology explicitly. Take as an example Kellner's (2006) essay "9/11, Spectacles of Terror, and Media Manipulation," in which he forcefully criticized the Bush administration's handling of the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and subsequent so-called "war on terror." Kellner wrote:

> Moreover, since the September 11 strikes, the Bush administration has arguably used fear tactics to advance its political agenda, including tax breaks for the rich, curtailment of social programs, military build-up, the most draconian assaults on US rights and freedoms in the contemporary era in the so-called USA Patriot Act, and a highly controversial and divisive March 2003 war in Iraq. (p. 47)

In contrast to this overtly politicized and ideological analysis, Murphy (2003) explored the ways in which the same Bush administration "crafted the authority to dominate public interpretation of those events and the appropriate response to them" (p. 607) but abstained from making any visibly ideological or political assertions about the impact, morality, or "rightness" of those efforts. Instead, Murphy withheld judgment, allowing the resulting insights to emerge from the process of analysis (Kuypers, 2008). Both critics presented examples of critical rhetorical analyses, but their goals, objectives, and approaches to the texts were vastly different with regard to the articulation (or lack thereof) of ideology. It then becomes the role of critical theory to determine whether a particular ideology is present in a text, or whether the text is attempting to be ideologically neutral.

Thus, my analysis focused acutely on the articulation and positionality of power within each text, looking closely at the sources used to contextualize each story and the source's implicit or explicit relationship to institutions that perpetuate the rhetoric of single mothers as a social problem. I also paid particular attention to the ways in which journalistic narrative contributed to or contested/critiqued articulations of power within each text, asking whether journalists situate institutional sources prominently, and to what extent the voices of single mothers and their allies are featured in relation to institutional sources. Moreover, the analysis of each text and the sample as a whole consisted of an identification of both emergent discursive themes as well as what was missing from the discourse. Explicit

discussions of race, for example, were largely absent, and in some cases, media discourse wholly ignored critical elements of policy that impacted mothers' lives. Further, I considered each text's possible subversive meanings by examining the presence, absence, or centrality of structural explanations for single motherhood and its associated social ills, the sources used to contextualize each narrative, and the journalistic narrative itself. This strategy is both consistent with established CDA procedures and McKerrow's (1989) guiding principles for critical rhetoric.

Rationale and Significance

Media representations and narratives are important. Studies have found relationships between media discourse, public policy, and public opinion, although the directionality of these relationships remains a subject of contestation. In their meta-analysis of research on media and public policy, Walgrave and van Aelst (2006) found 12 of the 19 studies published during a 30-year period reported strong or considerable media effects on policymaking, and seven reported weak or minimal impact. There are many reasons to assume the media have little opportunity to influence policymaking. Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer (2010) posited the fleeting and increasingly fractured nature of contemporary news coverage "generates only spotlights of attention that hardly leave any traces in the memory of the audience" (p. 2). They additionally stated media coverage may be limited in its impact due to the conflicting agendas of policymakers and media outlets:

> The substance of the media agenda differs from the policy agenda in that it is driven by newsworthy events rather than structural problems . . . . . Thus there seems to be a fundamental mismatch between the way in which the media operate and the process of policymaking. (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010, p. 2)

Evidence in favor of at least some relationship, however tenuous, between media

discourse and public policy can be found in research about public opinion. Rightly or wrongly, policymakers have traditionally considered the media a fast lane to public opinion because they tend to assume the general public is heavily influenced by what they read and watch (Herbst, 1998). Consequently, policymakers may adapt their agendas based on media priorities and the ways in which coverage of issues may influence public opinion (Davis, 2007). This orientation toward media has served policymakers in important ways. First, the relationship between journalists and political figures has changed, with journalists adopting an adversarial or aggressive style of reporting (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995), which has increased pressure on politicians and government officials to engage in active news management techniques (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010). The internet has provided infinite opportunities for politicians to communicate with their constituencies, and vice versa. And while democratically this may be a positive development, it has also diminished mainstream legacy news media's already tenuous influence on policy and public opinion (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010). However, in their adoption of web-based platforms to disseminate news, traditional media outlets have started to regain some of their foothold in the digital age. Coupled with the growing acceptance of journalist blogs, web-shows, Twitter feeds, and other social media tools, the agenda-setting function of the fourth estate remains intact, if fractured (McCombs, 2014).

The strength of media influence on public policy and public opinion is mitigated in no small part by the degree of political agreement or indecision around a given issue. Robinson (2001) argued elite consensus and policy uncertainty function as variables that can enhance or reduce media's ability to shape policy decisions. The assumption, he argued, is that uncertainty makes politicians more susceptible to media pressures, particularly when an issue lends itself to sensationalized images and storylines. But consensus among

policymakers decreases media interest and functions like a kind of shield. Koch-Baumgartner and Voltmer (2010) argued this is because

> [t]ypically, the media's attention is drawn to a policy debate when internal splits or sharp divisions between political parties become obvious. Once the media have become involved, the dynamic and direction of a policy can change dramatically. Increased media coverage usually intensifies the conflict and invites new actors to enter the debate and to join one of the opposing camps. Policy alternatives must then be formulated in a manner that suits the media's thirst for soundbites and catch headlines and, since the conflict is now enacted in front of the public eye, compromises and backstage deals become less likely. (p.5)

This discussion of public policy and public opinion is important for articulating the significance of the present study. Two of the four representative anecdotes selected for analysis focus on articulations and constructions of single mothers in the face of major, unprecedented shifts in public policy. Chapter 3 examines news media discourse surrounding the landmark 1990s welfare reform debate, and Chapter 4 analyzes discourses about single mothers in the wake of George W. Bush's marriage promotion efforts. Given the punitive nature of welfare reform legislation and its ideological relationship to marriage promotion programs a few years later, it is worth considering the possible role media coverage might have played in shaping public perceptions about single mothers during this era. It is also worth considering media coverage surrounding Dan Quayle's comments about Murphy Brown in 1992 might have shaped welfare reform policies a few years later. While the current study did not orient itself toward answering these questions with authority, I found evidence for at least a conceptual connection between media coverage of single mothers and the public policy decisions that have a material impact on their lives.

A Personal Connection

If, as conservative pundit Charles Murray contended in the 1990s, unmarried childbearing is truly the most important social problem of the time, then I am part of that problem. And so was my mother. And so was her mother. In the 1940s, my maternal grandmother, Lola Bannon, bore her first child out of wedlock. It was a scandalous affair, and the circumstances under which she became pregnant are still not something I fully understand. The child—my aunt Lynn, who is now in her 70s—spent the first few years of her life living with her grandparents, my great-grandparents. After Lola met and married my grandfather, Robert Conner, Lynn became part of the family and, in fairly rapid fashion, was joined by seven siblings, the fifth of whom is my mother, Cathy. My mother was 26 and unmarried when I was born in 1984. I never met my biological father, who is now deceased, and I was legally adopted by the only man I have ever known as a father after my parents were married in 1989. Most of my six maternal aunts have, at various periods in their lives, raised children as single mothers as well. Even my lone maternal uncle, Robert Jr., is currently raising his son alone. He legally adopted his late wife's African-American grandson after she passed away of pancreatic cancer in 2016.

Continuing the legacy of unmarried motherhood, at age 20 I became pregnant with a daughter of my own, Lola Grace. While her biological father is active and involved in her life, we have never been married, nor are we currently romantic partners. In fact, Lola (named after her maternal great-grandmother) and I have lived in a different state than her father since she was only two years old. As of this writing, I am 34, have never been married, am not in a relationship, nor have I never even been engaged. While my pregnancy was certainly not planned, my daughter has been the single most powerful, positive, motivating

force in my life since the sunny day in February 2005 when both lines on the pregnancy test strip turned pink.

The social, cultural, and political issues surrounding single motherhood are therefore of great personal interest and significance to me. Raising my daughter in a world where we and other nontraditional families are not judged by the nature of our family structure, but rather viewed as fully formed human beings with agency and autonomy, is important as a matter not only of social justice but of human rights. Individuals are more than their circumstances, but circumstances are often critical to success. For a time when I was very young, my bedroom was a closet and my bed was a dresser drawer. Before my parents got married, my mother and I lived in a house the size of a two-car garage. Neither of my parents went to college, but my dad has worked at an aircraft manufacturing plant for nearly 40 years, and his income allowed my mother to stay home and take care of my sister, Jane, who is six years younger than I am. Even after Jane and I were both in school, my mother continued to mostly stay home, only occasionally working part-time jobs for short periods. This is the epitome of middle-class privilege, and I often wonder what would have become of my mother and me had she not married out of the lower working class. Would we have been one of the families affected by the 1996 welfare reforms? Would I have ever gone to college? I almost certainly would not be toiling over this dissertation right now.

I also want to acknowledge here my privilege as a cisgender White person, as someone with a college education, and as a member of the middle class. I have not faced racial discrimination or felt the kind of prejudices that LGBTQ individuals or women of color have to endure in navigating social safety net infrastructure. But none of these privileges have fully insulated me from poverty either. After having my daughter and establishing my own household, I have struggled mightily through the years to subsist at the

poverty level. I have had to rely periodically on food stamps, Medicaid, subsidized childcare, loans from my parents (which, as an aside, are a middle-class luxury not available to many people of color) and astronomical student loans all in the hopes that someday I too will be able to join the ranks of the middle class and provide for my daughter like my parents provided for me. Yet there is still shame associated with filling out a food stamp application and stating I am a university instructor with two degrees, working on a third. I am guilty of looking over my shoulder in the grocery checkout line, trying to hide my EBT card while praying no one says anything about my smartphone, shoes, manicure, or the $300 Michael Kors tote bag on my arm (it was a gift! I carry it to work! I prefer my students operate under the illusion that I am not actually living below the poverty level!).

Preview of Chapters

The following chapters explore four discrete but interconnected frames of discourse about single mothers in American news media in order to understand how media coverage has constructed and perpetuated narratives about these women and their lives. But in order to properly situate this study, I must first review the relevant literature on moral regulation, moral panic, and intensive motherhood—the three predominant frameworks through which this analysis was centered. Additionally, Chapter 2 presents an overview of the relevant sociological literature about marriage, family, and single mothers.

Chapter 3 analyzes media coverage about Dan Quayle's 1992 *Murphy Brown* speech in the context of the family values rhetoric so common during this time period. Using a critical rhetorical lens, the chapter discusses how much of the political and social conversation surrounding single mothers and single motherhood functions as a tool of moral regulation intended to apply heteropatriarchal ideals of family onto single women who bear and raise children outside of marriage.

Chapter 4 focuses on the landmark welfare reform legislation passed by President Clinton in 1996. It begins with an overview of the reforms and how they compare and contrast with previous welfare programs. I analyzed the discourse through a framework of moral regulation, considering how media narratives were deployed to construct single mothers as morally deficient social deviants, and how mothers engaged with those discourses to resituate themselves as the worthy or deserving poor. Chapter 5 moves into an analysis of President George W. Bush's marriage- and fatherhood-promotion programs on federal and state levels. Beginning with a review of the origins of these programs, the analysis then reflects on the ways in which news media descriptions of marriage and fatherhood programs largely excluded single mothers, focusing instead on increasing the involvement of "absentee" fathers. Chapter 5 further analyzes media constructions of marriage as a broad, positive social force and how that construction has been misaligned with the lived experiences of poor single mothers.

Chapter 6 considers the discursive themes present in news media about single mothers without the influence of previous representative anecdotes. Then I move into a more focused analysis, reconsidering how media framed Dan Quayle's rhetoric about Murphy Brown 20 years after his initial speech. Next, I examined the implications of Clinton's welfare reforms in the wake of Obama-era reforms during 2012. Finally, I focused on discourse about the outcomes of the Bush administration's marriage- and fatherhood-promotion programs in light of the government reports that studied their impacts. To conclude, in Chapter 7 I revisit my stated research questions and then present a discussion of the ways in which news media reports about single mothers and the issues that affect them function as moral regulatory mechanisms that perpetuate problematic notions of women,

gender, family, and standards of mothering. I then offer remarks on the value of studying discursive narratives of single motherhood in news media through a critical rhetorical lens.

CHAPTER 2. THE SINGLE MOTHER "PROBLEM"

> Illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time—more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else.
>
> — Charles A. Murray, 1993

During his first U.S. Senate campaign in 1994, Senator Rick Santorum blamed single mothers for the downfall of America, saying "We are seeing it. We are seeing the fabric of this country fall apart, and it's falling apart because of single moms" (Murphy & Kroll, 2012). A few months later, Santorum also accused single mothers of "breeding more criminals" (Kroll & Murphy, 2012). In her book *In Defense of Single Parent Families*, Nancy Dowd (1997) summarized popular sentiments about single-parent families in these words:

> A remarkably consistent view of single parent families dominates popular culture as well as public policy. "Single parent family" is a euphemism . . . for "problem family," for some kind of social pathology. Single parent families are characterized as part of the "underclass"; broken and deviant, as compared to the nuclear, traditional, patriarchal family. (p. 3)

Dowd (1997) was right. A majority of Americans apparently do hold this view. In 2010, the Pew Research Center published an extensive and widely circulated report on social and demographic trends in the United States (Taylor et al., 2010). The report's most striking findings were about public attitudes toward changing family structures: nearly 70% of Americans disapproved of the growing rates of single motherhood, agreeing the trend was "bad for society." This attitude held true for a majority of men and women of all racial/ethnic groups and age ranges (Fig. 2.1). Further, 61% of respondents believed a child needs both a mother and a father to grow up happily. In fact, the trend toward unmarried motherhood was viewed more negatively than gay couples raising children (Fig. 2.2).

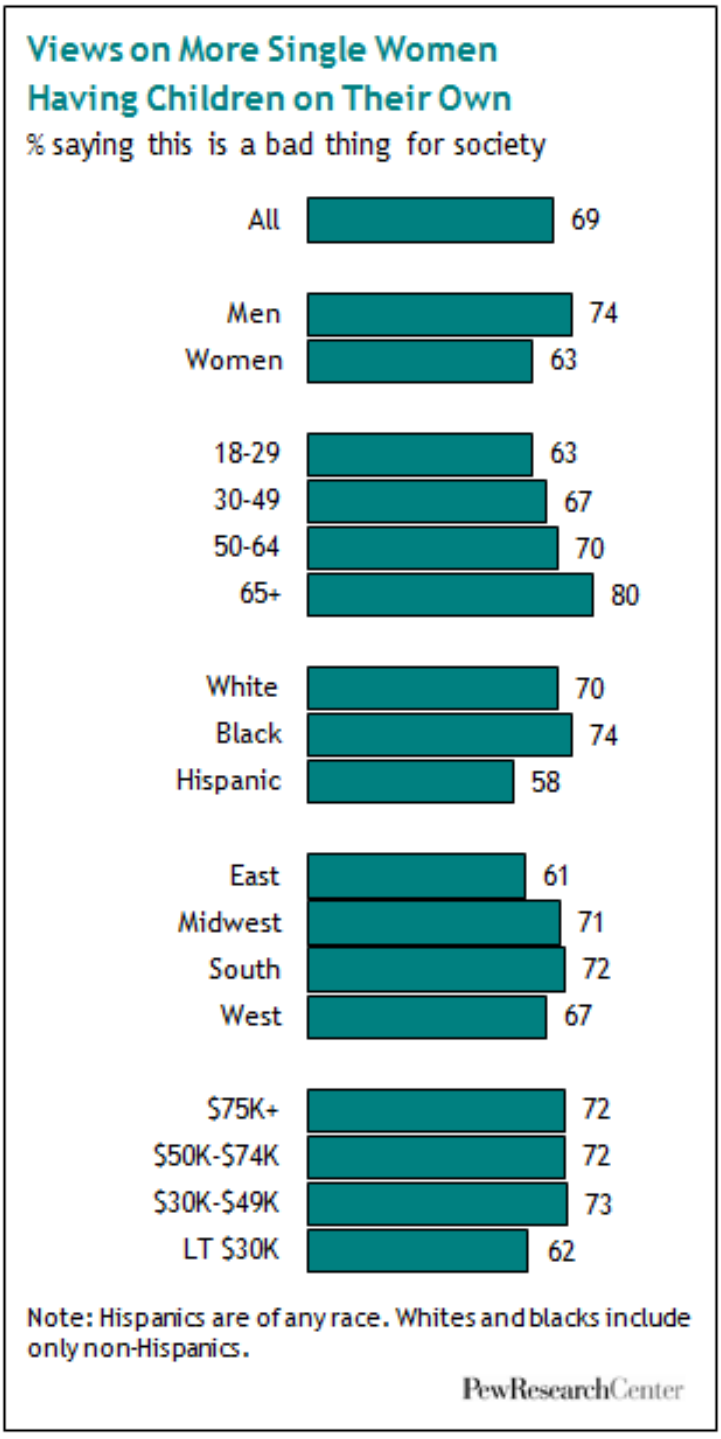

Figure 2.1. Views on single women raising children. Graph courtesy of Taylor, et al., (2010).

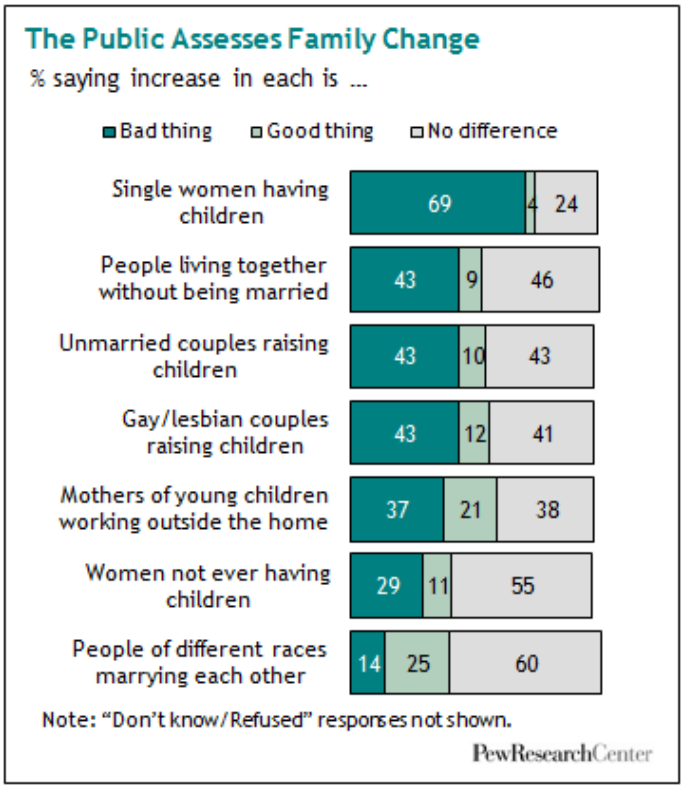

Figure 2.2. Views on changing family structures
Graph courtesy of Taylor, et al., (2010).

It is true that the share of births to unmarried women in the United States has risen sharply in the past 50 years—from five percent overall in the mid-1960s to 40% in the mid-2000s (Martin, et al., 2017). There are also significant differences in unmarried birth rates among racial groups. According to the CDC report (Martin et al., 2017), Asian and Pacific Islander women have the lowest rates of nonmarital childbearing, which was slightly more than 16%, followed by White women (35.8%) and Hispanic women (53%), and Black women had the highest rate by far with 71% (Table 2.1).

It is important to be clear, though, that not all children born to unmarried mothers live with only one biological parent. Concurrent with the rise in unmarried birth rates has been a significant increase in cohabitation among unmarried partners. During the past 20

years, according to the National Survey of Family Growth, "virtually all of the growth in births outside of marriage has been driven by increases in births to cohabitating women" (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 22). Many so-called single mothers, then, are not parenting alone; they are just parenting unmarried. The typical child in these families, therefore, is not growing up in one-parent households but is more likely being raised by an unmarried mother or father, or possibly by a mother and a partner who is not the biological father.

Table 2.1. Nonmarital Childbearing by Race and Hispanic Origin of Mother, and Maternal Age: United States, selected years 1970–2015 (%)

Maternal race, Hispanic origin & age	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2013	2014	2015
All races and origins	10.7	18.4	28	32.2	33.2	36.9	40.8	40.6	40.2	40.3
White	5.5	11.2	20.4	25.3	27.1	31.7	35.9	35.8	35.7	35.8
Black of African American	37.5	56.1	66.5	69.9	68.5	69.3	72.1	71	70.4	70.1
American Indian/ Alaska Native	22.4	39.2	53.6	57.2	58.4	63.5	65.6	66.4	65.7	65.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	---	---	13.2	16.3	14.8	16.2	17	17	16.4	16.4
Hispanic or Latina	---	---	36.7	40.8	42.7	48	53.4	53.2	52.9	53

(Source: Martin et al., 2015. Centers for Disease Control)

While sociological and psychological studies have consistently indicated that married unions are the most stable structures in which to raise children, even children born within the sanctity of marriage are likely to experience a shift in family structure at some point. Demographers Kennedy and Bumpass (2008) found that 20% of children born to a married couple will experience the breakup of that family by age nine, and half of children born to cohabiting parents will see changes in family structure by that same age.

To position this study socially, politically, historically, and theoretically, it is important to have at least a cursory understanding of the social and economic circumstances of American single mothers in the early 20th century. First, this chapter reviews relevant sociological literature on marriage, family, and motherhood to explain the causes and consequences of the increase in single-mother-headed families. Second, I outline the

literature on single mothers in the context of poverty. This situates the analyses in Chapters 3 and 4, which focus on Dan Quayle's public feud with fictional TV journalist Murphy Brown and the overhaul of the American welfare system under President Bill Clinton. Third, I consider literature on the intersection of motherhood and morality, a topic that, along with poverty, has shown to be a salient theme in discussions about single mothers. Fourth and finally, I detail the three central theoretical frameworks—moral panic, moral regulation, and intensive mothering—that guided my analysis and grounded this research in a media sociology context. Taken together, this literature review provides the structure for my argument that media coverage about single mothers is both ideologically driven and wielded as a tool of moral regulation intended to bring single mothers back into the idealized heteronormative and patriarchal matrix of the American family.

Single Mothers in Historical Context

The increased number of single-mother families in the United States is a product of several simultaneously occurring trends. First, increased rates of divorce beginning in the 1970s made single parents out of previously married couples. Mostly thanks to the spread of no-fault divorce laws, couples began splitting up and subsequently cohabiting, remarrying, creating stepfamilies, or, in a small portion of cases, remaining single. Presently, it is estimated that approximately 50% of all marriages will end in divorce (Cherlin, 2009). Second, increased rates of cohabitation have also led to the rise of single motherhood. But simply because a woman is not married at the time she gives birth does not necessarily mean she will be parenting alone. By the mid-1990s, cohabitation had become commonplace, with 45% of woman aged 19–44 ever having lived with an unmarried partner (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). This phenomenon has since expanded to half of all women aged 15–44 (Chandra et al., 2005). In the 1990s, about 18% of children were born to cohabiting parents, but by 2001

that figure had risen to nearly 50% (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). These cohabiting unions are tenuous, however. More than half of cohabiting couples in the United States will either marry or separate within two years, and only about one-fifth of cohabiting couples are still cohabiting after four years (Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008). Third, the feminist movement and resultant advances in women's employment, educational opportunities, and reproductive freedom led to an increase, albeit a small one, in so-called "single mothers by choice" (Bock, 2000). These women are typically in their mid- to late thirties or early forties, well-educated, and career-oriented (much like Murphy Brown) and actively choose to forgo partnered childbearing to pursue lone motherhood (Bock, 2000; Hertz, 2006).

Familial upheaval has long been the cause of political and social handwringing. In the first half of the 20th century, having a child out of wedlock was a shameful and secretive act. Unmarried pregnant women would either be pressured into marrying quickly, or shipped off to maternity homes (usually under the guise of visiting relatives), where they would give birth and often be coerced into giving their illegitimate—to use the parlance of the time—babies up for adoption (Fessler, 2006). When the sexual revolution began to take hold in the early 1960s, discussions of sex and sexuality began to mosey their way out of the marital bedroom and into the public sphere, allowing women to display their sexuality and assert their independence more openly. At the same time, social and religious conservatives were lamenting the decay of traditional family values and decrying the evils of feminism. These debates about family and women's social roles were also beginning to play out in popular media.

The invention of the birth control pill in 1960 was undoubtedly a large part of this shift, but so too was the newfound ability of women to talk about the problems they were experiencing at home. Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* identified what she called

"the problem that has no name"—an overall feeling of unhappiness and discontent felt by millions of women but rarely, if ever, articulated. This newfound freedom to express dissatisfaction with marital and child-rearing drudgery was just one of many social forces at play in the early '60s that ultimately fueled the whirlwind of cultural and legal changes that would take place over the next two decades.

Between 1960 and 1980, women fought for and won numerous protections against workplace gender and pay discrimination, abortion rights, legal recognition for marital rape, and no-fault divorce laws, among other things. They also went to work en masse. Women's labor force participation rates skyrocketed between 1960 and 1980. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007), in 1960 just 38% of women participated in the labor force. By 1980, that figure had jumped to more than 51%. Furthermore, marriages were dissolving in greater numbers thanks in large part to the advent of no-fault divorce laws. Between 1960 and 1980, divorce rates more than doubled, rising from 9.2 divorces per 1,000 married women to 22.6 divorces per 1,000 married women (Wilcox, 2009). This, of course, led to an increase in the number of women raising children on their own. Adding fuel to the fire of concern, rates of nonmarital childbearing were increasing simultaneously. According to a 2015 report issued by ChildTrends, a nonpartisan Maryland-based think tank, in 1960, 5.3% of all births were to unmarried women (ChildTrends, 2015). By 1970, that figure had more than doubled to 10.7%, and it more than doubled again by 1985 to 22%.

Clearly, the trend toward out-of-wedlock births did not go unnoticed. By the early 1990s, rates of unmarried childbearing had risen to nearly 30%, and the "social problem" of single motherhood had been articulated and deployed politically, resulting in increased news media coverage of the issue. A host of conservatives joined Rick Santorum in denouncing single motherhood. This included political pundit Charles A. Murray, a fellow at the

conservative American Enterprise Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based public policy think tank. Murray wrote in a 1993 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed that "illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time—more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else." And it did not stop there. As recently as the 2012 election cycle, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney joined the chorus of politicians like Santorum in denouncing single motherhood. He insinuated during the second presidential debate that single parents were responsible for gun violence:

> We need moms and dads to raise kids. Wherever possible, the benefit of having two parents in the home. That's not always possible. Lot of great single moms and single dads. But gosh, to tell our kids, before they have babies, they ought to think about getting married to someone. That's a great idea. Because if there's a two-parent family, the prospect of living in poverty goes down dramatically. The opportunities that the child will be able to achieve increase dramatically. So we can make changes in the way our culture works to help bring people away from violence and give them opportunity and bring them into the American system. (Follman, 2012).

Statements like these were—and frequently still are—part of media discourse about single mothers, the issues surrounding poverty, and what are often perceived to be the lifestyle choices of mothers parenting without partners. It is critical to remember that beyond the statistics—about nonmarital childbearing, government welfare, food stamp expenditures, divorce rates, and women's labor force participation data—are real mothers, real children, real lives, real struggles, real joy, and, most importantly, often very real and serious policy consequences for poor and low-income mothers and their families. Media reports are the primary vehicle through which these policy discussions and debates are disseminated to the

public and, in a properly functioning democratic society, a primary way for the citizenry to talk back to their government. Therefore, the ways in which media discuss, depict, construct, and debate single motherhood and the sociopolitical issues pertaining directly to them is of critical importance to this growing segment of the population and their children.

Despite much rhetoric to the contrary, single mothers are not a new phenomenon, nor was single motherhood unprecedented when the out-of-wedlock birthrate began to rise in the 1960s. What is a (somewhat) new phenomenon, however, is the all-encompassing use of the term "single mother" to describe any woman raising children by herself. Gordon (1994) explained how early terminology used to refer to single mothers was more explanatory than today's vague phrasing:

> "Single," or "lone" or "solo" mother is itself a relatively recent aggregate term. In the early twentieth century women alone with children were referred to more specifically as widows, deserted women, unmarried, "illegitimate" mothers, and, very occasionally, divorced women. These categories have the advantage that they tell us something about the histories of these women . . . we can learn something about the causes of single motherhood. (p. 19)

Perhaps what Gordon (1994) saw here as an advantage (at least from a historical research perspective) women later in the 20th century viewed as unnecessarily descriptive and intrusive. Now, when someone utters the phrase "single mom" it could refer to any woman raising a child alone: from a pregnant teenager to a 40-something undergoing IVF via a sperm donor to have a child without a partner. And while the pathways to single parenthood are even more varied now, thanks to technology, than they were in the 1900s, the language used to refer to women raising children alone is far less elucidatory but no less

loaded. There are some notable exceptions to this, however, which will be discussed in a later section.

According to Gordon and McLanahan (1991), 8.5% of children lived with a single parent in 1900. Breaking down Gordon's (1994) categories of lone mothers a bit further, unlike today, the overwhelming majority of women raising children alone in 1900 were widows. Approximately 75% of lone parents (primarily, although not exclusively, mothers), regardless of race, had suffered the death of a spouse (Gordon & McLanahan, 1990). By 1933, that figure had fallen to 55% (Gordon, 1994). So-called deserted women were the second largest category of single mothers—16% in 1900. Today, these women would be considered permanently separated from their husbands. In that era, divorce was extremely rare, and men would not infrequently abandon their wives and children for economic reasons, leaving the woman to care and provide for the children financially. Few deserted wives ever sought divorce, partially because they were expensive, and also because many women found the idea of divorce morally objectionable. Even as late as the 1930s only about 1.3% of single mothers were legally divorced (Gordon, 1994). Almost as infrequent was the occurrence of "illegitimate" birth. In 1900, 4.6% of children in female-headed households were born outside of marriage.

Even though the overall rate of lone motherhood was low during this era, and the overwhelming cause was not "unchaste" or immoral women but the death of a husband, lone mothering was still viewed as cause for concern.

> The role of mothers when they are single, the responsibility laid upon them for earning *and* caring for children, may also help explain why single parenthood has been falsely considered so aberrant: single motherhood was such a violation of

> norms in a society that defined a two-parent family as "male-headed" that its occurrence created alarm and denial. (Gordon & McLanahan, 1991, p. 113)

Gordon (1994) further argued that single mothers had long been viewed as a social problem that represented both a symptom *and* a cause of social breakdown in two contexts in particular: morality and welfare.

Single Mothers and Poverty

The most often cited problem occurring as a result of a single-parent family is poverty. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 38.5% of single-mother families lived in poverty in 2009, and single-mother families with an income less than half the poverty level rose from 14% in 2000 to 19% in 2009 (Casey, 2011). A more in-depth discussion of single mothers in the context of welfare, and more specifically late-20th-century welfare reform, is presented in Chapter 4. However, it is important to understand the shifts that led to these reforms and the consequences they have had on some of America's most vulnerable families.

The network of welfare programs available in the 1970s–1990s was vastly different than what was available in the earlier part of the century, although it was equally controversial. Also, much like today, there was an undertone, and sometimes an overt discussion, of "worthiness" and moralizing attached to various categories of recipients of government aid. Chapter 4 offers a further exploration of this divide. Nonetheless, a brief overview of the beginnings of welfare in the United States is warranted in order to understand how and why its recipients came to be so stigmatized and closely monitored.

Prior to the 1900s, no organized system of federal welfare, or what was then called "public relief," existed. Most aid, when available, came from local governments and private charities who sometimes partnered to meet the needs of local indigent populations. At least

40 states did have at least some form of "mother's pension"—public aid programs for mothers of dependent children. But these programs were usually piecemeal, and participation often came with many strings:

> Despite the spotlight on "innocent" widows, mothers' aid was never meant to be open armed or trusting toward those it helped. To the contrary, mothers' aid functioned and was intended to superintend and discipline as well as support its recipients. This is evident in the scrutiny of recipients' morality . . . . Illegitimate children or male friends, alcoholic beverages, boarders or alien methods of housekeeping and childcare might disqualify a home. (Gordon, 1994, p. 45–46)

It was not until the Great Depression era and the utter collapse of these local resources that the federal government stepped in to assist (Hansen, 2011). The next several years saw a slew of federal efforts to help relieve the crushing poverty and joblessness experienced by millions of Americans. The Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932 was signed by President Herbert Hoover, which provided money to states for relief efforts and job creation. In 1933, President Roosevelt signed the Federal Emergency Relief Act, which allowed the national government to distribute more than $1 billion to temporarily bolster existing relief programs. In 1935, the Social Security Act (SSA) was passed. This is by far the most comprehensive legislation, establishing three types of programs designated to provide protections for distinct populations in different ways. First, it created a system of state-administered unemployment insurance to provide temporary financial assistance to able-bodied workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. Second, it established the Old Age and Survivors Insurance Program—a universal and contributor social insurance program for eligible wage-earners who retired or died, leaving a spouse or family. Finally, it founded a system of means-tested, state–federal public assistance programs for aged, blind,

and dependent children deemed unable to earn wages and therefore not eligible participate in the social wage-related insurance programs. Food stamps and Medicaid were added to the mix several decades later in 1965 (Hansen, 2011).

The federal program originally designed to be most useful to widowed and otherwise unmarried mothers was the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC, later changed to AFDC, Aid to Families with Dependent Children) program. Established by the SSA in 1935, ADC was designed to provide the 40 states that had passed mothers' aid laws with federal grant money to help maintain the programs. The vision of the U.S. Children's Bureau directors who drafted the plan was that the federal government would foot one-third of the bill so that poor mothers could stay home to care for their children, which was viewed as the best situation at the time. Mothers would also have access to cash stipends and social workers, since single mothers were viewed as in need of support and guidance. The program would be overseen by the Children's Bureau, and all applicants would be treated equally regardless of race or marital status. The program also requested an initial appropriation of $120 million.

What happened instead was nearly the exact opposite of what was requested. State participation became voluntary, and in 1939, eight states had no ADC program, leaving hundreds of thousands of women and children without the opportunity to apply for assistance. The provision allowing for a cash stipend was removed, as was the guarantee of federal oversight that promised equal treatment to all racial groups and women of all marital statuses. Moreover, the appropriation was reduced to a paltry $20 million. All of these revisions functioned to effectively neuter the program for its first three decades. In 1960, when 79 out of every 1,000 children were in need, only 30 received assistance (Gordon & Batlan, 2011).

In many ways, AFDC functioned like the long-defunct private charities of the early 20th century that gauged mothers' worthiness based on their perceived morality. Only, in this case, it was individual government caseworkers who had the discretion to reduce or eliminate benefits with little to no notice based on subjective judgments of worthiness or perceived adherence to often vague and poorly worded rules. But recipients did not stand idly by and just accept their paltry handout and judgment in silence. Throughout the decades that followed, more than a dozen court cases sought to clarify and eliminate some of the confusing AFDC regulations that frequently subjected mothers to inconsistent, degrading, and unconstitutional treatment. While the courts did not always side with the plaintiffs, by the mid-1970s, they had struck down, on both statutory and constitutional grounds, many of the draconian provisions regulating AFDC (Gordon & Batlan, 2011).

Beginning in the '60s, shifts in cultural and social attitudes toward women, as well as new trends in women's employment, led to new work requirements for welfare recipients. Women were penalized for refusing "suitable" jobs, and so-called workfare programs were implemented at the state and federal levels. Some provisions were initially carved out to allow mothers to attend school rather than work, but most were eventually removed even though educated women tend to earn more over time. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, reforms were implemented here and there; gross and household income limits were enacted in 1981, followed by the creation of childcare assistance, job training, and education programs in 1988 (Moffitt, 2008).

As is likely evident by this point, what began as a few relatively modest federal programs during the Great Depression had, during the next 50 years, developed into a behemoth tangle of entitlement and means-tested programs that were so broad, complicated, and expensive that the whole system began to cause substantial tension between federal and

state governments. Moreover, the public was becoming increasingly unhappy with the program. The 1980s were an unusually conservative era, and although the later part of the decade saw a 33% increase in the number of people receiving assistance, the overwhelming national sentiment was that people wanted entitlement reform (Rothman, 2016). It is an unfortunate irony that the program first created to help mothers stay home and care for their children eventually become a massive bureaucratic burden that undoubtedly made the same mothers' lives more difficult.

Despite the fact that three-fourths of single mothers are in the labor force and that they have slightly higher rates of labor force participation than women in married couples, the majority of employed single mothers—62%—work in low-wage service sector or administrative jobs that do not provide comprehensive, or any, benefits package (Mather, 2010). These low-paying jobs are also far less likely to provide paid vacation, sick leave, flexible schedule, or other employee benefits and support programs conducive to work–life balance. Moreover, one-quarter of single mothers do not have health insurance coverage, and among those who are insured, two-fifths are covered by public assistance programs like Medicaid. Because single mothers are more likely to hold low-paying positions, their families also have significantly higher rates of poverty and reliance on "entitlement" programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which provides limited cash assistance to very low-income families. In 2010, 41% of single mothers received SNAP benefits, up from 29% in 2001. Data on the number of single mothers receiving TANF benefits are not available, but one estimate claims that nearly 90% of TANF recipients are single mothers (Casey & Maldonado, 2012) Undoubtedly, the poverty rate among single mothers is high; however, many of the provisions designed to help lift single mothers and their children out

of poverty in fact function to keep them there.

Motherhood and Morality

A second argument often employed in discourses against single mothers is one of morality, which is, unsurprisingly, linked to marital status. While single mothers have always existed, albeit typically in the periphery of society, historically it was only acceptable to become a single mother due to the death of a spouse. Divorce was taboo, and women who had children out of wedlock were considered "ruined" and often shunned by their families or sent to maternity homes to have their bastard children. The public shame and ostracism resulting from unwed childbirth throughout most of history led to a trend of infanticide and child abandonment (Thurer, 1994). In the early to mid-20th century, unmarried pregnant women in the United States and Canada were seen as "girls in trouble," pegged as social deviants (Rains, 1970) and often sent to live in maternity homes, where they were given false names, discouraged from bonding with their children, and frequently coerced into giving up their babies for adoption (Schnarr, 2011).

Throughout most of the 19th and early 20th centuries, motherhood and femininity were romanticized; women were relegated to the private sphere, as their proper role was to care for men, children, and the home. This "cult of domesticity" or "cult of true womanhood" reigned supreme until the first wave of the feminist movement gained steam in the 1920s, but it continued well into the 1960s, when the women's liberation movement and sexual revolution took hold. During the last two centuries, a "true woman" possessed the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Welter, 1966), and, taken together, these characteristics gave women the promise of happiness and power. Women who chose not to embody these virtues were publicly ridiculed, shamed, and castigated. Such

women were said to be "tampering with society, undermining civilization" (Welter, 1966, p. 173). Not only were they condemned, they were read out of the sex. "They are only semi-women, mental hermaphrodites" (Welter, 1966, p. 173). Unwed mothers, then, epitomized the antithesis of femininity and womanhood during this time. Perhaps this explains the nearly nonexistent literature on the conditions of single mothers in the United States prior to 1900; they were simply written out of history, not worth the paper upon which they would be written about.

Conceptual Frameworks

Intensive Mothering

The entrenchment and idealization of the nuclear family in the United States has led to a cultural environment in which any other family form, particularly one that defies patriarchal norms and acceptable standards and practices of motherhood, is viewed as problematic. Single mothers violate all of these norms and are therefore often viewed as social deviants. In addition to having their character and morals questioned, single mothers have been ridiculed for their (in)ability to properly raise and nurture their children. During the 1970s–1980s, and arguably even now, the overwhelming philosophy of acceptable parenting practice was/is that of "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996).

This ideology, Hays (1996) argued, requires that individual mothers, not fathers or other family members, be responsible for child-rearing. Moreover, the tenets of intensive mothering compel mothers to rely on child-rearing experts—most of whom are men—for advice about child development and to invest all their time, energy, and financial resources into their children (Hulbert, 2003; Martin, 2005).

> A mother must put her child's needs above her own. A mother must recognize and conscientiously respond to all the child's needs and desires, and every state of the

> child's emotional and intellectual development. This means that a mother must acquire detailed knowledge of what the experts consider proper child development, and then spend a good deal of time and money attempting to foster it. . . . In sum, the methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive. (Hays, 1996, p. 8)

Given the wide variety of parenting practices and methods present throughout time and geography, Hays (1996) argued that intensive mothering is a socially constructed ideology perpetuated by the media, accepted cultural and social values, and patriarchy. Moreover, it is excessive and unnecessarily strenuous.

> . . . this form of mothering is neither self-evidently natural nor, in any absolute sense, necessary; it is a social construction. Child-rearing ideologies vary widely, both historically and cross-culturally. In other times and places, simpler, less time-and-energy consuming methods have been considered appropriate, and the child's mother has not always and everywhere been the primary caregiver. The idea that correct child rearing requires not only large quantities of money, but also professional-level skills and copious amounts of physical, moral, mental, and emotional energy on the part of the individual mother is a relatively recent historical phenomenon. (p. 4)

Hays also asserted that intensive mothering contradicts basic principles of reasoning and logic.

> . . . the ideology of intensive mothering seems to contradict the interests of almost everyone. Paid working women might like to avoid the extra work on the 'second shift,' stay-at-home mothers might enjoy a bit more free time, capitalists surely want

all of their paid laborers' energy and attention, and husbands might prefer the career promotions of a woman who dedicates herself to bringing home the bacon. (p. 5)

In sum, this ideology traps mothers in a cycle of impossible standards. If a mother works outside the home, she cannot possibly adhere to the tenets of intensive mothering that dictate and define "good" mothering. If a mother does not work outside the home, the time, energy, financial resources, and self-sacrifice required to observe and practice intensive mothering are largely untenable. Despite this double bind, research on intensive mothering has consistently found that women recognize it, albeit not by name, as the primary socially acceptable approach to motherhood, and even those who do not or cannot fully embrace all of its tenets position themselves in such a way that their choices (to work full time, for example) ultimately allow them to believe they are good mothers within this ideology (Blair-Loy, 2005; Douglas & Michaels, 2005; Hays, 1996; Johnson & Swanson 2006, 2007; Newman & Henderson, 2014).

While intensive mothering has been studied by scholars from a variety of disciplines during the past 20 years, little empirical or conceptual work has considered this ideology from the perspectives of single mothers or mothers of varying socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups. This is despite the assertion of Hays (1996) and others (Douglas & Michaels, 2005; Wolf, 2011) that intensive mothering is a near-universal American phenomenon. "Intensive mothering is coded White and middle class, and the bulk of scholarship on intensive mothering has focused on middle- and upper-class mothers" (Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2015, p. 352).

However, the small body of research undertaking the examination of intensive mothering by non-White and low-income mothers lends credence to the claim that the basic tenets of this ideology are pervasive and reach across race and class lines, although their

execution may be different from that of the middle-class, White, married mothers in the suburbs. Hays (1996) found that while class differences define baseline standards for "good" mothering, women of all class backgrounds "share a fundamental set of assumptions about the importance of putting their children's needs first and dedicating themselves to providing what is best for their kids, as they understand it" (p. 86). These differences are well documented by Lareau (2003), who labeled the active support of children's desires, talents, cognitive growth, and school performance by middle- and upper-class parents "concerted cultivation." Working-class and poor parents, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in what Lareau called the "accomplishment of natural growth," a strategy characterized by an emphasis on providing for children's fundamental needs like food, clothing, and shelter.

In this regard, the concerns and child-rearing approaches of low-income parents tend to be similar across racial lines, but Hill-Collins (1994) argued that, for White, middle-class children, physical survival is assumed, so emphasis is placed on psychological and emotional well-being. For minority children, however, survival must be fought for and guarded.

> The children of women of color, many of whom are 'physically starving' have no such choices. Racial ethnic children's lives have long been held in low regard. . . . In addition, racial ethnic children often live in harsh urban environments where drugs, crime, industrial pollutants, and violence threaten their survival. (p. 49)

Women of color and low-income mothers often lack the resources to provide their children with a packed schedule of extracurricular activities like middle-class mothers can, but that does not stop them from defining their own forms of intensive mothering. Edin and Kefalas (2005) argued that low-income single mothers in the Philadelphia neighborhoods they studied extensively define good mothering in much the same way as White, middle-class, stay-at-home mothers, by simply "being there" all the time. Accessibility

was a central tenet for these women, who often had children young and rarely stayed in relationships with the fathers of their children. Also, much like White, middle-class, stay-at-home mothers, the women in Edin and Kefelas's (2005) study wrapped their identities around their role as mothers.

> The redemptive stories our mothers tell speak to the primacy of the mothering role, how it can become virtually the only source of identity and meaning in a young woman's life. . . . These mothers, we discovered . . . manage to credit virtually every bit of good in their lives to the fact that they have children—they believe motherhood has "saved" them. (p. 14)

More recent work also has supported the notion that poor and working-class mothers practice intensive mothering despite a lack of resources. Elliott et al. (2015) found that low-income Black single mothers "engage in intensive mothering using the resources available to them . . . . Their mothering largely involves fending of the dangers, indignities and vagaries of poverty, racism, and sexism" (p. 366). These mothers work to help their children navigate the impersonal and often hostile bureaucracies that frequently dominate their lives, and "much of their mothering thus involves 'institutional advocacy'" (Elliott et al., 2015, p. 366). Moreover, in line with the intensive mothering ideology, mothers limited their own educational aspirations and social lives in order to put their children's needs first.

Through in-depth interviews with 18 mothers of teenage children, Elliott et al. (2015) found that mothers in their sample demonstrated a commitment to traditionally recognized good mothering practices despite the structural barriers they face.

> [Mothers] stress that although they might not have always done everything right, they have always put their children's welfare first and sacrificed for them, yet they still

> have children who are struggling with issues like addiction, incarceration, single parenting, school suspensions, and poor academic performance. (p. 366)

The inherent contradiction identified by the authors is the difference between ideology and lived experience for these women. If mothers believe, as these women do, that good mothering will lead to good outcomes for children, mothers will tend to blame themselves when their children do not achieve traditionally recognized and institutionalized forms of success.

> The ideology of intensive mothering reflects a version of privatized mothering that is not conducive with the constrains placed on low-income, Black single mothers, and instead increases their burdens, stresses, and hardships even while providing a convenient explanation for these very difficulties: *mothers* are to blame. (Elliott et al., 2015, p. 366)

The demands and expectations of intensive mothering contribute in a very real way to the lived experiences of American mothers, regardless of work status, marital status, racial and ethnic background, or social class. While the original iteration of this ideology certainly reflects White, middle-class privilege (Hays, 1996; Johnson, 2014), further research has indicated that mothers of all social positions feel the pressure to conform or risk being labeled "bad" mothers. Moreover, if their children fail, mothers still take the lion's share of blame (Eyer, 1996). This framework is particularly useful throughout the present analysis because it connects modern standards of good mothering with dimensions of social class and socioeconomic status, consumerism, paid and unpaid labor, and morality.

Folk Devils and Moral Panics

Perhaps the most infamous and stigmatized image of single motherhood to come out of the 20th century is that of the "welfare queen." A term frequently attributed to

Ronald Reagan but was actually coined by a writer at the *Chicago Tribune* (Levin, 2013), the "welfare queen" evokes an image that has come to refer to a very specific type of welfare recipient. Almost always Black, and usually bilking the system, the welfare queen is unemployed with multiple children and spends her time perched in front of the television eating chips and watching daytime television rather than working. She unapologetically relies on government assistance and probably has acrylic fingernails, a designer handbag, and the newest iPhone. The welfare queen trope took shape in the mid-1970s and was in fact modeled after a real woman who, as it turns out, was suspected of crimes far more serious than welfare fraud. Linda Taylor drove a Cadillac, wore diamonds and fur, and had received at least $150,000 in tax-free welfare cash. She also had upwards of 80 aliases (Levin, 2013).

Needless to say, Ms. Taylor gave single mothers on welfare a worse name than they already had. And although rates of means-tested welfare fraud were—and still are—low due to the amount of scrutiny faced by applicants, public opinion still reflected a general distaste for the program and those reliant upon it (Shapiro, 2007). Periodically, a story would surface about recipients abusing the system. One such instance occurred in Chicago in 1985, when a grand jury indicted 23 women on welfare fraud charges totaling more than $1 million (Mount, 1985). The next year, also in Chicago, federal officials charged 91 people with fraud totaling $2.5 million (Crawford, 1986). These types of headlines were not unique to Chicago, nor were they particularly rare despite relatively few instances of actual fraud.

Public distaste for, and overall anxieties about, the welfare system created an environment in which single mothers were viewed not only negatively, but negatively in a particular kind of way—as "folk devils." This term originated from the research of sociologist Stanley Cohen (2011/1973), who used it to describe the cultural reaction to two 1960s British youth subcultures. Drawing from sociological work in the fields of disaster

research, collective behavior, social problems, and law, Cohen developed a framework to help explain why societies go through intense, often short-lived, periods of deep fear or worry about a cultural phenomenon. By his definition, a moral panic occurs when

> . . . a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (Cohen, 2011, p. 1)

The subject of a moral panic, added Cohen (2011), can be obscure or relatively commonplace, and the consequences can range from almost none to serious long-lasting legal, political, and social change.

The term "moral panic" itself is worthy of some unpacking. According to Thompson (2005):

> Implicit in the use of the two words "moral panic" is the suggestion that the threat is to something held sacred by or fundamental to society. The reason for calling it a *moral* panic is precisely to indicate that the perceived threat is not to something mundane—such as economic output or educational standards—but a threat to the social order itself or an idealized (ideological) conception of some part of it. . . . Events are more likely to be perceived as fundamental threats and to give rise to moral panics if the society, or some part of it, is in crisis or experiencing disturbing changes giving rise to stress. The response to such threats is likely to be a demand

> for greater social regulation or control and a demand for a return to "traditional" values. (p. 8)

This articulation of moral panic accurately characterizes all but one of the sociocultural events selected for analysis in this research. In each case, some vital social institution or practice is observed to be decaying, resulting in a plea—or a policy mandate—to return to the status quo.

Hall's (1982) foundational work on moral panic inserted the Gramscian concept of hegemony into moral panics, arguing that ruling-class elites benefit from the demonization of outsiders—in his case young Black men—and the distraction they provide from the "real" causes of social ills. Hall (1982) further argued that media discourse often relies on an implied chain of argument, and that statistical data in the form of opinion polls are often deployed ideologically to ground and give legitimacy to "facts." In much the same way that Hall's case study of muggings in 1970s-era Britain examined the use of statistical data about crime rates to incite and justify moral panic, the current analysis will show how statistics about increased rates of nonmarital births, divorce, and cohabitation are used in media coverage to help rationalize the need for "traditional family values," welfare reform legislation, and government expenditures for marriage promotion.

Later research by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) identified five key characteristics of a moral panic: (1) concern (some reported conduct or event sparks anxiety); (2) hostility (the perpetrators are portrayed as folk devils); (3) consensus (the negative social reaction is broad and unified); (4) disproportionality (the extent of the conduct, or the threat it poses, are exaggerated); (5) volatility (the media's reporting and the associated panic emerge suddenly but can dissipate quickly too). Garland (2008) added two elements that he believed were essential to Cohen's original conception: (6) the moral dimension of the social reaction, and

(7) the idea that the deviant conduct is somehow symptomatic. "Together, these two elements are important because they point to . . . the anxious concern on the part of certain social actors that an established value system is being threatened" (p. 11). Moreover, Garland (2008) asserted moral panics are fueled by sensational media coverage but, at their core, stem from transitions in the social, economic, and moral order. Folk devils, then, function as cultural scapegoats whose conduct so appalls onlookers because it relates to personal fears or desires.

Moral panics can also be viewed as narratives (Falkof, 2018; Wright, 2015). Wright (2015) argued that moral panics can be seen as enacted melodramas where "everyday citizens experience the role of the suffering victim, where ordinary outsiders are shaped into extraordinary villains, and where moral entrepreneurs 'step in' to become heroic" (p. 1246). Wright (2015) defined a melodrama as a story line "where nasty villains enact evil deeds against virtuous victims who are eventually rescued and have their virtue reinstated by gallant heroes" (p. 1246). Melodramas depict characters and behavior in exaggerated, emotional terms that allow for a clear demarcation of "boundaries between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and justice" (p. 1247). Through this process, audiences bear witness to the victim's suffering in order to evoke empathy, and also to cultivate anger toward the villain—for instance, the folk devils. Wright (2015) also advanced the view that moral panic research should renew its focus on the role of the media, which in her estimation has been neglected. Critcher (2003, 2008) saw moral panic research as a tool to elucidate the discrepancies between representation and reality and called for greater scrutiny of the role of media in the emergence of panic episodes. For him, the decentralization of media from moral panic research is problematic because "the media remain instrumental in creating moral panics, with all the exaggeration, distortion and overreaction this entails" (p. 1141).

Whether popular or political, discourse deploying rhetoric about villainous welfare queens was both racially coded and heavily moralized. The use of the "welfare queen" label "transformed poor women from citizens into 'welfare mothers,'" argued Shepard (2007). The strategic use of rhetoric constructing women who use social services as lazy and dishonest also functioned to delegitimize the validity of the welfare state as a whole (Shepard, 2007). If, as Habermas (1962) contended, only those with cultural capital can participate in the formal confines of the public sphere and its social privileges, then those without it, like single mothers, are viewed as social deviants (Shepard, 2007). Social class, race, and gender can provide, or suppress, what amounts to a protective shield for deviant behavior. The deviant behavior of the underprivileged is harder to conceal because they lack the resources that would otherwise enable them to hide their activities from public view (Shepard, 2007; Wagner, 1997). Thus, the welfare queen–as–folk devil was a product of Reagan's calculated political rhetoric, racism, and vague, undefined fears about changing family structures in the United States.

Moral Regulation

Related to, but also distinct from, the concept of moral panic is the concept of moral regulation. Moral regulation has been theorized in a number of ways by scholars who interpret the original formulation differently. In practice, moral regulation has been occurring for centuries, but its formal development as a sociological framework did not begin until the 1980s, when Corrigan and Sayer (1985) undertook the task of attempting to remedy what they saw as deficiencies in Marxist theorizing about the role and nature of the state. While an in-depth discussion of the theoretical underpinnings and development of moral regulation as a theory is unnecessary here, it is valuable, in the context of the analyses in later chapters, to understand what moral regulation is, how it functions via government

and social institutions—like the media—and how mothers and children have been subject to projects of moral regulation in recent history. Moreover, it is useful to understand the frequently contentious relationship between the theories of moral regulation and moral panic.

At its most simplistic, moral regulation is a "form of politics in which some people act to problematize the conduct, values or culture of others and seek to impose regulation upon them," (Hunt, 1999, p. 1). Projects of moral regulation involve "the deployment of distinctively moral discourses which construct a moralized subject and an object or target which is acted upon by means of moralizing practices. Moral discourses seek to act on conduct that is deemed to be intrinsically bad or wrong" (Hunt, 1999, p. 7). Hunt (1999) isolated five elements present in all projects of moral regulation: agents, targets, tactics, discourses, and political context.

While other formulations of moral regulation have been developed (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985; Dean, 1994; Ruonavaara, 1997; Valverde, 1994), the value of Hunt's (1999) interpretation for this work is threefold. First, he insisted that the targets of moral regulation projects have agency. Rather than being passive recipients of attempts to govern their behavior, Hunt argued, targets "may attempt to refuse the subjectification imposed on them and thus create the possibility of resistance and the formation of an alternate subjectivity" (p. 8). Second, he rejected the idea that moral regulation movements are distinct from one another or that they exist in isolation. Rather, his position is that they form "an interconnected web of discourses, symbols and practices . . . that stretch across time and place" (p. 9). And finally, Hunt asserted that moral reform movements have an "umbrella effect" in that they garner support from diverse ideological and political positions. It is also noteworthy that, unlike other moral regulation theorists, Hunt believed moral regulation

projects are not exclusively the realm of government or political institutions. Indeed, he forcefully argued that "moral regulation manifests itself in many different guises; it may present itself as a medical project, a sanitary undertaking, a religious imperative or as a political strategy" (p. 17) and that these discourses will often coexist with other forms of regulation.

Linking Moral Panic and Moral Regulation

Hunt's work, however, is less useful in linking moral regulation to moral panic, which he summarily rejected due to its tendency to "import a negative normative judgment" (p. 19). Other scholars have disagreed with his outright dismissal of moral panic and have undertaken the theoretical task of linking the two concepts in a meaningful way. Hier (2002, 2008, 2011) and Hier et al. (2011) in particular have endeavored to create a critical theory of moral panic that enables fusion between panics and regulatory projects. Hier (2002) situated moral panic as a form of moral regulation whereby moral panic is conceptualized as a critical ideology. He argued that "it seems as though the convulsive power of the 'panic,' combined with the long-term reserve of regulatory projects, is where the real thrust of moral governance (of the self as well as others) is to be located" (p. 332).

Put another way, moral panic refers to short-lived bouts of outrage articulated in the media, while moral regulation refers to the more mundane and conventional discourses through which social identities and subjectivities are created (Lundstrom, 2011). But for Hier, the two concepts work in tandem, with moral panics functioning as "episodes of contestation and negotiation that emerge from and contribute to or reinforce broader processes of moral regulation" (Hier et al., 2011, p. 260). Critcher (2008) generally concurred, arguing that "moral panics may be an extreme form of moral regulation, most prevalent at the time of perceived cultural crisis" (p. 1140).

Chapter Summary

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research used a critical rhetorical lens to interrogate media constructions of and discourse about single mothers in American news media. Critical rhetorical theory, in conjunction with the theoretical frameworks of intensive mothering, moral panic, and moral regulation, allows for a thorough interrogation of the ways in which these depictions and narratives have positioned single mothers as subjects and/or objects in media. Having considered the sociohistorical and cultural contexts discussed in this chapter, contexts through which single-mother families have come to prominence, the scaffolding upon which I analyzed media discourse in this research is complete.

CHAPTER 3. JUST ANOTHER LIFESTYLE CHOICE? SINGLE MOTHERS AND FAMILY VALUES

> The personal is political.
> — Carol Hanisch, 1969

> One of the reasons more young women are giving birth out of wedlock and more young men are walking away from their paternal obligations is that there is no longer a stigma attached to this behavior, no reason to feel shame.
> — Jeb Bush, 1995

In May 1992, during a speech to the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco, former Vice President Dan Quayle decried the decline of traditional family values, blaming the infamous riots that had occurred in Los Angeles earlier that month on the "breakdown of family structure, personal responsibility, and social order in too many areas of our society" (Quayle, 1992). Quayle spent the majority of his speech articulating his view of the struggles of poor and working-class families, and presenting a program to solve what he saw as the deterioration of so-called family values. During his 40-minute presentation, Quayle, referring to the morality of marriage and sanctity of two-parent families, commented:

> It doesn't help matters when prime time TV has Murphy Brown—a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman—mocking the importance of fathers, by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another 'lifestyle choice.' (Quayle, 1992)

A media firestorm quickly erupted. The *New York Times, USA Today*, and *Washington Post* all ran front-page stories about this single sentence, and all three major network news programs broadcast the sound bite. In the weeks and months that followed, it was fodder for editorials in nearly every major news weekly magazine in the country, and many glossy monthlies featured articles or commentary on it as well.

In this chapter, I argue that family values rhetoric, particularly as it relates to media discourse about single mothers, functions as a heavy-handed tool of moral regulation that reinforces the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). While discourse about single mothers in the nation's top newspapers and magazines frequently attempted to contextualize the nontraditional family form historically and socially, the hegemonic ideology of the nuclear family and its embedded "traditional family values" were decidedly not contextualized by the politicians who espoused it, namely Quayle and his supporters.

Relying on idealized notions of post-war family life to bolster claims about the benefits of marriage while simultaneously condemning a culture of "dependency" proves paradoxical; it is acceptable for a woman to be dependent on a male partner, but it is not okay to for her to be dependent on the government. Finally, this chapter contends that the media discourse about single mothers after the *Murphy Brown* speech contributed to a political climate in which unmarried women with children were viewed as a pathology—an out-of-control social problem in need of a government-imposed solution: welfare reform, the focus of analysis in Chapter 4.

Dan Quayle vs. Murphy Brown

In September 1992, a few months after Dan Quayle's infamous speech, a response came from Murphy Brown, the fictional television journalist played by actress Candice Bergen on the hit CBS sitcom of the same name, via her fictional television news program. In the special one-hour episode, Murphy came home from work to see the vice president criticizing her on television, using real clips from his speech. Incensed, Murphy returned to her job to deliver a long, moralistic attack against the vice president on her television-show-within-a-television-show:

These are difficult times for our country, and in searching for the causes of our social

> ills, we could choose to blame the media or the Congress or an Administration that's been in power for 12 years, or we could blame me. (Kolbert, 1992)

The episode, entitled "Murphy's Revenge," drew an audience of roughly 44 million (Kolbert, 1992).

Much of the media discourse, political and otherwise, about nontraditional families during this time was firmly situated in a rhetoric of "family values" deployed by the conservative Bush/Quayle presidential campaign and ultimately co-opted by the Democrats. Cloud (1998) explored how the term "family values" functioned as an ideograph during the Bush/Quayle vs. Clinton/Gore campaigns, and argued it was a tool used in an attempt to usher in the return to "a mythic family ideal, even as it scapegoated private families—especially those headed by single parents, racial minorities, and the poor—for structural social problems" (p. 411). The concept of the ideograph was developed by McGee (1980) and articulated in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* article "The 'Ideograph': A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology." Here, McGee discussed the ways in which language contributes to the construction and maintenance of ideologies, arguing that "human beings are conditioned . . . to a vocabulary of concepts that function as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief" (p. 6). The ideograph, he said, is

> an ordinary language term found in political discourse. It is higher-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but univocal and ill-defined normative goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief that which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable. (p. 15)

Ideographs are flexible and fluid concepts marked by stable signifiers. For McGee

(1980), they are important for precisely this reason; the signifier is stable while that which is signified is unstable, making them "constitutive signs of American sociopolitical community" (Condit, 1990, p. 18). Thus, ideographs are sites of struggle or tension to determine meaning and social, political, or cultural contexts. Using this framework, Cloud (1998) posited the rhetoric of "family values" in the 1990s "structured policy discourse across partisan lines and re-invoked a long, deep-running familialist ideological thematic in US culture" (p. 388).

These assertions are critical to understanding the sometimes explicit, but more frequently implicit, assumptions about the moral status of single mothers. "The word 'values' indicates a rhetorical emphasis on moral, character-based solutions rather than material redress of economic need or the remediation of structural racism" (Cloud, 1998, p. 391). The "family values" theme employed by Quayle and countless other political actors of both parties in the early 1990s clearly emphasized that those family values should be "traditional" ones.

The Myth of the Traditional Family

At the core of the family values rhetoric so central to discussions of single mothers during the 1992 presidential campaign is the assumption that there is indeed such a thing as a "traditional family." As family historian Stephanie Coontz (2000) argued, the 1950s middle-class nuclear families so idealized in sitcoms like *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Leave It to Beaver* were a historical anomaly, the product of post-war economic conditions: a sharp decline in divorce; rising rates of fertility, marriage, and homeownership; and low rates of violent crime, among other factors. But, Coontz (2000) stated, most people of this era also understood the nuclear family to be a new invention.

With this new family structure also came a shift in the ideology surrounding family life. The acceptance of domesticity on the part of women, and the centrality of family to ideas about personal happiness and fulfillment for both genders became more prominent. "The values of 1950s families were also new," explained Coontz (2000). "The emphasis on producing a whole world of satisfaction, amusement, and inventiveness within the nuclear family had no precedents. . . . For the first time, men as well as women were encouraged to root their identity and self-image in familial and parental roles" (p. 27).

But these conditions, as romanticized as they were, did not hold true for many families of the era. A full 25% of Americans were poor in the mid-1950s, and one-third of children were considered poor by the end of the decade. Black and immigrant families suffered particularly crippling rates of poverty, not to mention racial discrimination, regardless of marital status. Gays and lesbians who were "found out" were systematically impelled out of their jobs and socially castigated. Moreover, the women who initially purported to be so fulfilled by their new domestic roles began to sow seeds of resentment and ambivalence about their wifely duties: ". . . no sooner was the ideal of the postwar family accepted that observers began to comment perplexedly on how discontented women seemed in the very roles they supposedly desired the most" (Coontz, 2000, p. 36). To cope, many suburban women turned to alcohol and tranquilizers. The problems of sexual abuse, incest, marital rape, and domestic violence did not yet have names, although Coontz (2000) presented evidence suggesting they were indeed features—if not fixtures—of family life in the era.

Unwed childbearing was also not an uncommon occurrence in the 1950s. It was uncommon, however, for young, unmarried women to keep and raise their children. "Rates of unwed childbearing tripled between 1940 and 1958, but most Americans didn't notice

because unwed mothers generally left town, gave their babies up for adoption and returned home as if nothing had happened" (Coontz, 1999, p. 1). In many other cases, Coontz (2000) argued, as soon as a pregnancy was discovered the woman was given a wedding ring and thrust into a marriage for which she might or might not have been ready.

The idealized traditional family of the 1950s and the "family values" that came with it have been mythologized by contemporary and heavily whitewashed retellings of history. Our current understanding of the harmonious families of yore is informed in no small part by the media's denial of diversity (Coontz, 2000). These myths have been entrenched and perpetuated without consideration of social class or, often by proxy, of race. Myths like the "American Dream" are supposed to be available to everyone regardless of where you were born and the station you were born into—after all, all men are created equal, yes? (Isenberg, 2016). Dan Quayle, for his part, was a beneficiary of all the best elements of post-war family life, and many media commentators were quick to point out as much, like the editorial board of *The New York Times* in an article published on May 22, 1992:

> What the Vice President keeps failing to grasp is that the admirable values he asserts refer to a highly-idealized world, America by Norman Rockwell. That leaves him grimly insensitive to the real world, as newly laid bare by the Los Angeles riot. (Dan Quayle's Fictitious World, 1992, p. A28)

Family Values Rhetoric and the Moral Regulation of Single Mothers

While most of it was ignored by the press, the crux of Dan Quayle's infamous speech to the Commonwealth Club could be classified as a treatise on the immorality of being poor. As Cloud (1998) has argued, the family values rhetoric of the time centered on the idea that material poverty was in many ways a result of a "poverty of values," and that with the proper shifting of one's moral compass, individual poverty could be rectified. In

this view, single mothers, and particularly never-married single mothers, suffer from a lack of morals, not a lack of social support.

The idea that single mothers are morally deficient is certainly not new, nor is the belief that their immorality can be "fixed" with the proper mix of repentance and, in some cases, government oversight. In her thorough and enlightening book *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920–1997,* Margaret Little (1998) outlined the development of the Ontario Mother's Allowance program and detailed the many pains single mothers went through to qualify and retain their benefits. She argued persuasively that welfare policies at the time were focused not only on need, but also deservedness, which was demonstrated through applicants' pious conduct and tolerating never-ending surveillance of their private lives.

> Both public and private welfare administrators believed that welfare should distinguishing between the deserving and the undeserving poor, providing a minimal existence for the former and denying the latter. . . . In keeping with the popular Malthusian ideas of the time, the underserving poor were left to fend for themselves, allowing nature to take its course. . . . During this era poverty was considered both a moral and economic weakness, with emphasis on the former. As a result, even the most destitute were considered suspect and had to prove continuously that they were morally deserving. It was generally believed that the worthy poor required constant guidance to improve their moral life and strengthen their work habits. (Little, 1998, p. 2)

The focus on moral worthiness and the notion that the poor must be taught proper moral conduct are two central features of moral regulatory projects. Alan Hunt, a key scholar in the area of moral regulation, defined these projects as "an interesting and significant form of

politics in which some act to problematize the conduct, values or culture of others, and seek to impose regulation upon them" (1999, p. 1). Furthermore, moral regulation involves "the deployment of distinctively moral discourses which construct a moralized subject and an object or target which is acted upon by means of moralizing practices. Moral discourses seek to act on conduct that is deemed to be intrinsically bad or wrong" (p. 7). Most typically, projects of moral regulation are expressed with a language of deterioration or decline: "things" are not what they used to be, and this change, viewed destructively, is articulated within the framework of a moral discourse.

Hunt (1999) isolated six distinct components that he argued are present in projects of moral regulation: (1) a moralized subject, (2) a moralized object or target; (3) knowledge, either expert or informal; (4) a discourse within which the knowledge is given a normative content; (5) a set of practices; and (6) a "harm" to be avoided or overcome. These roughly correspond to the five main elements of moral regulatory projects outlined in Chapter 1—agents, targets, tactics, discourses, and political context—but explicitly require the acknowledgment of a potential harm that project is intended to prevent. The following two sections trace the use of moral regulatory discourse in flagship newspapers and nationally circulated general interest news magazines during the 18-month period following Dan Quayle's *Murphy Brown* speech.

(Im)moral Single Mothers

The first component of Hunt's framework of moral regulation is that there must be a moralized subject. In this instance, that subject is the nuclear family. As previously discussed, the nuclear family model was a historical anomaly made possible by post-war economic prosperity; it was not a universally desirable or even historically common family model. But the pedestal upon which the nuclear family has been placed is high, and the moral authority

imparted upon it by those in power is singular. This view is implicit in much of the discourse surrounding the *Murphy Brown* speech, particularly when the focus is on the rhetoric of the Bush/Quayle administration.

One of the more high-profile pieces published in the not-so-immediate wake of Dan Quayle's speech ran in *The Atlantic Monthly* in April 1993. Summarily, the pages-long feature could be classified as a social-scientific indictment of nontraditional family types. Author Barbara Dafoe Whitehead systematically outlined the negative outcomes for children of divorce, single parenthood (especially single motherhood), and stepfamilies, citing studies from well-known (if ideologically and politically divergent) family sociologists like Andrew Cherlin and David Popenoe. While Whitehead stayed away from explicitly moral discourse, she argued in no uncertain terms that the nuclear family is superior to its alternatives.

> Though far from perfect as a social institution, the intact family offers children greater security and better outcomes than its fast-growing alternatives: single-parent and stepparent families. Not only does the intact family protect the child from poverty and economic insecurity, it also provides greater noneconomic investments of parental time, attention and emotional support over the entire life course. (Whitehead, 1993, p. 80)

Whitehead's (1993) use of the term "intact family" is significant here, because it imports a discourse of morality, functioning as an ideograph. "Intact" families are good, healthy, happy, secure, supportive, and safe. The opposite of intact is broken, and therefore broken families cannot also be good, healthy, secure, supportive, and safe families.

As sex has become less intertwined with marriage and children, it has also become the basis for more significant cultural arguments about family and family values (Oldenberg, 1992, p. C5). Carbone (2007) analyzed, compared, and contrasted the liberal and

conservative family ideologies put forth by McClain (2006) and J. Q. Wilson (2002), respectively. In his book *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families*, J. Q. Wilson (2002), a Harvard-trained political scientist, blamed the weakening of traditional family values on the Enlightenment's focus on individual freedom, autonomy, and intellectualism. He believed marriage should occupy a unique place of social and cultural authority, and in order to facilitate this, he argued, the concept of shame should be resurrected to help enforce moral and social order. "He sees shame, for example, as inhibiting 'women from having children without marrying and women from abandoning wives for trophy alternatives'" (Carbone, 2007, p. 811). Further, Wilson joined the chorus of conservatives who believe single and teenage mothers perpetuate cycles of generational poverty and violence; he espoused assorted benefits of marriage for men—but struggled to articulate the benefits for women—and summarily dismissed gender parity within marriage as "nonsense." While he did not advocate for the elevation of a particular religious philosophy, Wilson did see religion as a useful institution for the promotion of marriage and morals (Carbone, 2007).

The conservative family values ideology relies heavily on a patriarchal model of family, mostly ignoring gender egalitarianism in favor of female domesticity, and eschewing ideas about marital equity and even happiness or satisfaction in order to uphold the commitment that allows marriage to retain its social and cultural power. Moreover, conservatives like Wilson have argued fervently that children raised outside of a nuclear two-parent family, preferably one where the mother stays home, are tremendously disadvantaged—nearly to the point of being destined to lead lives of poverty, wracked with behavioral and emotional problems, truancy, and even criminality (J. Q. Wilson, 1993).

Charles Murray, an author and fellow at the conservative think tank American Enterprise Institute, argued in a *USA Today* article that illegitimacy is the single most important social problem "because it drives everything else" (Welch, 1993, p. 8A). Speaking about welfare reform, Murray continued: "The whole welfare debate I think is focusing on the wrong question. The measure of success is not how many you put in jobs, it is whether the number of children born to single women falls" (p. 8A). By this metric, the unemployment rate could be zero, but if single women are still having children, society is in danger of crumbling. Murray also believed shaming single mothers would discourage them from having additional children, and he proposed eliminating welfare benefits altogether in order to make fatherless families "unviable as an economic unit" (p. 8A).

On the other side of the ideological spectrum, Boston University law professor Linda McClain argued government should have a much more tolerant, broad, and accepting view of families. In her book, *The Place of Families: Fostering Capacity, Equality, and Responsibility*, McClain (2006) refuted the traditional conservative philosophies of family, arguing that a good liberal society should promote gender parity within families and among children regardless of the family form that brought them into existence.

> To remain true to liberal values, it [the family] cannot subordinate one gender to childrearing, denying it full participation in economic and civic life. Nor can the state condition access to the full benefits of citizenship on a family form beyond the reach or at odds with the cultural tradition of its poorest citizens. A liberal state should seek to create conditions in which all of its citizens should have an opportunity to flourish. (Carbone, 2007, p. 810)

For McClain, the heteronormative, hegemonic, patriarchal nuclear family unit is an instrument of oppression for women, and government ought not be in the business of

promoting partnerships of any kind that can be damaging to women or children. She did, however, believe the state has a substantial role to play in constructing institutions and policies that can bolster strong families.

Carbone (2007) did not take sides or advocate for the correctness or superiority of either author's position. Rather, she was more concerned with the value and contribution of both Wilson's and McLain's arguments to the discourse of American family life despite their discordant views.

> Whereas Wilson sees self-sacrifice as necessary to family success, McClain sees the sacrifices as unequally shared burdens that guarantee women's subordination. Where Wilson sees the decline of family health, McClain sees a diversity of family forms that contribute to women's equality and autonomy. Where Wilson sees the failure of private actors to provide for the well-being of family, McClain argues for the remaking the public-private compact to provide more societal support for the formative project she argues should be at the core of family promotion. Most fundamentally, Wilson and McClain differ on the role of the state. Where Wilson argues that the role of government is limited and only a cultural rebirth of the importance of marriage can adequately provide for children, McClain sees the ill health of the nation's poorest families as a direct result of the failures of government policy. (Carbone, 2007, p. 824)

These opposing positions are articulated in various ways throughout the media discourse. Conservative-leaning pundits, sources, letters to the editor, commentators, and the like may not always agree with Quayle about Murphy Brown, but they do tend to connect the concepts of personal responsibility and morality, emphasizing that dealing with the consequences of one's choices is an integral element of virtue. Conversely, more liberal-

leaning commentators tend to think beyond personal circumstance and toward structural or institutional conditions. Rather than looking at individuals, they instead highlight, for example, high rates of unemployment for Black men and low marriage rates throughout history among Blacks.

(Re)Defining "Family Values"

Not 24 hours after the *Murphy Brown* speech, Dan Quayle found himself on the defensive. Amid the criticism that he was bashing single mothers, Quayle quickly backtracked, clarifying that he never meant to criticize single mothers, but instead the Hollywood "cultural elites" who "glamorize illegitimacy." "I have the greatest respect for single parents," Quayle was quoted saying, "especially single-parent mothers. They are true heroes and inspirations—going against the tides. It's a tough situation" (Yang & Devroy, 1992, p. A1). For at least a few days, the media circus seemed to focus itself primarily on Quayle's perceived hypocrisy. Diane English, creator and producer of the *Murphy Brown* sitcom, fired back at Quayle: "If the Vice President thinks it's disgraceful for an unmarried woman to bear a child, and if he believes that a woman cannot adequately raise a child without a father, then he'd better make sure abortion remains safe and legal" (Wines, 1992, p. A1). But it did not take long for the discourse to take another turn.

Among the back-and-forth of media reports and editorials about what Dan Quayle might or might not have meant when he referred to Murphy Brown's decision to bear a child alone was a discussion about the meaning of "family values" and how those values manifest themselves in people's everyday lives. In an interview with *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, Dan Quayle defined family values as "parental involvement, personal responsibility, integrity, hard work, self-dignity, teaching children what is right and wrong

[and] telling people that there is in some cases not a gray area, that there is a difference" (Oldenberg, 1992, p. C5).

Conspicuously absent from Quayle's definition of family values was any discussion of the characteristics and traits typically associated with family: love, kindness, nurturing, generosity, fairness, thoughtfulness, consideration for others, fun, security, safety, happiness. And yet the media neglected to call attention to this, instead giving Quayle an uncontested platform to advance his conservative family values agenda—one that did not take into account the feelings most Americans had about the role families should play or the actual feelings people generally held about their families.

Elsewhere, Quayle implied other standards related to family dynamics, including his contention in the *Murphy Brown* speech that marriage and procreation (and therefore sex) should be inextricably linked. Other stories characterized the Bush/Quayle campaign's focus on family values as coded racism, classism, and homophobia: "the phrase became a synonym for GOP opposition to homosexual rights, welfare, feminism and abortion rights . . . . Bush has depicted family values as shorthand for policies he endorses: welfare reform, tax credits for private school students, prayer in schools . . . " (Keen, 1992, p. 2A). Quayle, unsurprisingly, contested this view, saying in a speech to the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce that "I especially reject the notion that discussing this issue is intended to divide Americans from one another, or to imply that some families are superior to others. Family values is neither meaningless nor mean-spirited" (Sack, 1992, p. A20).

But, arguably, dividing people and organizing family types in some moral hierarchy is precisely what he intended to do. In the *Murphy Brown* speech, Quayle stated:

> The intergenerational poverty that troubles us so much today is predominantly a poverty of values. Our inner cities are filled with children having children, with

> people who have not been able to take advantage of educational opportunities, with people who are dependent on drugs or the narcotic of welfare . . . . Right now the failure of our families is hurting America deeply. When families fail, society fails. The anarchy and lack of structure in our inner cities are testament to how quickly civilization falls apart when the family foundation cracks . . . . Now it's time to make the discussion public. It's time to talk again about family, hard work, integrity and personal responsibility. We cannot be embarrassed out of our belief that two parents, married to each other, are better in most cases for children than one. (Quayle, 1992)

If Quayle was trying to be inclusive with his rhetoric, he certainly did not do it in this speech. In the span of a couple of paragraphs, he managed to alienate Black families, poor families, gay and lesbian families, single-parent families, cohabiting couples with children, stepfamilies, and every other combination of adults and children falling outside of the traditional nuclear model. From a political perspective, alienating large percentages of the voting public by telling them they were morally inferior because their families were less than ideal was not a wise approach. It is not surprising, then, that many Americans were unconvinced the government should be in the business of discussing family values at all. According to one public opinion poll published in *USA Today*, 57% of respondents disagreed that government should have a role in promoting traditional values, 38% thought government should have a role, and five percent had no opinion (Keen, 1992, p. 2A).

Mothers (and Others) Push Back

Despite Dan Quayle's attempts to set the tone of the family values conversation by putting the nuclear family on a pedestal, major American newspapers were publishing stories that focused on the actual lived conditions and situations of real single mothers and their children. These stories usually blended the voices of social scientists, policy experts, and

single mothers themselves to help explain why, for many women, single motherhood was anything but "another lifestyle choice." In these stories, single mothers were quick to push back against Quayle's assertions about their lack of values. In a lesser-quoted passage of the *Murphy Brown* speech, Quayle also said,

> Children need love and discipline; they need mothers and fathers. A welfare check is not a husband. The state is not a father . . . . And for those concerned about children growing up in poverty, we should know this: Marriage is probably the best anti-poverty program of all. (Quayle 1992)

In response, mothers in a number of news stories spoke of abuse or abandonment by their husbands or boyfriends and roundly rejected the idea that getting married would solve all their problems. For some mothers, like Debbie Spain, a single mother featured in a *New York Times* story, staying married was not an option:

> A 32-year-old medical secretary in Boston, Ms. Spain was beaten by the father of her first child and ended a brief marriage to her second child's father, who was an alcoholic. "Just because you have someone's last name doesn't mean that's going to solve any problems," she said. (Suro, 1992, p. A12)

Spain's point is an important one; marriages can—and in some cases should—end. And when they do, oftentimes women—particularly mothers—are left in more vulnerable economic situations than they were in before they got married. That women bear a disproportionate burden when it comes to marital dissolution is the culmination of both gender and economic factors, including lower wages for women, unequal distribution of household labor, and childcare costs (Holden & Smock, 1991). Women who separate or divorce will experience, on average, a 25% decline in their standard of living, although the severity of the decline varies widely depending on the circumstances (McKeever &

Wolfinger, 2001). Adding salt to an open wound, men experience the opposite. For them, divorce can lead to an increase in per capita income even after accounting for alimony and child support payments (McKeever & Wolfinger, 2001).

In a few cases, the view of marriage as a panacea was rejected outright by single mothers. In the same article that featured Debbie Spain above, another woman talked about the importance of self-reliance and the limited ability of marriage to protect a family from poverty.

> "Many of the homeless are whole families—men, women and children—and they are still in poverty," [Ms. Bryant] said. "A man can lose a job anytime. A man is not always the best means of support. A woman can be just as independent as a man." (Suro, p. A12)

While it is true that single mothers experience higher rates of poverty than other demographic groups, married couples are certainly not immune. In the mid-1990s, 12.7% of married-couple families were at or under the poverty line (Seccombe, 2000). The lesson here is that while marriage certainly helps decrease poverty rates, simply combining the incomes of two poor people does not necessarily equal a middle-class lifestyle.

Single mothers also addressed Dan Quayle's assumptions about them, some quite forcefully. In a *USA Today* article addressing the moral underpinnings of Quayle's rhetoric, one 26-year-old mother questioned the logic of using a man as an economic strategy.

> "There is no guarantee a man would stand by me while I am raising a child," she says. "The vice president doesn't know anything about the real world. He should come out of his ivory tower and see what's really going on. You do not have to have a husband to be financially and emotionally healthy." (Peterson, 1992, p. 1D)

This is consistent with the findings of Edin and Kefalas (2005) discussed previously. Young women, especially single mothers, view marriage with both reverence and skepticism. For them, marriage is not a priority, but it is often a long-term goal. Further, Dan Quayle's social and economic advantages were viewed with incredulity by many single mothers who resented his moralizing rhetoric about their lot in life, which did little to help improve their material conditions or address many of the large structural issues that contributed to them.

> This is what Dan Quayle failed to grasp when he went to San Francisco in May and sat down with a group of welfare mothers and told them, "Look around the table today—where are the men? These men have a responsibility too." Here were a dozen women who had enough self-respect and determination not to wait for some man to turn up and be responsible and all the vice president could say was: "Where are the men?" For him to suggest that those women are somehow to blame for the disappearance of male role models is to deny them their self-respect and, in effect, to tell them that their model of individual responsibility—society's highest principle—is not a factor in their children's lives. (Horyn, 1992, p. D1)

These comments from mothers and journalists are consistent with Hunt's (1999) claim that the "targets" or "objects" of moral regulatory discourses will not necessarily be passive recipients of attempts at reform but will exert agency and "attempt to refuse the subjectification imposed on them" (Hunt, 1999, p. 8). Mothers refused to accept the politicized narratives being thrust upon them by conservatives like Quayle. For all of their emphasis on family values and personal responsibility, this era of conservative politicians missed the mark by criticizing women who were raising children alone because they left abusive partners or had partners leave them after becoming pregnant. Many of them were in

fact taking responsibility for their actions and indeed showing tremendous respect for family by stepping up and being the best mothers they could be in the circumstances they were in.

The pushback against the idealization of American family values came from all over, including Quayle's hometown of Muncie, Indiana. A 1992 *Washington Post* article with a Muncie dateline made a point of describing how out of touch Quayle was with the people he purported to be so closely tied to: working-class Midwesterners. Men and women of many ages quoted by reporter Mary Ann French described the ways in which their values were different from those espoused by the vice president and Bush administration.

> Rick, 29, is exhausted. He is also baffled by the vice president's apparent belief that "values are what the American people care most about" as Quayle told a convention of Southern Baptists in Indianapolis earlier this month. . . . "It's hard to focus on family values when you're working all the time," says Rick. "Now I'm working two jobs. I don't know what more I can do . . . . Maybe one of these days I'll find a third one. They sit up there and say they know what we're going through, they know what it's like. No they don't. I'm sorry. They've never known what it's like." (French, 1992, p. F1)

Even White men felt alienated by Quayle's intense focus on morality and family values. The phrase "It's the economy, stupid" comes to mind here—even if Midwesterners had different "values" than coastal dwellers, they still needed good, stable, high-paying jobs to support the type of families Quayle promoted. Others saw the deployment of family values rhetoric as opportunistic and disingenuous, an insincere attempt at political posturing rather than a genuine expression of care toward the American people.

> Dominick thinks what Bush and Quayle are doing is shameful and manipulative. If they are so concerned with the dissolution of the family and its values, why didn't

> they seek to save those values four years ago, he asks—when they first came into office? (French, 1992, p. F1)

Articles of this kind sought to recontextualize the ongoing conversation about what family values meant to Americans and to call attention to the fact that Dan Quayle's White, bourgeois definition was just one of many. Quayle must have gotten the message, because in the fall of 1992, his campaign began to soften its stance in a presumed attempt to appeal to more moderate voters and distance himself from party extremists.

But these stories also served another rhetorical purpose. While the intention of the reporters crafting these narratives about the lives of single mothers might have been to shed light on the lived conditions of single mothers, the result was often a reinforcement of the trope that single mothers were poor and struggling. To be sure, many were, but the majority, even by Quayle's own admission, were not. In the *Murphy Brown* speech, Quayle rattled off the statistic that 33.4% of single-mother-headed households were in poverty. But that also means that 66.6% of them were not.

The stories about single mothers in major American newspapers often contained descriptions of dilapidated housing or bad neighborhoods, job instability or unemployment, childcare issues, and reliance on government assistance programs to make ends meet. Struggle was the predominant theme, like in this excerpt from *The New York Times*:

> Tight finances can affect parenting decisions: Every morning after Paula Brightbill gets her two older children out the door for school and leaves for her job, her 6-year-old, Michael, stays home alone for a half-hour watching cartoons until it is time to join a child next door for the walk to school. (Lewin, 1992, p. A1)

Without question, low-income single mothers—and in fact all mothers—often have to make difficult choices. In the face of astronomical childcare costs, a dearth of available

jobs, and low wages for the jobs that were available, some mothers were relegated to living in less-than-ideal conditions. Others had to choose between leaving their children home alone or losing their jobs. In 1997, New York City adopted an aggressive, punitive approach to child welfare cases. Previously, mothers who found themselves accused of non-violent child neglect or endangerment received counseling and help from social workers. But new policies enacted in the "tough on crime" mid- to late 1990s cracked down on these offenses, opting instead to arrest women and handle their cases through the court system (Swarns, 1997). This approach disproportionally affected low-income single mothers of color, and in many cases mothers might have been neglectful in a legal sense but did not actually commit a crime.

The struggle to find high-quality, reliable, affordable childcare is a universal one, even in relative terms. Regardless of race or social class, single mothers lack options when it comes to caring for their children, a fact acknowledged in some journalistic narratives.

> Finding affordable and reliable childcare was also a major concern cited by the mothers. Some hired live-in help; some found baby sitters or had relatives who would watch the children, and others waited their turns on the long waiting lists of certified daycare centers. All of the women interviewed said the process of raising children alone was physically and emotionally taxing and sometimes required the mother to take more than one job to make ends meet and always required a juggling act to meet the requirements of a job, or jobs, and the needs of children. The emotional strains of being a single mother were most acute, the women said, during emergencies—when either they or the children were sick, for example—and there was no one to turn to for help. At those times, they said, they felt a strong sense of being alone. Few had relatives nearby. (Brenner, 1992)

Even when mothers manage to find childcare and affordable housing, they often struggle in other ways. While crime was not a predominant theme in the discourse, this excerpt from a *USA Today* story helps to situate the issues faced by single mothers beyond providing basic food and shelter.

> Edna McNeil and her 9-year-old daughter live in a two-bedroom, tidy apartment in a once-glamorous neighborhood that now nervously harbors drug dealers. McNeil's mother and grandmother live in another apartment in the same building that time has treated with so little respect. Outside, restless young men often roam in clusters. And sometimes "bullets without any names on them" terrorize the neighborhood. (Peterson, 1992, p. 1D)

While there is undoubtedly value in contextualizing the situations of low-income single mothers like the stories cited above, the repeated characterization of single mothers as poor, stressed, and harried does nothing to actually help them. If anything, this representation is detrimental and reinforces the already-ubiquitous conception that a) most single mothers are on welfare or are poor, and b) they, by nature of their circumstances, put their children in danger. Furthermore, these representations do not reflect the circumstances of even *most* single mothers, yet even stories that acknowledge the majority of single mothers are not poor still choose to focus on those mothers who are.

The "Bootstrap" Principle

There are, however, some stories that do focus on the single mothers living in safe neighborhoods, working full-time, and generally making ends meet week after week. These stories offer a particularly valuable political narrative. Hunt's (1999) third element of a moral regulation project is specialized knowledge, either expert or informal, and the fourth is a discourse within which that knowledge is given a normative context. Media texts in which

single women with children are able to overcome (sometimes significant) obstacles to be successful provide fuel for the moral fire.

For the last century, parenting manuals and magazines have functioned to create and socially construct ideas about culturally acceptable mothering practices (Hays, 1996). The discourses therein have been guided by so-called child-rearing experts, who provide parents—although almost exclusively mothers (Sunderland, 2006)—with advice about how to properly care for, nurture, discipline, feed, clothe, play, and interact with their children in developmentally appropriate ways. More recently, parenting websites, blogs, discussion forums, Facebook groups, and all manners of online environs have assumed this same role. To parent outside of the generally accepted standards will at best lead to a vicious verbal lambasting, and at worst to accusations of abuse or neglect accompanied by police intervention.

The government itself also acts as a source of expert knowledge with regard to child-rearing and parenting information. The United States Department of Health and Human Services was founded in 1953 and has been the umbrella department under which the Administration for Children and Families is housed. This agency functions as a clearinghouse for information related to childcare, early childhood development, Head Start programs, child welfare, and more. The Bush administration's focus on family values, coupled with the parenting discourses presented by magazines and books, functions to create a body of "expert" knowledge by which most American parents should adhere. Dan Quayle's speech provided an ideal scenario in which to normalize discourses about family values, morality, and how those ideas relate to mothering.

Along with concern about the breakdown of families and traditional family values, Quayle's original speech also lauded the importance of personal responsibility, hard work,

and integrity. The single mothers featured in a 1993 *Essence* story embodied all of these principles and more, each overcoming obstacles, making sacrifices, and ultimately reaping the rewards of their hard work. The story went so far as to eschew the welfare mother stereotype by including an anecdote about how one of the mothers sold her diamond engagement ring in order to afford childcare, get bus fare to look for work, and get off welfare.

> Lydia also knew she had to get off welfare two years later when a problem with a check caused one son, only 5-years-old at the time, to complain loudly about not getting their money. "Being educated in sociology and psychology and having worked as a caseworker, I recognized that as being the beginning of the welfare mentality," says Lydia. "And that day . . . I realized I had to get out." Lydia sold her diamond engagement ring so she could afford day care for her sons and have bus fare to go on job interviews. (Cain, 1993, p. 3)

Lydia embodied many of the characteristics lauded by Dan Quayle. And her story had a happy ending; her children grew up and graduated from college, and she eventually earned a master's degree of her own. Lydia is thus the embodiment of conservative bootstrap rhetoric—women can, and should, do whatever it takes to get off welfare and better themselves.

Two women in the story had similar tales; one got pregnant while in college but persisted and, at the time of the story's publication, was nearing the end of her Bachelor of Arts. degree while working for an airline. Another ran her own business and went to school. Both lived with their parents. Compared to the tales of woe presented in more mainstream news sources, these stories about single mothers—particularly single mothers of color—overcoming the odds, getting degrees, starting businesses, and being successful are a breath

of fresh air. But they are also somewhat disingenuous. Each of the featured women had family to fall back on. Each of them had some resources at their disposal to be able to go to college. None of them did it entirely on her own, and the value of familial assistance cannot be understated. These kinds of feel-good feature stories are popular, argued media critic John Leo in a 1992 *U.S. New and World Report* column, because

> [m]edia culture tends to frame issues in terms of options, choice and lifestyle. This is a noncensorious culture in which it is considered tacky to emit any discouraging words about other people's choices and lifestyles. Indeed, part of the silence of the media on the damage to children comes from the fear of seeming to criticize or hurt the feelings of parents, usually women, who are raising (or who are forced to raise) children alone. A byproduct of this attitude is an ocean of feel-good journalism and programming that's intended to praise the self-esteem of single mothers. Part of the result is the detoxifying of people who put children through this intentionally . . . . This helps promote the birth of at-risk babies. It amounts to cheerleading for the unraveling of the social structure, a common affliction of those who labor in medialand. (Leo, 1992, p. 19)

In contrast to Leo's (1992) claims about the feel-good nature of media discourse about single mothers and their families, the present analysis did not find a glut of these types of stories. They were few and far between, and when they were present, they certainly did not function to "praise the self-esteem of single mothers." Further, Leo's assertion that stories about single mothers overcoming obstacles promotes the birth of at-risk babies is preposterous. Women do not have children outside of marriage as a result of journalistic narrative. And single mothers are not, by any measure, an intrinsic danger to their children.

But Leo (1992) was right on one account: the direct, unabashed finger-wagging at single mothers was largely seen as unnecessary, and those who partook of it publicly sometimes found the tables turned. This is precisely what happened after Dan Quayle criticized Murphy Brown (and by proxy single mothers) and ultimately had to walk back his initial statements, saying instead that single mothers were heroines. Moreover, the reliance on family for support, like in the *Essence* story above, is acceptable in the eyes of the Bush/Quayle administration, because family is part of the moral value structure they believed should be the norm. Quayle's personal responsibility–centered definition of family values might not have intended to encompass parents supporting adult children with children, but these extended networks of family support are commonplace among low-income single mothers who must often cobble together informal systems of childcare, transportation, and additional income in order to make ends meet (Edin & Lein, 1997).

The location of this particular narrative is also rhetorically significant. *Essence's* target audience is predominantly Black women, and data have consistently shown that Black women are not only significantly more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to be single mothers (Centers of Disease Control, 1995), but they are also more likely to be poor. According to Dill and Williams (1992), White women may become poor as a result of single motherhood, but Black women are frequently already poor when they become single parents. By focusing the above-referenced feature story on women who overcame challenges to become successful, *Essence* was complicit in perpetuating the idea that Black single mothers can be prosperous if only they are willing to work hard enough. Of course, this fits right into the conservative family values rhetoric of personal responsibility, which summarily dismisses the roles government and other social structures and institutions may have in creating the inequalities that make it difficult for single mothers of any race to be successful.

Sex, Welfare, and Single Women

The fifth element of Hunt's (1999) moral regulation framework is "a set of practices." By this, he meant a behavior that can be linked to some form of harm ("harm" being the sixth and final component). Hunt (1999) argued that the most fundamental of moralized practices/behaviors is sex, stating "that sex, sexuality and sexual conduct have rarely been far from the center of attention—to such an extent that for at least the last 200-years sex and morals have been virtually synonymous" (p. 21). Hunt contended in *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* that most moral regulatory movements involving sex or sexuality originate from the middle classes and fan outward rather than moving from the top down. Using case studies from Britain and the United States, Hunt traced the evolution of several moral regulation movements beginning in the 17th century through the present.

Hunt (1999) claimed that discourses surrounding health, in addition to projects of self-regulation, manifest themselves in the moral regulation of others. This does not, of course, happen in a vacuum. These movements are linked, through both time and institutions, and have significant political and sociocultural consequences. "Movements that originate in attempts to promote male sexual self-control find themselves pressing for extensions to the criminalization of sexual conduct" (p. 2). The same argument can certainly be made for movements involving women. Moreover, Hunt posited that the same issues cycle through discourses of moral regulation, but the contexts in which they are discussed are shifted. For example, "while smoking was for centuries locked into the politics of status and distinction, today it has been substantially harnessed by a powerful constellation of class cultures and state and medical institutions" (p. 3). These distinctions are important because the politics of sex as they relate to women, particularly unmarried women, have, through

time, shifted in ways that are largely ignored today. While we often think of the buttoned-up, chaste, politically correct sexual mores of the Victorian or Puritan eras, this was not always true in practice. Analyses of premarital pregnancy rates in the early United States indicate that the second half of the 18th century saw a peak in these figures, from around 10% in the 17th century to 30% in the latter half of the 18th century (Smith & Hindus, 1975). Moreover, as discussed previously, sex before marriage in the early to mid-20th century was not as atypical as the family values politicians of the 1990s would have us believe. Women of this era married before their pregnancies became visible, were shuttled off to maternity homes and forced to give their babies up for adoption, or lived with the stigma of being unchaste. In 1950, nearly 40% of women were sexually active by the time they were 20 years old (Fessler, 2006). Clearly, abstinence before marriage was not as universal in practice as in theory.

Although sex and sexuality are long-standing targets of moral regulatory efforts, the family values rhetoric of the Bush/Clinton era and all of its associated media commentary contained almost no discussion of sex. The exceptions were when Diane English, creator and producer of the *Murphy Brown* show, issued a statement immediately after Dan Quayle's speech about upholding abortion rights. A similar remark was made by the mother of the twin boys who jointly played the role of Murphy's infant son. The 33-year-old single mother urged Quayle to support abortion rights and the Family Leave Act in a 1992 *USA Today* article (Urschel, 1992, p. 1A).

The most direct reference to sexual activity came in a July 1992 *Washington Post* feature about family values, in which Gary Bauer, president of the conservative Family Research Council think tank, discussed the dissonance between what people said family values were and how they subsequently behaved.

> You get ready agreement on the concept [of family values] but as soon as you take it to the next step and suggest the culture has a responsibility here, or say virtue is important and thus we shouldn't be giving our kids condoms, then you get a big, hot, nasty debate. My side would argue that you can't be serious about virtue if in the same breath you are talking to children about how to make sodomy a healthful practice. (Oldenberg, 1992, p C5)

The assertion here is that virtuous or moral families do not discuss sex, or if they do, it is in the context of abstinence until marriage. Unfortunately for Bauer's "side," copious studies have shown that abstinence-only education is ineffective in dissuading teen sex and indeed leads to higher rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections—precisely the opposite of what he presumably hoped for (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). It is also noteworthy that Bauer chose to highlight sodomy given that it is (or was at the time) most frequently associated with homosexual sex. This word choice appears to be strategic—made for shock value, as if saying "making premarital sex a healthful practice" would not have been impactful enough. By choosing to use sodomy as an example, Bauer was essentially implying that so much as talking about gay sex was wrong, let alone actually engaging in it. The Family Research Council, it should be noted, is the political lobbying arm of the evangelical Focus on the Family ministry organization, which strongly opposes, and offers policy recommendations on, issues like gay rights and gay marriage, bisexuality, transgenderism, premarital sex, abortion, comprehensive sex education, single motherhood, stem cell research, and a whole host of other social "problems."

But as far as overt discussions about sex are concerned, Bauer's remarks are as explicit as it got. The near total absence of discourse about sex, reproduction, and sexuality is surprising and somewhat curious. After all, just a few years later the media was not the least

bit shy about discussing the lurid details of President Clinton's sexual affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. However, another far less subtle moral indictment of single mothers is running through some veins of the discourse. The view of single mothers as welfare-dependent is a moral critique as much as, if not more than, an economic one. This theme is discussed at length in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the construction of single mothers throughout news media narratives in the wake of Dan Quayle's criticism of fictional television journalist Murphy Brown. Giving special consideration to the rhetoric of "family values" and the ways in which that rhetoric contributed to myths about nuclear families, I demonstrated that such accounts of single mothers functioned as mechanisms of moral regulation, which, intentionally or not, positioned single mothers as social deviants. Media narratives in this sample legitimized conservative "family values" rhetoric by consistently giving consideration to the arguments and positions of stakeholders who prescribed a frighteningly narrow definition of "family values" as a panacea for all manner of social ills. I also identified strains of discourse in which single mothers and their allies attempted to construct counter-narratives and define their own identities in the face of these unfavorable depictions. These counter-narratives were of critical importance given the subordinate status of single mothers in relation to the policymakers and social conservatives who wielded "irresponsible" sexuality as a rhetorical weapon that threatened the core values of American society.

CHAPTER 4. ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT

> A long time ago, I concluded that the current welfare system undermines the basic values of work, responsibility and family, trapping generation after generation in dependency and hurting the very people it was designed to help.
>
> — Bill Clinton, 1996
>
> If we don't deal with out-of-wedlock births, then we're not really dealing with welfare reform.
>
> — Bob Dole, 1995

During the same tumultuous presidential campaign in which Dan Quayle decried the loss of family values and called single motherhood "just another lifestyle choice," Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton was making his own headlines. In his July 16, 1992, acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, Clinton talked about the importance of a strong middle class, growing the economy, and, perhaps most famously, promise of ending "welfare as we know it." Four years later, in August 1996, he did just that when he signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) into law. This legislation effectively dismantled the more than 60-year-old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, also known colloquially as welfare, which had been initially developed, along with Supplemental Security Income (SSI/Disability) and unemployment insurance, to support poor families during the depression in the late 1920s and 1930s. In its place, Clinton approved the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, also referred to as "workfare."

The differences between TANF and AFDC were stark (see Table 4.1). Summarily, under AFDC all poor families with children (as defined by federal statutory language) were guaranteed to receive cash assistance. Eligibility and benefit levels were determined by the states but had to fall within federal guidelines, and funding was open-ended and shared by both entities. The amount of cash assistance was determined by family size, earned income,

and consideration of certain expenses. There were no time limits associated with benefits, so families remained eligible as long as they met the guidelines.

Table 4.1. Key Differences Between AFDC and TANF

	AFDC	TANF
Federal Funding	-Unlimited for AFDC and emergency assistance for needy families -Capped for JOBS -Federal share of AFDC and JOBS costs varied with state per capita income	-Fixed block grants to states -And (1) contingency funding and loans for states with high population growth and low welfare spending; (2) welfare-to-work grants through FY 2003; (3) bonuses to states that reduce out-of-wedlock births and abortions
State Funding	Matching required for each federal dollar	States must spend 75% of "historic" level (100% for contingency funds) and must provide matching for contingency funds
Eligibility	Children with one parent with an incapacitated or unemployed second parent	Set by states
Income Limits	Set by states	Set by states
Benefit Levels	Set by states	Set by states
Entitlement	States required to assist all families eligible under state income standards	Expressly denies benefits to some individuals
Work Requirement	JOBS program had participation requirements, but not work requirements	By 2002, states must have 50% of caseload in specified work activities
Exemptions from Work Requirement	Parents with a child under age three (under age one at state option)	None, but states may exempt single parents caring for children under age one
Work Trigger	None	Work (as defined by the state) required after a maximum of two years of benefits
Time Limits	None	60 months (20% hardship exception allowed)
Child Support Enforcement	Cooperation required	Cooperation required
Legal Non-Citizen Residents	Eligible	Not Eligible

This objective of this chapter is twofold. First, I examine coverage of 1990s welfare reform legislation and its impact on single mothers in primarily, but not exclusively, the top three nationally circulating newspapers at the time—*The New York Times, The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*—focusing most intensely on the 12-month period surrounding the passage

of the PRWORA and implementation of TANF in August 1996. Because the debate surrounding welfare reform occurred throughout the 1990s, meaningful and significant texts published outside this 12-month time frame were also included when pertinent. In addition, the sample also included select magazine articles, published nonprofit and government reports, television and radio transcripts, and high-profile speeches given by key figures that focused on relevant subject matters. This process was designed to uncover insights into the salient topics and themes of discourse during the time.

Second, using Hunt's (1999) moral regulation framework, and the arguments of Mink (2001) and Smith (2002, 2007) that the PRWORA and TANF policies functioned as tools of moral and sexual regulation for single mothers, I focus on a key element of moral and sexual regulation in TANF, the collection of child support, and analyze the sample for discourses that ignored, reinforced, or pushed back against reforms intended to bring single mothers on government assistance in line with hegemonic, heteropatriarchal norms of behavior.

I begin with a broad outline of the development of entitlement programs in the United States as they relate to single mothers, followed by a critical analysis of dominant discursive themes in conjunction with an overview of relevant literature. In the second section, I present a tightly focused overview of the structuralist and individualist perspectives of poverty and analyze the moral regulatory discourses about single mothers in media coverage of TANF/welfare policies, with an emphasis on child support collection practices.

The Development of Welfare

In 1988, the Family Support Act established the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, which required participation in job training or education programs as a condition of AFDC eligibility. There were a number of exceptions to this

requirement, however, but participants who were employed had a proportional reduction in their benefit allowance. Critics of AFDC argued that it discouraged recipients from working and encouraged unmarried women to have additional children since their benefit allotment increased with each family member. Most AFDC recipients were also eligible for food stamps, subsidized childcare if they were working or pursuing an education, and subsidized housing through the Section 8 program. All families receiving AFDC were automatically eligible for Medicaid.

TANF completely dismantled the entitlement structure of AFDC, eliminating any guarantee of cash assistance or any assistance at all. One of the most notable and dramatic changes was to the overall funding configuration. Rather than leaving funding open-ended and matching federal funds with state contributions, TANF created a single federal block grant that allotted a lump sum of $16.4 billion a year to be divided among the states based on previous AFDC- and JOBS-related program expenditures.

Further, TANF implemented a cumulative lifetime benefit cap of 60 months for families, with a few narrow provisions for states to allow exemptions. There were also strict work requirements imposed on TANF recipients, requiring most to go to work within two years or lose their benefits, and states were penalized with funding cuts if they did not meet the established quotas. Funding for other related social service programs like food stamps, childcare assistance, unemployment insurance, SSI, and services for disabled children and legal immigrants were also dramatically cut or eliminated completely. Like AFDC, TANF required single mothers to cooperate with child support enforcement agencies to identify the biological father(s) of their children in order to attempt to recoup part of the cost of any assistance the mother might receive; put another way, mothers seeking welfare had to relinquish their child support payments to the state in order to receive cash assistance.

Unlike AFDC, though, TANF included a provision permitting states to implement family caps, allowing for the denial of additional benefits or reduction of existing cash grants to families who have additional children while on assistance. As of 2016, at least 15 states still had these caps in place, down from 23 in 2009 (Wiltz, 2016).

Proponents of the PRWORA and TANF believed these sweeping changes would discourage (or render impossible) welfare dependency, curb out-of-wedlock childbearing, promote marriage, and encourage self-sufficiency and personal responsibility. Critics of the new program, on the other hand, insisted it would have the opposite effects—leading to greater levels of poverty and hunger, leaving the most vulnerable Americans with no reliable safety net. Moreover, some critics, like Cornell University legal and political theorist Anna Marie Smith and feminist legal scholar Gwendolyn Mink, argued that the legislation—particularly the child support enforcement, abstinence-only sex education, marriage promotion, and family cap—functioned unabashedly as tools of sexual and moral regulation of poor women.

Single Mothers and Social Safety Nets

The Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, the precursor to AFDC, was first devised in 1935 in conjunction with the SSA and was viewed as a safety net program for children who either had been abandoned or whose parent—typically the mother—had been widowed. The inclusion of adult caretakers and parents (under AFDC) was not accounted for until years later. The SSA was not the first social program to offer assistance to poor children and families, however; most states, cities, and municipalities had individual formal and informal systems of aid for the poor that functioned to keep needy families and children afloat, if only barely, and each devised their own guidelines for deservedness and distribution. Most early programs drew upon Elizabethan poor laws imported from the

British. These systems of public aid were piecemeal, and most lone mothers were provided with what was known as "outdoor" relief—small gifts of food or money from public sources. The amount of aid varied, and the continuation of relief was never guaranteed as a right (Katz, 2013). It was not until after the Civil War and the advent of veterans' pensions that White women began to fare a bit better. Some semi-skilled and unskilled jobs opened up to them, although only a tiny fraction of women worked outside the home, and a few states began to introduce mothers' pensions. The situation for Black women, however, was vastly different, as they had long been working in the homes of White women or in agriculture for poverty-level wages, while local benefit agencies and social workers often conspired to deny them benefits (Katz, 2013).

The creation of mothers' pensions early in the 20th century was primarily the result of a grassroots lobbying effort on behalf of elite and middle-class women who rallied political support for public spending on behalf of poor women and their children, despite lacking the right to vote themselves. Skocpol (1995) argued that upper-class women were motivated to do this because they shared the common bond of motherhood with women of lower socioeconomic status, and also because it would strengthen their own status as mothers. Historian Linda Gordon outlined why Skocpol's theory was likely correct. Gordon's (1994) thorough history of single mothers and the welfare system documents how upper-class women were well aware of the ways in which the world of paid work was incompatible with motherhood. First, the pay for women's labor was inadequate to support a family no matter how many hours she worked, and second, the work schedules and conditions of "women's" jobs left mothers with no time or energy for housework or childcare. Single mothers were often forced to send their older children off to work while younger children were confined at home or left on the streets to fend for themselves. By

doing so, mothers risked permanently losing their children to orphanages if they did not concede to giving them up voluntarily (White, 1994).

In the 1910s, a broad coalition of reformers headed by groups like the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the National Congress of Mothers, as well as a collection of juvenile court justices, local law and labor unions, and media outlets, including The *New York Evening World*, *Outlook*, the *Nation,* and the *Delineator*, proposed that state and local governments provide poor single mothers and their children with cash payments (Howard, 1992). While the coalition was met with resistance from private groups like the Charity Organization Society, the opposition was not enough to stop the effort, and mothers' pensions spread rapidly throughout the country, with 20 states adopting some sort of program between 1911 and 1913. By 1920, a total of 39 states had done so. Within another 15 years, every state except Georgia and South Carolina provided some sort of mothers' pension program. Although initially limited to providing relief only to widows, by the 1930s, in nearly all states benefits were expanded to other classes of women (never-married, abandoned, and divorcees) and the age limit was increased for eligible children.

Ironically, the term "mothers' pension" is itself a bit of a misnomer given that the amount of aid administered per household depended exclusively on the number of children and did not make any provision for support of the mother herself (Howard, 1992). Moreover, even the most generous states had what could be considered draconian criteria for eligibility. These standards were typically based on three broad and often loosely defined categories: financial need, the status of the children's father, and "suitability" of the mother.

Stringent means and asset tests were put in place to ensure only the neediest cases received assistance. In Massachusetts, for example, a single mother was deemed ineligible if the value of her home was appraised at more than $2,500, or if she had more than $500 in

home equity or other property. Liquid assets of more than $200 were also impermissible. In Illinois, welfare officials would track down relatives of an applicant and ask them to provide the applicant with financial support. If the relatives were able to provide help but refused, the applicant would be required to sue them or else be deemed ineligible (Howard, 1992).

Women who applied for aid nearly always had to prove that the father(s) of their children were absent, dead, or otherwise unable to support them, and there was a clear moral hierarchy of deservedness when it came to a woman's pathway to single motherhood. Widows had—and in the eyes of some today, still have—the moral upper hand when it came to being worthy of taxpayer-funded state help. One opponent of expansion to non-widowed single mothers stated:

> To pension desertion or illegitimacy would, undoubtedly, have the effect of a premium upon these crimes against society . . . . It is a great deal more difficult to determine the worthiness of such mothers than of the widow, and a great deal more dangerous for the state to attempt relief on any large scale. (quoted in Bell, 1965, pp. 6–7)

Perhaps the most notorious requirements of mothers' pensions and subsequent welfare laws were the mandatory home visits recipients were often subjected to, usually with little or no notice, under the guise of ensuring their homes were fit for children. What mothers and case workers both knew, however, was that the true reason for these home visits was to make sure the women did not have male housemates, that their homes were not too nice (a signal of too high an income) but also not too dirty (a sign of laziness). In her thorough and fascinating investigation of mothers' allowances in Canada from the early 1920s to the late 1990s, Margaret Little (1998) argued that these intrusive home visits and the invasive interviewing process that preceded them functioned as intense forms of moral

regulation intended to both shame and scare single mothers into compliance with welfare law and middle-class financial and sexual mores.

> There are a number of others who volunteer to scrutinize a mother's behavior. Again, this is often justified on financial grounds. Teachers, judges, landlords, and a number of taxpayers have made it their personal mission to ensure that single mothers do not "cheat." The implication in much of this scrutiny is that those who pay the bills also have the right to define moral codes of behaviour for society. Similar to charity work, these workers and volunteers feel justified in imposing their moral values upon the others they are "helping." (Little, 1998, p. 173)

While Little's research focused on Canadian women, American single mothers were also subjected to home visits and concentrated scrutiny by welfare agency workers, the state, and their communities in a process that sought to determine whether they were deserving of aid. Requirements varied by location, but generally case workers were supposed to visit recipients' homes at least a few times a year, and as frequently as once a month.

> While social workers enjoyed considerable latitude in determining the substance of these visits, they were instructed to look for signs that aid was no longer needed. A typical mothers' pensions law directed social workers to investigate "the condition of the home and family and all other data which might assist in determining the wisdom of the measure taken and the advisability of their continuance." (Howard, 1992, p. 198)

The passing of the SSA in 1935 helped reshape the welfare landscape in the early part of the 20th century by providing some standardization to the laws and policies governing the distribution of federal funds, as well as the asset and eligibility parameters for applicants. During the course of the next half-century, the ADC program morphed into the

AFDC program, taking into account the needs of the mother/caretaker as well as the children. Then, in the mid-1960s, the Food Stamp program (later renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, and Medicaid were implemented, giving single mothers additional forms of public assistance to rely on in addition to the meager cash payments provided by AFDC. In 1974, Congress authorized the Section 8 program under the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Section 8 provides housing assistance vouchers to low-income families and was originally designed to help poor urban families move out of crime-ridden neighborhoods and into communities where their kids could attend better schools. However, since its inception, Section 8 has been woefully underfunded and poorly designed, serving only about 25% of eligible households.

> In much of the country, landlords can refuse to take Section 8 vouchers, even if the voucher covers the rent. And, unlike the landlords in poor neighborhoods . . . many landlords of buildings in nicer neighborhoods will do anything to keep voucher-holders out. The result is that Section 8 traps families in the poorest neighborhoods. (Semuels, 2015)

Anyone lucky enough to get off the sometimes years-long waiting list for Section 8 housing vouchers are then tasked with the onerous chore of finding suitable housing in the 60- to 90-day timeframe or they risk losing the voucher. Since landlords are not required to accept vouchers, and those who do accept them often cluster voucher-holders in lower-income areas, many Section 8 recipients find themselves not much better off with the voucher in securing better-quality housing.

Taken together, AFDC, SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, and Section 8 made up the core of what most Americans considered welfare programs by the 1980s. While each program was

funded and operated by different government agencies, eligibility for one program usually meant eligibility for the others, and sometimes applications for services were combined or considered in tandem. However, when Bill Clinton and other politicians in the late 1980s and 1990s began talking about welfare reform, they were primarily concerned with altering the structure of AFDC and cash payments to families.

While the original intentions of these social safety net programs were to provide relief to the most vulnerable populations of Americans and alleviate poverty in the United States, it took a few decades for these programs to become associated with social decline and deviance.

> ADC began to gain the public perception that it was a program for "undeserving single mothers" after survivor benefits in Social Security shifted most widows—the mothers considered deserving of help—to Social Security benefits. This turn of events led to the public perception of ADC as a program for morally corrupt single mothers and African Americans who were ineligible for Social Security. (Hancock, 2004, p. 35)

Part of the reason for this negative view of AFDC was the low rate of workforce participation among its female participants, despite a huge increase in the number of women working at least part time since the 1950s. Further, the "welfare queen" stereotype introduced by Ronald Reagan in 1976 had long permeated public perceptions about female public assistance recipients, creating what Hancock (2004) termed a "politics of disgust" surrounding single mothers on welfare, particularly Black single mothers on welfare: "the public identity of welfare recipients—created from the misperception that they are all or mostly single mothers who are poor and African American—interacts with . . . the politics of

disgust to produce legislative outcomes that are undemocratic both procedurally and substantively" (p. 6). She continued:

> The politics of disgust is an emotion-laden response to long-standing beliefs about single, poor African American mothers that has spread, epidemiologically, to all recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and to recipients of other welfare program, including Social Security Income (SSI) and related programs for what citizens previously considered "the deserving poor." (p. 9)

Importantly, public perception of the average welfare recipient and the actual racial composition of program beneficiaries have always been vastly different. Before World War II, only about 14% of African-American applicants were allowed ADC (Abramovitz, 1996). But longitudinal data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1995) found the proportion of White and Black parents and children among AFDC recipients to be roughly equal—within about a five-percentage point range—from 1983 to 1996, with neither racial group exceeding 42% of total recipients. So, while Whites and African Americans were receiving welfare benefits at about the same rates, public resentment was rapidly mounting toward the "undeserving poor"—that is, unmarried, sexually promiscuous Black women who were unwilling to work for their keep.

There were also growing middle-class anxieties about the perceived rise in welfare dependency among these women. Fraser and Gordon (1994) argued that the very word "dependency" was "the single most crucial term in the current U.S. debate about welfare reform" (p. 4).

> [The phrase "welfare dependency"] entered the American lexicon early but metamorphosed over time. Originating in the late nineteenth-century discourse of

> pauperism, modified in the Progressive Era, and stabilized in the period of the New Deal, this use of the term was fundamentally ambiguous, slipping easily, and repeatedly, from an economic meaning to a moral/psychological meaning. The United States was especially hospitable to elaborating dependency as a defect of individual character. (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p. 319)

Changes in public perception about who was receiving welfare also led to shifts in public opinion about welfare programs and their participants. MacLeod, Montero, and Speer (1999) examined changing attitudes toward welfare and welfare recipients between 1938 and 1995. Their findings indicate 71% of respondents in 1987 believed the government had a responsibility to take care of those in need. By 1995, only one year before Clinton signed the PRWORA, that number had decreased to 61% (see Table 4.2). This was coupled with some dramatic swings in opinion about other issues. In 1992, 29% of those polled agreed welfare recipients could "get along without" public assistance if they tried, while 50% stated they thought most welfare recipients "really needed the help" to get by. A mere two years later, those figures had shifted to 48% and 35%, respectively (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.2. Attitudes Toward Government Responsibility to Provide for Those in Need, 1938–1995

Year*	Yes (Favor) (%)	No (Oppose) (%)
1938	68	28
1940	65	28
1946	72	19
1947	73	19
1948	73	19
1964	72	20
1973	68	27
1983	83	11
1987	71	24
1988	74	23
1990	67	29
1992	69	28
1993	62	35
1994	57	41
1994	65	29
1995	63	30
1995	61	30

Results from MacLeod et al. (1999). *Data reported twice in one year indicate that the question was asked twice in the same year. **The question asked, "Do you agree or disagree: It is the responsibility of the government to take care of people who cannot take care of themselves?" Over the years, slight variations were made in the wording of the question. "Don't know" responses were not recorded thus percentages may not equal 100.

Table 4.3. Attitudes Toward Welfare Recipients, 1976–1994

Year*	Get Along Without (%)	Really Need Help (%)	Half and Half (%)	Don't Know (%)
1976	52	38	--	10
1976	51	36	--	13
1977	54	31	--	14
1980	51	39	--	10
1981	55	32	--	15
1986	40	35	20	4
1992	29	50	16	4
1994	48	35	13	4
1994	46	44	--	10

Results adapted from McLeod et al. (1999). *Data reported twice in one year indicate that the question was asked twice in the same year. **The question asked, "In your opinion, do you think that most people who receive money from welfare could get along without help if they tried, or do you think most of them really need this help?"

Even more radical was the shift in the number of people who believed the poor were responsible for their own poverty (Table 4.4). In 1990, 30% of respondents thought the main cause of poverty was "a lack of one's own effort," while 48% thought it was a result of "circumstances beyond his or her control" and 20% said "both." Only five years later, those figures had moved to 60%, 30%, and 7%, respectively. In other words, Americans were far more likely to believe that poverty was a result of a lack of individual effort, even though a slight majority still felt the government had some responsibility to help the poor.

Table 4.4. Attitudes Toward the Cause of Poverty

Year*	Lack of Effort (%)	Circumstances (%)	Both (%)	Don't Know (%)
1982	37	39	17	7
1984	33	34	31	2
1988	40	37	17	6
1989	38	42	17	3
1990	35	45	17	3
1990	30	48	20	2
1992	27	52	18	3
1993	48	33	17	2
1994	44	34	18	4
1995	60	30	7	3

Results adapted from McLeod et al. (1999). *Data reported twice in one year indicate that the question was asked twice in the same year. **The question asked, "In your opinion, which is more often to blame if a person is poor—lack of effort on his or her own part or circumstances beyond his or her control?"

As a specific segment of the welfare-receiving population, mothers on welfare were not regarded sympathetically by the general public but were generally viewed with a level of suspicion. A nationwide focus group conducted by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (Farkas, 1995) between June and July 1995 found that "welfare moms" were a common source of frustration for participants, who perceived these benefit recipients to bear children carelessly and use their welfare checks as an alternative to work.

> When confronted with the issue of mothers on welfare, people express the same desire for firmness and fair warning as they do in their approach to time limits and able-bodied recipients. "We can understand one mistake," people say, "but be warned: you will not get additional money for additional babies." (p. 19)

Focus group participants also consistently and strongly believed welfare mothers should work or perform community service in exchange for their benefits. They reasoned that work provided mothers with a sense of self-respect and self-worth and would teach their children the value of earning their way in the world (Farkas, Johnson, Friedman, & Bers, 1996). Reese (2005) argued that these overwhelmingly negative attitudes toward welfare programs and the poor mothers receiving them were fueled by a backlash against welfare expansion in the 1960s. It took an amalgam of social and political factors to ultimately coalesce and push the PRWORA through Congress in 1996. According to Reese (2005):

> Anti-welfare propaganda and bipartisan attacks on welfare mothers spread through the mainstream media, increased public opposition to AFDC. Anti-welfare rhetoric resonated with the broader public, especially more affluent and traditionally minded whites, because it tapped into broadly held values, resentments, stereotypes, and concerns. Attacks on welfare mothers exploited racist stereotypes of poor blacks and Latinos and appealed to white resentment toward taxes, civil rights gains, and the recent wave of immigration. The rise in women's labor force participation also increased expectations that poor mothers work. Finally, traditional 'family values' and concerns about the rise in single motherhood, especially among blacks and Latinos, created support for punitive policies toward "deadbeat dads," unwed mothers, and teenage mothers. Rising public opposition to welfare in turn put increased pressure on politicians to champion tough welfare policies. (p. 172)

From Political Rhetoric to Painful Reality

Even before President Clinton officially signed the PRWORA into law in August 1996, many states had already begun to experiment with cuts to benefits and developing their own workfare programs with varying degrees of success. The tone of political and

cultural rhetoric had shifted since Dan Quayle's blunder about Murphy Brown. To be sure, single motherhood was still seen as immoral, but it was immoral largely because it encouraged reliance on public assistance. Rather than handwringing about single mothers being detrimental to children and the need for "family values," media buzzwords in the era of welfare reform included terms like "personal responsibility," "dependency," "opportunity," "illegitimacy," "self-sufficiency," and "self-esteem." In a 1996 welfare reform–focused story in *The New York Times* ("Some Look at the Welfare Plan with Hope," 1996), Florida Republican Representative E. Clay Shaw Jr. discussed the welfare system and its goals in these words, activating several of these buzzwords along the way:

> It definitely helps the poor; that is the way it should be. It helps build their self-esteem and puts them to work. The measure replaces a welfare system with a work program. It will be a revolutionary way we attack poverty. . . . We have a responsibility to see that everyone is given the opportunity and is able to accept a job. It is the obligation of government to allow everyone the opportunity to share in the American dream. We are helping more than halfway to that goal. (p. A26)

Later in the same article, which was a compilation of quotes from various welfare reform stakeholders, Christopher Bond, a Republican senator from Missouri, offered his perspective, once again deploying the language of responsibility, illegitimacy, and opportunity:

> There can be no doubt that the current system is a failure. That should be one thing that is agreed upon by Republicans, Democrats, liberals, conservatives and anyone else who is concerned about their fellow man today. It is cruel to adults who are treated like numbers when they need public assistance. It is even crueler to the children because it encourages a lifetime of dependency and they are raised in an

> atmosphere without hope. The current system discourages work, but it encourages illegitimacy . . . . (p. A26)

The issues of morality playing out in media discourse focused much less on the lack of family values displayed by single mothers, and instead concentrated on the strain lazy single mothers and their illegitimate children placed on the hardworking, taxpaying citizens funding the welfare infrastructure.

Politicians were not interested in allowing welfare mothers to stay home and care for their young children to provide stability. An at-home mother is, after all, an upper-middle-class luxury. Most policymakers in Washington, D.C., and the leaders of state governments seemed all too eager to get welfare mothers off the dole and into jobs as soon as possible, often with little to no regard for whether those jobs were actually able to support the women's families.

Single mothers repeatedly discussed the difficulties they encountered in trying to get themselves off welfare—a lack of job skills, transportation, reliable childcare, and scheduling flexibility, coupled with the loss of already-meager food stamp, cash, and childcare benefits as soon as employment kicked in, often left mothers in the red after working 40-plus hour weeks. For most, like Jewell Bibbs, a 21-year-old single mother cited in a 1996 *New York Times* story, the stress of grinding through weeks of sometimes physically demanding jobs away from their children only to still not be able to pay the bills was too much:

> "They made it sound so good," she said of her experience in the program. "They help you with childcare. They help you with bus fare. But they tell you you can find a good job. And to them, any job is a good job. You can get one of them and you're still going to be poor." (Golden, 1996, p. A23)

This was a common refrain among mothers. In another 1996 *New York Times* story, reporter Lizette Alvarez talked to mothers in an emergency shelter, many of whom were concerned about their economic prospects under welfare reform.

> But where, they ask, are the jobs that will pay their bills? Who will take care of their children when they are at work? How will they ever find an apartment they can afford? New York City, they say, is not Idaho, and $4.25 an hour does not add up to $800 a month in rent. "If you work a minimum wage job, that's nothing," said Teresa Falu, 33, who wound up at the center with her three children. "Think about paying rent, with a family, working at McDonald's. You will rob the cash register is what you will do." (Alvarez, 1996, p A23)

Single mothers on welfare regularly discuss the disparity between actual wages and cost of living. Conservative policymakers typically argued that pushing mothers into low-paid work functioned only as a starting point and that those positions would allow them to gain job skills, whereby improving their wages and eventually their socioeconomic status overall. But the reality, as it so often is, was far less idyllic.

Peter Edelman was President Clinton's assistant secretary for planning and evaluation at the Department of Health and Human Services. Edelman, along with two other administration officials, resigned in protest after Clinton signed the PRWORA and wrote a biting critique of the legislation, which was published in *The Atlantic* in March 1997. Edelman (1997) argued forcefully that Clinton had chosen to restructure welfare funding into block grants in part because

> Medicaid block grants would have negative consequences for a much larger slice of the electorate than would welfare block grants. Large numbers of middle-income people had elderly parents in nursing homes whose bills were paid by Medicaid—to

> say nothing of the potential impact on hospitals, physicians, and the nursing homes themselves, all of which groups have substantial political clout. Welfare had no politically powerful constituency that would be hurt by conversion to block grants. (p. 46)

In other words, Clinton chose the most vulnerable, least politically vocal and influential segment of the population to play political chess with. Edelman (1997) further argued that the entire structure of the PRWORA is actually hostile to the poor. "So this is hardly a welfare bill. In fact, most of its budget reductions come in programs for the poor other than welfare, and many of them affect working families. Many of them are just cuts, not reform" (p. 49). And while proponents of reform believed these cuts would ultimately benefit the poor by ushering them into the labor market, Edelman (1997) contended that the mass exodus of benefit recipients off the rolls was unrealistic and problematic for two reasons. First, there were not enough appropriate jobs in the right locations to accommodate the people who would be required to work to sustain their now time-limited benefits. Second, the labor market was not (and arguably still is not, some 20 years later) friendly to those with little work experience, skills, training, or education. Additionally, the types of manual labor and service industry jobs welfare recipients were pushed into were not amenable to working around health, personal, and family problems that poor, unskilled workers brought with them, and the PRWORA had no supports in place to help people stay working once they found a job.

Like many others who worked closely with underprivileged populations, Edelman (1997) was aware that welfare-reliant individuals were frequently in that position for reasons other than economic choice or laziness. Rather, he argued, it was most commonly their *capacity*, rather than their willingness, to sustain gainful employment that caused long-term

dependence on AFDC and other safety net programs. "Many long-term welfare recipients are functionally disabled even if they are not disabled in a legal sense" (1997, p. 53). Edelman believed the real impacts of these so-called reforms would not be more employment and self-sufficiency, but rather increases in homelessness, higher demands on already-strapped soup kitchens and shelters, more malnutrition and crime, greater rates of infant mortality, and drug and alcohol abuse. "There will be increased family violence and abuse against children and women, and a consequent significant spillover of the problem into the already-overloaded child-welfare system and battered women's shelters" (p. 53). Tragically, Edelman was right about many of his predictions.

Consequences for Children

One consequence of requiring hundreds of thousands of single mothers nationwide to seek work at the same time was the increased demand for childcare. Concerns were raised from all sides about how to address these challenges, but since the primary feature of the PRWORA was that it gave states huge amounts of leeway in crafting their own programs, state and local governments were essentially left to their own devices to figure out how to develop job creation programs for tens or hundreds of thousands of welfare recipients and childcare programs for their children. Post-PRWORA, New York City spent about $100 million to subsidize childcare for roughly 65,000 children, with tens of thousands more qualifying for a spot in one of the city's 300 formal childcare centers. However, according to a *New York Times* article on childcare centers and welfare (Sexton, 1996), informal and home-based childcare centers had become increasingly popular among welfare recipients because of the flexibility and reduced cost. But they also came at a much greater risk.

> . . . the city conducts no background checks or performance evaluation of the people it currently pays to care for roughly 17,000 children of welfare recipients, informal

> care can also mean exposing children to care providers with no training, experience or aptitude, or with criminal records. Of course, the lack of monitoring means there is no documented history of children abused by city financed care providers. But that is hardly a comfort to critics among child-care experts and elected officials who question any significant expansion of informal care without a concentrated effort to improve the early development of many of the city's impoverished children. "The tendency for public administrators will be to create the cheapest kind of child care, and that's exactly the opposite of what these children need," said Barbara Blum, president of the Foundation for Child Development and a top advisor to Nicholas Scoppetta, Commissioner of the city's child welfare agency. "The danger is that all sorts of short cuts will be taken." (Sexton, 1996, p. 1B)

The article goes on to cite a 1995 study of informal, unregulated childcare in four cities, conducted by the Work and Families Institute, that found only nine percent of households provided "good quality care." More than a third of the care in observed households was determined to have adversely impacted the children's developmental progress. This left a lot of single mothers frustrated and fearful of what could happen to their kids, even if they were not particularly upset about having to go to work or the new time limits placed on benefits.

> Molissa Smokes said the assignment she was given as part of the city program that requires welfare recipients to work for their benefits conflicts with the hours that her 4-year-old daughter attends a Bronx Head Start program. Ms. Smokes said welfare officials told her that she would have to find someone to pick up her daughter from the East Side House Early Childhood Center in the South Bronx and care for the child during her work hours. To Ms. Smokes, a 28-year-old single mother, the problem forces a cruel choice: because she said there were no openings at a formal

> day-care center to send her daughter to every afternoon, she said she could either find a neighbor to care for her child or she could defy the work requirement, keep her child in the highly regarded Head Start program and risk being cut off from her cash and food stamp benefits . . . . She said the thought of entrusting her child to a neighbor or local unlicensed household offering informal daycare was too frightening. "You can't trust people out there," she said. (Sexton, 1996, p. 1B)

Another single mother, this one homeless and living at a Bronx shelter, was concerned about childcare, the new work requirements, and how she would manage to complete her education at the same time. "I want to further my education so I don't have to depend on the city . . . . I have a 7-year-old daughter, and I'm not going to allow just any to take care of my daughter," she said in an August 17, 1996 *New York Times* article (Firestone, 1996, p. 1).

These fears were common; women wanted to pursue education and training programs that would eventually allow them to pursue professional careers, but welfare reform regulations, either in federal language or those imposed by the states, took a work-first mentality that likely did more harm than good toward the ultimate aim of moving women permanently off welfare.

Education Takes a Backseat

Requiring welfare recipients to cease training and higher education programs for low-wage employment was also a hallmark of TANF workfare rules. Under AFDC and the JOBS act, welfare participants could be exempted from some work assignments or decline offers of employment and still retain benefits if the employment conflicted with eligible training or continuing education endeavors or if satisfactory childcare was not available. TANF legislation and many state-run workfare programs implemented prior to the official

passage of the PRWORA, like the one headed by Mayor Rudy Giuliani in New York, made no such allowances.

Mothers frequently lamented about the double bind this put them in. "I had a problem finding a job because I needed more computer skill in order to get, you know, a good paying job, and I had to bring my typing skill speed up," stated one mother in a June 1996 NPR interview (Fertig, 1996). The reporter went on to explain how the mother, Lizzie Middleton, enrolled in a computer class in order to improve her skills, but a month later was given a 20-hour-per-week minimum-wage workfare assignment in an office. The hours of the computer class conflicted with the work assignment, so she brought a letter from the school asking to be excused. "And I gave it to the gentleman. So he took it and he said, 'Oh, we're not accepting this anymore.' I said, 'Well, you expect me to drop out of school to work in this office?' And he said 'Yeah, you gotta do it'" (Fertig, 1996).

In the same interview, NPR reporter Beth Fertig (1996) talked to several other young mothers, who said they were hopeful workfare would not interfere with their longer-term goals. "I wouldn't do it. If they call me for sanitation or the parks, I wouldn't do it. You understand? I don't think it's fair when I'm trying to empower myself when I'm thinking about my future."

> I don't mind going to work, but not for—if I'm going to school to learn one thing, I'm not going to turn around and go to work—go to work in a park. If I'm going to school, I want to try to be an accountant. I'm going to go work in a park? Where's-what learning am I getting out that? What math am I getting out that—how many leaves I'm going to pick up today? (Fertig, 1996)

Work-first mandates were heavily criticized by more liberal and moderate policymakers, as well as stakeholders in education, who argued that education and training

initiatives, not low-wage labor, were the true ticket off welfare. "A college education is the surest way off welfare and to a successful life," said W. Ann Reynolds, chancellor of the City University of New York, in a June 1, 1996, *New York Times* article (Arenson, 1996, p. 1A). CUNY was one of many colleges and universities nationwide that saw enrollment figures decline under the new rules. According the Arenson *New York Times* article, from 1995 to 1996, CUNY enrollment of students on welfare dropped 17%. By the year 2000, CUNY had lost 81.5% of its welfare-receiving students (Cox & Spriggs, 2002).

These types of precipitous declines in education and training program enrollment held true across the country post-TANF. Cox and Spriggs (2002) found a 20% drop nationwide in the college enrollment of all welfare recipients during the first two years of TANF.

> The result of our empirical research indicates that on average, state policies account for 13% of the drop in the probability that welfare recipients would enroll in college relative to other poor women after implementation of TANF . . . . The most disturbing part of our finding was that African American welfare recipients who reside in states with strict "work first" TANF programs are most affected. (p. 4)

Proponents of the work-first philosophy, however, argued that welfare recipients had an obligation to earn their benefits and that workfare jobs functioned both as a way of earning a living and as a type of job training in and of itself, as evidenced in a later portion of the above-referenced *New York Times* article.

> But a growing number of cities and states, impatient with the continuing high cost of welfare, have made a job the top priority, letting education and training fall into the background. Some of them have pointed to studies that suggest pressing people to find work right away is the best route to moving people of welfare rolls. In one

> widely cited study, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation of New York City examined six counties in California, some that placed more emphasis on giving welfare recipients more training and education, and one that put more emphasis on pushing welfare recipients into jobs right away. The one with the emphasis on finding quick employment showed better results in moving welfare recipients into jobs and in cutting welfare costs. "We don't have evidence that pushing welfare recipients en masse into education and training is generally effective in improving their earnings and reducing their use of welfare," said James Riccio, a senior research associate for the Manpower corporation. "A strategy emphasizing job search first and education and training for some may be a more effective approach." (Arenson, 1996)

Advocates of college programs pushed back, however, arguing that welfare recipients with training or a college education often leave welfare and stay off because they earn higher wages. Their children experience better outcomes as a result as well. A 1996 NPR report (Fertig, 1996) featured New York Legal Aid Society attorney Richard Blum, who said his office had been "flooded" with requests from people in education and training programs who were told they could not continue, or who wanted to enroll but were told programs were no longer available:

> The new practice . . . is to disregard the needs of the person. It's to disregard the-what makes the most sense to get a job that will provide for the household and will keep the person off public assistance. It's to disregard all of that and instead have a one-size-fits-all policy to pick the worst program and assign everyone to it. (Fertig, 1996)

Given the evidence about education programs and improved job prospects, it stands to reason policymakers would be more interested in providing access to these programs for welfare recipients to foster higher incomes and help keep them off welfare for good. But the opposite was true with TANF—women were forced to unenroll, or were prevented from enrolling altogether, in programs that would ultimately have well served the goals of TANF reforms. What policymakers viewed as an obligation of recipients to work for their benefits functioned primarily to keep them in low-wage, dead-end jobs that perpetuated the cycle of poverty.

Moral and Sexual Regulation of Welfare Mothers Under PRWORA/TANF

Before signing the PRWORA in 1996, President Clinton had vetoed two earlier Republican-drafted versions of welfare reform legislation. The battle over welfare reform had been waged for at least four years, and the Republicans in Congress had been heavily pressured by conservatives outside of Congress to make combating "illegitimacy" a primary feature of any welfare proposal sent to President Clinton.

Upon passage of the PRWORA, the four explicitly stated purposes of the TANF program, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (About TANF, 2017), are to: (1) provide assistance to needy families so children can be cared for in their own homes; (2) reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. It does not take a critical analysis of any kind to see the carry-over of family values rhetoric in these goals. Government intervention in and promotion of marriage and marital childbearing behavior is on its face paternalistic and patriarchal. Moreover, the use of the word "parents" in the second stated goal is almost laughable, as not a single government report I examined, nor so

much a lone newspaper or magazine article or radio or television transcript explicitly identified a single *father* being dependent on welfare. A few male welfare recipients were quoted throughout the sample of texts, but not one was identified explicitly as a single father in the same way women were identified as single mothers.

The observation that welfare policies, and TANF in particular, function as tools of moral regulation on behalf of the state is not original. In particular, legal scholars Gwendolyn Mink (2001) and Anna Marie Smith (2002, 2007) have both argued fervently that welfare policies subject recipients, specifically women, to a series of requirements aimed at correcting what is viewed as deviant behavior and bringing them in line with patriarchal social norms.

> In exchange for welfare, TANF recipients must surrender or compromise their vocational freedom, sexual privacy, and reproductive choice, as well as the right to make intimate decisions about how to be and raise a family. As TANF's foremost objective is to restore the patriarchal family, numerous provisions promote marriage and paternal headship while frustrating childbearing and child-raising rights outside of marriage. (Mink, 2001, p. 79)

Mink (2001) criticized TANF's substitution of employment for marriage and the assumption that "fathers are the best substitute for welfare" (p. 81). She also railed against the claim that TANF work requirements help mothers regain self-sufficiency: "Far from 'ending dependency,' the TANF regime actually fosters poor mothers' dependence on individual men" (p. 81), thereby upholding the heteropatriarchal societal norms most beneficial to the status quo. Smith (2002, 2007) furthered these arguments, focusing most acutely on the nature of welfare reform's sexual regulation provisions via what she dubbed "paternafare" (i.e., child support), family caps, family planning, and child relinquishment efforts under TANF, marriage promotion, fatherhood programs, and abstinence education.

While my examination of moral regulatory discourse was heavily informed and influenced by the works of Mink (2001) and Smith (2002, 2007) insofar as I accepted their arguments and resultant conclusions, my focus here is not on the moral underpinnings of specific statutory or regulatory language. Rather, I turn my attention to the ways in which those moral underpinnings are reflected—if they are reflected at all—in media discourse about TANF and the PRWORA. Using the conclusions of Mink and Smith about PRWORA's infringements of poor mothers' rights as a starting point, the following section scrutinizes media discourse regarding child support collection and sexual regulation.

It is worth noting here that, because a primary feature of TANF was marriage promotion, and the next chapter looks at the implementation of the Healthy Marriage Initiative under President George W. Bush in the early 2000s, there is substantial overlap between these two discussions. However, the analytical timeframes and texts are different, as were the sociopolitical climates under which the discourses about these subjects occurred. Welfare reform took place under a Democratic president, during a strong economy with low unemployment rates, and after a period of decline in teen births (Kost & Henshaw, 2014). Marriage promotion, on the other hand, was the project of a Republican president in the wake of 9/11, amid growing unemployment rates and a 0.5% decrease in GDP (Roberts, 2009).

The Structural and Individualistic View of Poverty

In order to properly contextualize moral regulatory discourse and the arguments of Smith (2002, 2007) and Mink (2001), it is first necessary to understand the two dominant competing theoretical perspectives in discourses about welfare and single mothers.

Participation in capitalist economic behavior has long been a hallmark of the American ideology, and the association between paid labor, economic status, and moral

character has been substantially documented (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1991; Katz, 2013; Romano 2018). There are multiple competing theories about the root causes of poverty, but the current capitalist American dogma has fixed blame squarely on the backs of the poor themselves (with a few rare caveats, generally revolving around deservedness, such as in the case of widows and the disabled). For the most part, reliance on others for economic support is a sign of personal failure, weakness, laziness, or, according to some fringe theories, even biological inferiority (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). These explanations, according to Royce (2009),

> rely on an individualistic perspective of poverty which view poverty as a result of individual weaknesses, failings, and inadequacies. People are poor for some combination of the following reasons: they are deficient in intelligence, competence, and ability; they are insufficiently experienced, skilled and educated; they lack ambition, determination, and perseverance; they have poor attitudes, motivations and values; they make bad choices and engage in self-destructive behaviors; and they are unable or unwilling to exert the necessary effort or take advantage of the opportunities available to them. Poverty is an individual problem, according to this perspective it is a by-product of the characteristics and behaviors of the poor . . . . The individualistic perspective explains poverty mainly by reference to the choices and actions of the poor. They drop out of high school; they reject marriage and sexual monogamy; they have children out of wedlock; they join gangs, do drugs, and commit crimes and they refuse to stick with a job. From the individualistic perspective, poor people are victims of their own bad decisions and lifestyle preferences. (p. 14)

Conversely, a structural perspective of poverty attributes the condition to a variety of political, economic, cultural, and social forces outside the immediate control of any one individual; instead, it examines the actions of cultural, political, and economic elites who make decisions about welfare legislation, taxation, corporate profit structures, and job creation. A structural perspective looks at, according to Royce (2009),

> a shortage of jobs that pay a living wage; a corporate profit-making strategy focused on the reduction of labor costs; a governing system that caters to the concerns of the wealthy while ignoring the interests of low-income families; a political and media rhetoric that variously disparages the poor, treats them as objects of charity, and renders them invisible; and the persistence of discrimination, residential segregation, and social isolation. Poverty is a social problem, according to this perspective; it is a by-product of the distribution of power and the organization of society. (p. 14)

In line with the critical perspective discussed in Chapter 1, this portion of the project assumes a structuralist perspective of poverty. Just as structuralism views social issues like poverty as the product of systems of power, critical theory understands traditional mass media as a reinforcer and maintainer of power systems. In this view, media function

> not as an autonomous organizational system, but as a set of institutions closely linked to the dominant power structure through ownership, legal regulation, the values implicit in the professional ideologies in media, and the structures and ideological consequences of prevailing modes of news gathering. (Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran, & Woollacott, 1982, p. 11)

Therefore, the ways in which moral regulatory discourses about mothers on TANF and welfare were articulated by media was consequential for both the power elite who made and

implemented welfare policy and sought public support for their positions, and also for the women and children whose lives were directly affected by these policies.

Extant literature on media representations of the poor, specifically of welfare mothers, is too copious to summarize (see in particular Bullock et al., 2001; Fineman, 1991; Gilens, 1996, 2004; Gilliam, 1999; Huda, 2001; Katz, 2013; Kinnick, 2009; Misra, Moller, & Karides, 2003; Romano, 2018; Williams, 1995), but studies overwhelmingly indicate that welfare recipients, single mothers generally and single mothers of color in particular, are viewed with disdain and even disgust (Hancock, 2004). Interestingly, African Americans, according to sociologist Michele Lamont, are more accepting of the poor, "offering structural, rather than individual, explanations of poverty" (2000, p. 4). Moreover, African Americans, while still buying into the so-called "American dream," are more critical of the middle-class values White Americans hold so dear. The imposition of these bourgeoisie values by both government and other sociocultural forces are particularly problematic for low-income Black mothers. They had to contend with not only patriarchal legislation that punished them for rejecting marriage to men they did not wish to spend their lives with, having children out of wedlock, and seeking public assistance to raise those children, but they must also wrestle with a salient, pervasive cultural discourse that categorized them as lazy even when the economic realities of working dictated it was in their best interest to receive government welfare benefits.

This struggle played out in media discourse about welfare reform in a couple of important ways. First, the use of the explicitly moralizing terms "dependency," "self-esteem," "self-sufficiency," "opportunity," "personal responsibility," and "illegitimacy" was extremely common, and not just because two of them were in the title of the legislation. Close readings of the sample texts revealed these to be recurrent terms used to discuss single

mothers on welfare. Some terms like "dependency" are so salient that studies have specifically examined their use in the context of welfare reform legislation. Fraser and Gordon traced the genealogy of the use of the word "dependency" in welfare discourse (1994a) and critiqued its use in political discourse in order to challenge the prevailing authoritative ideology (1994b).

Second, the words of welfare mothers were sometimes used both to impugn their own moral standing and to push back against the regulatory efforts of the state. In some cases, mothers were depicted as flippant, dismissive, defiant, obstinate, or entitled. This was particularly striking in a 1995 *CBS News* exchange (Smith, 1995) between reporter Harry Smith and welfare recipient Renee Piko. (Reproduced here in the style of the transcript for clarity):

SMITH: Renee Pico, who is 44-years-old, has been on public aid for 20 years. She receives $824 a month in AFDC for her six children. People would sit here and watch this and say "What is this woman with a college education…"

PIKO: …doing on welfare?

SMITH: …the six kids?

PIKO: Yes.

SMITH: One dad, two dads?

PIKO: Five fathers.

SMITH: Five fathers?

PIKO: Yes.

SMITH: Any money from any of these guys?

PIKO: No. Mm-mm.

SMITH: Why don't you stop having kids?

PIKO: Because I love children, and I was not going to limit what I wanted just because I didn't have the money.

In other cases, however, mothers worked to position themselves rhetorically as members of the "deserving poor" who faced insurmountable structural and institutional barriers to economic self-sufficiency, and whose use of welfare was a byproduct of forces beyond their individual control. Harry Smith, the reporter who interviewed Renee Piko quoted above, also interviewed 27-year-old divorced single mother of two, Aline Nunes, in the same story. Unlike Renee Piko, Nunes described her experience on welfare as more of a necessary evil rather than a subsidy for her lifestyle, calling it a last resort. (Reproduced in the style of a transcript for clarity):

SMITH: Talk of reform on Capitol Hill has her scared. What would happen to you if, two years from today, they said 'No more AFDC, nothing, you're on your own. Have a nice life.' What would happen to you and your kids?

NUNES: I would be homeless, first of all, because I live month to month. I don't have a savings account. I don't even have a checking account, because there's no money left over. I have a box back in my back room that I've tried to save canned goods and I've tried to save beans, because it's coming. If, in the 100 days, if they actually pass this, it's coming. And with these institution orphanages they're talking about, my children would be ripped from me., which would leave me destitute. I would just—I would want—if they took my children from me and I was homeless, I wouldn't have any reason to

live anymore, and I would just pretty much want to throw my hands up and give up at that point.

Nunes's account of her life and the challenges welfare reform posed to her and her family was not uncommon. Women feared for their futures, and their children's futures, under the new reforms.

At times, special interest commentators and journalistic narrative also helped bolster welfare mothers' credibility and arguments. In other cases, mothers were cast in a morally redemptive frame that constructed them as grateful recipients of the requirements of reform. And not all single mothers saw themselves as prisoners of the system. Some mothers pushed back against the depiction that they were lazy or unwilling to work or that their childcare responsibilities did not count as work, and they highlighted the problems of workplace inflexibility, lack of childcare, transportation issues, low wages, and inaccessibility of healthcare benefits as reasons for cycling through jobs or not working at all. This was evident in a September 23, 1995, CNN report "Welfare Mothers Say Welfare Is Not the Easy Way Out" by reporter Joie Chen (Chen & Wenge, 1995). Chen interviewed two women, Theresa Funiciello, a former welfare recipient and single mother-turned-writer, and Bianca Vela, a current welfare recipient. In the report, Chen addressed the stereotypes welfare recipients faced and how the women felt about the current system and the proposed reforms (segment reproduced here in transcript style for clarity):

CHEN: What is the biggest misconception, Bianca, in your mind to what people think about people on welfare?

BIANCA VELA: There are so many of them and to pick one of them it's really hard, but I- probably the one that jumped right out at me is that welfare recipients are lazy and they don't want to work and that they're

talking a-I think- I hope I'm saying it right but they are saying that 'they're talking a free ride of taxpayer's back.' That really burns me.

CHEN: Theresa, one of the senators who spoke on our program earlier today said it was the easy way out. Do you see it as the easy way out?

THERESA FUNICIELLO: Anybody who's ever had to raise a child ought to know that it, by itself, is work. If those people had to do it with something like $373 a month in this given year, they would find out how hard that really is. There's nothing easy about being on welfare. And, in fact, for many women a job outside the home is a much easier deal. We are worried in this country about what's happening to children who have no adult caretakers. Maybe we ought to be asking questions about whether $373 a month is a cheaper way is to go if that's all that we're concerned about. But we really ought to be concerned about the wellbeing of children—how they are and whether or not anyone's watching them.

These mothers spoke eloquently about the issues they had experienced, what they saw as the structural deficiencies of the system, and what impact they thought reforms would have. Neither woman was in favor of the changes proposed by the 1996 legislation, but they did agree there should be some changes in the way the system was set up, primarily because so many of the reforms being proposed did not take into account the lived experiences of so many of the people it would impact.

TANF as a Tool of Moral Regulation

Referring once more to Hunt's (1999) framework for moral regulation projects, in this context the agent(s) of social control is the state (taken here to mean government

generally), since the PRWORA was crafted by the federal government and handed down to individual states, which could then deploy the legislation in a variety of ways. While states were given wide latitude to implement their own policies, nearly all enacted similar provisions that functioned to restore the patriarchal family (Mink, 2001). The explicit targets of moral regulation in this context were welfare recipients broadly and single mothers on welfare specifically. Much of the statutory language of the PRWORA was aimed specifically at single mothers, and the effects of reforms were felt most acutely by this population. The tactics used by the state included the construction of unambiguously moralizing, often punitive, legislation, and the enforcement of that legislation in various ways that specifically targeted single mothers on welfare, but not so much fathers or "intact," traditional families.

Mink (2001) identified several interconnected components of TANF and the PRWORA that specifically sought to limit the rights, behaviors, and personal autonomy of poor mothers. First, TANF restricted vocational liberty by forcing mothers to work for no pay in some cases, take jobs with sub-livable wages and no benefits, and with no regard for working conditions. Second, family freedom was restricted by TANF provisions that forced mothers to yield some parental rights to fathers by way of child support payments, visitation, or partial custody; benefits could also be reduced or eliminated if a mother cohabited with a male partner or got married. Third, TANF policies constituted a violation of sexual privacy and reproductive rights. Mothers were often required to name their sexual partners in order to identify the biological fathers of their children, and family cap regulations punished and deterred women from having additional children while on TANF. Another aspect of TANF policy provided five states with so-called "illegitimacy bonuses" if they reduced nonmarital births without raising the abortion rate. States therefore discouraged conception by offering cash awards to poor women who used some forms of birth control. Fourth, abstinence-only

education programs funded by TANF money were required to teach women "not to have sex, let alone babies, until they are economically self-sufficient" (Mink, 2001 p. 86). Program funds were often diverted to religious organizations that imparted their own dogmas. Further, statutory rape prosecutions were invigorated under TANF, which assumes teenage sex is non-consensual, thereby reinforcing the abstinence-only message with the threat of criminal prosecution. Unmarried teenage mothers were further punished by TANF provisions that eliminated their access to benefits, required them to live at home, and mandated school attendance.

Discourses about these moralizing tactics were both generated by and circulated via media, which was skeptical, even critical, of some components (like the reality of TANF work requirements and cuts to food stamp benefits) but uncritically accepting of others. One example of this uncritical acceptance is the media's treatment—or more accurately lack of treatment—of PRWORA's more stringent paternity establishment and child support enforcement requirements.

An August 23, 1996, *New York Times* article outlined the impacts of welfare reform on specific segments of the TANF receiving population. Under the heading of "Missing Father" the article described the effect of TANF on single mother families:

> A woman will be required to provide information about the father of her child as a condition of receiving welfare. If she does not cooperate with state authorities, she will lose at least 25% of her family's welfare benefit. Using a national database, the Federal Government will help states locate the father and force him to pay child support. States may require genetic testing of the child and parents in some cases. (Shaver, 1996, p. A22)

Subjecting otherwise law-abiding citizens to mandatory DNA testing in order to

collect child support from an uncooperative parent was at worst an unconstitutional breach of Fourth Amendment rights, and at best an overreach of government authority into the realm of bodily autonomy. Legal scholar Anna Marie Smith (2007) argued that these kinds of paternafare measures extended into the realm of biopolitics, and consequently functioned as virtual 18-year prison sentences for poor mothers, children, and biological fathers. The paternafare system doled out material and symbolic rewards whenever

> a member of the dyad serves as a State informant against the other. The custodial mother is pressed to help the State locate the payer and to report to the State any evidence suggesting that he is concealing income from the paternafare system. Insofar as the payer is encouraged by the paternafare system to regard himself as the children's bona fide father—regardless of the custodial mother's wishes, his actual parenting record, and in some cases, the needs of the children themselves—he is given every opportunity to take revenge by suing for visitation and custody or advancing damaging allegation of abuse and neglect against her. (Smith, 2007, p. 74).

Smith (2007) further stated that while the act of collecting a DNA sample was, by all accounts relatively non-invasive in and of itself, and a mother's consent was required, mothers who relied on welfare benefits to survive and support their children were nonetheless coerced into giving consent since TANF, unlike AFDC, allowed states to delay the distribution of benefits for children until the custodial mother could demonstrate her cooperation with support enforcement agencies. "The single mother knows that if she does not comply with the paternafare system, her children will go hungry; she is hardly in a position to walk away" (Smith, 2007, p. 121).

Given the coercive and personally invasive nature of these mandatory child support collection programs, it is conceivable, even expected, that they would be the subject of

intense media scrutiny. (Just imagine middle-class White men and women being subject to the same measure for social security or Medicare. The horror! The outrage!) However, this was not the case at all. Little media attention was paid to expanded child support cooperation requirements, and in the limited circumstances in which it was discussed, most discourse was primarily favorable toward it. In December 1996, *New York Times* welfare reporter Jason DeParle crafted a 5500-word feature about David Ellwood, a professor of public policy and dean of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Ellwood was an unwitting architect of the welfare reform package passed by Clinton after his 1988 book *Poor Support* was picked up—and distorted—by reform proponents. Ellwood ultimately opposed many PRWORA provisions, but one thing he was strongly in favor of was guaranteed child support because "one parent shouldn't be expected to do the work of two" (DeParle, 1996).

The few stories that did highlight child support measures were uncritical in their stance, making no mention of the invasion of mothers' sexual histories, bodily autonomy, family structure, or their desires to be involved in any capacity with the biological fathers of their children. Even DeParle's (1996) deep dive into Ellwood's original blueprint for reforms did not question whether mothers would want this level of intrusion into their lives. Moreover, mothers' voices were all but absent from discourse about child support enforcement. One 1996 *New York Times* article (Kilborn, 1996, p. A12) focused on the elimination of pass-throughs, which were small bonus payments of about $50 a month provided to mothers who cooperated with child support officials under AFDC. Per the article, this bonus was created by Congress in the 1980s to reward single mothers when fathers paid child support. The aim was to encourage mothers' cooperation with state enforcement agencies that were tasked with tracking down absent fathers so states could

recoup some of the cost of the mothers' welfare benefits. Under AFDC, the federal government paid between 50% and 80% of the cost of these pass-throughs, but TANF eliminated that budget. Further, instead of using a carrot approach to entice mothers into cooperation, the states switched to using a stick—and rather large one—choosing to reduce the welfare benefits of uncooperative mothers by up to 25%. This article did not quote any mothers or fathers affected by this provision, opting instead to interview policy experts and think tank researchers.

Another story focused on child support collection under TANF ran on *ABC News* in February 1995, more than a year before the formal implementation of TANF and passage of the PRWORA. This story is remarkable in its candor regarding the coercive nature of some enforcement strategies. While interviewing a new father and his 16-year-old girlfriend in the hospital, reporter Michele Norris's voiceover stated, "This is perhaps the best time to get unmarried dads to sign legal forms that establish paternity and their financial responsibilities to their children" (Norris, 1995). A hospital representative was then immediately featured, saying, "It's the prime time because they're still goo-goo eyed over the baby's birth and at that time they're willing to sign." By approaching new parents in the hospital and asking them to sign legally binding documents, the state was unscrupulously manipulating both mothers and men into signing legally binding, long-term commitments to one another.

The same story later discusses the Clinton administration's strategies for imposing tougher penalties on "deadbeat parents," including measures to revoke driver's and other professional licenses from parents who refused to make payments. "Both parties want fathers to know that even if they break the emotional bonds with their children, the financial bonds will be established and enforced" (Norris, 1995). This provision was paradoxical;

suspending the professional and driver's licenses of men who did not pay effectively removed their ability to work and potentially pay support in the future.

Mink (2001) contended that TANF, in particular its child support enforcement components, impeded "poor mother's rights to form and sustain their own families—as well as to avoid or exit from untenable relationships with men . . . " (p. 80). She argued that these requirements constituted an invasion of sexual privacy that only poor, unmarried mothers were subject to *because* they were poor and unmarried.

> These provisions single out nonmarital mothers for scrutiny and punishment, as paternity is automatically established at birth if a mother is married. A mother who is not married, does not know who her child's biological father is, or who does not want anything to do with him must nevertheless provide welfare officials with information about him. (p. 85)

Discussion about single mothers' wishes regarding child support payments or, more importantly, maintaining state-mandated financial relationships with their children's father(s) was wholly absent. Also absent was discourse regarding the so-called "family cap," or limits on benefits for women who had additional children while receiving TANF. The obvious purpose of such a cap was to discourage TANF recipients from bearing children. The equally obvious assumptions underpinning the family cap rule were that welfare mothers were either unfit and should not be having more children in the first place, or they were promiscuous money-grubbers having babies to increase their welfare checks.

Chapter Summary

Taken together, the components of TANF and the PRWORA function to openly limit the sexual and bodily autonomy of poor unmarried mothers. The legislation assumed they were not capable of making their own choices about their families, bodies, and lives. It

is as if affluence was the lone yardstick by which their fitness as human beings had been measured, and they had no chance of measuring up. Thus, the state took it upon itself to impose restrictions on nearly every aspect of their lives, and the media did little to critique these conditions beyond discussing the difficulties of putting welfare recipients to work en masse. It is not as though the media were unaware of the invasive provisions of TANF—they were printed in black and white in the pages of newspapers. But public sentiment toward welfare reform was generally positive, and sentiment toward welfare recipients was assuredly not positive.

There are a few likely explanations for why journalists or media entities writ large neglected and ignored other intrusive elements of the PRWORA like child support enforcement and family caps. First, men's participation in the lives of their children was, and still is, seen as positive both for the men and for the children. The term "deadbeat dad" is widely used to refer to men who do not provide financial support to their children. The payment of child support is a natural extension of that paternal responsibility. It is also the case that no mothers in the sample I analyzed for this chapter, or any chapter, protested or criticized child support enforcement procedures. There did not seem to be any pushback from mothers regarding this measure. However, I surmise this may be because they were unware of the extent to which their bodily autonomy could be invaded, and/or they were never asked their opinions about it.

Second, the lack of newsroom diversity might have stifled any attempts at covering the more controversial gender-specific parts of TANF legislation. Women, minorities, and women minorities have long been grossly underrepresented in both television and print newsrooms for decades. A 2018 report issued by the Women's Media Center found that women of color represent less than 8% of U.S. print newsroom staff, 12.6% of local TV

news staff, and 6.2% of local radio staff (Gray, et al., 2018). This lack of diversity likely resulted in—intentionally or not—largely whitewashed coverage of TANF and its consequences for poor women, particularly poor women of color. Despite one's best journalistic efforts, it can be impossible to fully understand the systematic, structural, and institutional barriers placed upon poor communities. True, the middle and upper classes are subject to state regulation in daily life, but the poor experience a level of state scrutiny and intervention that middle- and upper-class Americans would never tolerate. It is reasonable, then, that journalists, White male journalists in particular, who have never experienced poverty would not be in a position to thoroughly scrutinize and critique the state policies governing the poor communities they were trying to cover. Moreover, documenting the lived experiences of a community from which one is so far removed is extraordinarily challenging and time-consuming. Reporters must gain the trust of a community, but journalism is a deadline-driven business where time is both money and of the essence, so dedicating precious resources to long-form, deep-dive pieces on the structural misalignment between TANF and say, civil rights, was likely not a high priority for the White male news directors and editors of the nation's top newspapers and television news programs.

Third, the most formidable and widespread challenge of the PRWORA and new TANF reforms was certainly the placement of millions of unskilled workers into jobs. In that way, it makes sense that media outlets would focus coverage on that particular component of the legislation. However, as I will explore in the next chapter, the objectives of TANF had far greater moral and patriarchal implications than expected.

CHAPTER 5. THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF WELFARE REFORM

> Rather than simply helping single-parent households figure out a way to generate earnings in the absence of a father, state reforms must find ways to bring more fathers back into (or into for the first time) the lives of their children.
>
> The problem is that strategies for promoting fatherhood and marriage are, to a very large extent, in conflict with those that seek to help single mothers achieve self-sufficiency through work. Indeed, a welfare system that helps single mothers become employed, but ignores the need to promote fatherhood and marriage, may only lead to more single parenting by mothers.
>
> — Wade F. Horn, Assistant Secretary of Children and Families, 2001–2007

Shortly after winning his second term in office, President George W. Bush and his administration presented the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 to Congress. This legislation was, on its face, a routine federal budget proposal—mostly unremarkable. Except, buried on page 133 of the 182-page document, under the innocuous heading "Title VII -- Human Resources and Other Provisions" was the allocation of $150 million federal dollars a year over five years for "grants for healthy marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood."

Dubbed the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative (HMRF), these programs were functionally separate but two sides of the same coin; the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) programs would focus on marriage education between low-income couples, while the Responsible Fatherhood programs were aimed at helping poor fathers improve job and education prospects, as well as parenting and communication skills. All this sounded harmless enough. What could possibly be bad about the government encouraging healthy marriages and involved fathers? As time would eventually reveal, quite a bit.

This chapter examines news media coverage of the HMRF and related state marriage and fatherhood promotion programs during the George W. Bush administration from 2001 to 2009. My focus is on the articulation of policy rhetoric and moral regulatory discourse in

stories about the HMRF. In particular, I am interested in the responses of single mothers and their allies to these programs, as well as the ways in which marriage promotion efforts functioned as a mechanism of moral regulation and was forced upon (via policy changes) and rhetorically "sold" to single mothers and the public. I begin with an overview of the sociocultural development of American marriage, followed by a review of the two predominant but competing sociological views of marriage and family being articulated via media discourse at the time. Next, a more thorough explanation of the development of the HMRF initiative and associated policies is presented to contextualize the scope and nature of its resultant state-level programs and their various impacts. Finally, I analyze a wide variety of news media sources, including traditional newspaper articles, TV and radio transcripts, magazine articles, and their related social media counterparts to determine the salient discursive themes and perspectives being presented in public discourse about the HMRF and its goals.

The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative

Heading up these programs was Wade F. Horn, Ph.D., Assistant Secretary of Children and Families and the first president of the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), a nonprofit organization founded to end "father-absence." By today's standards, Horn, a child psychologist by training, sounds much like a men's rights advocate. Many of the policies and rhetoric he advanced early in his position were little more than thinly veiled attacks on women's civil rights. Prior to his appointment in the George W. Bush administration, Horn was promulgating the restructuring of public aid to favor married couples over singles, encouraging states to redirect TANF funds toward job-placement services for low-income men, advocating for "aggressively publicizing the advantage of adoption," and using block grant funds to support maternity homes for unmarried women who relinquished their babies

(Horn & Bush, 1997). Suffice to say, Horn was not an advocate for single mothers and was wholly disinclined to use his position to help unburden them.

According to the Administration for Children and Families (Healthy Marriage, n.d.), the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI) allowed for federal and/or state funds to be used for a wide array of marriage promotion activities, including:

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of healthy marriages and the skills needed to increase marital stability and the health of the marriage
- Education in high schools on the value of healthy marriages, healthy relationship skills, and budgeting
- Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs, which may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement, for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers
- Premarital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or individuals interested in marriage
- Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples
- Divorce reduction programs that teach healthy relationship skills
- Marriage mentoring programs that use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities
- Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any activity described above
- Research on the benefits of healthy marriages and healthy marriage education
- Technical assistance to grantees who are implementing any of the above activities to help them succeed

Marriage promotion was indeed part of the initial statutory language of the PRWORA. The opening lines of the 1996 legislation refer explicitly to marriage, proclaiming that "Marriage is the foundation of a successful society," and that "Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interests of children." Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, three of the four articulated goals of TANF refer, at least implicitly, to marriage. This made the diversion of TANF funds to marriage and fatherhood promotion programs an option for states pre-HMI, but few states had yet to do much in this regard because it was not a particularly popular move fiscally or socially, but also because states were too overwhelmed by implementing the stringent work requirements of TANF to be bothered with marriage programs.

President Bush's supporters immediately applauded the HMRF, arguing it would help solidify his reputation as a "compassionate conservative." Not only was it a relatively inexpensive proposal, they said, it was a move toward the conservative family values his administration was striving to foster. Wade Horn was a near-constant presence in media coverage about the HMRF, and his attempts to frame the initiatives as educational opportunities were skillful. In a January 22, 2004, NPR story (Conan, 2004), Horn answered questions from listeners about the goals and objectives of the HMRF (quotes are presented in transcript style for clarity):

> MARK (Caller): Hi. Thank you very much. And Dr. Horn, my question is: Why is it that our federal government feels like they need to intervene or encourage something that's essentially a personal choice that people can decide to make or not to make? I mean, what is the precedent for this? And, you know, is there any kind of—you know, is there some sort of established reason for doing this now?

HORN: Well again, this proposal is not about interfering with the free choice of couples to get married. That's completely up to the couple. I am conservative, I believe in limited government, and I think that government ought not to get into the business of influencing the decision of individual couples about whether or not to get married. That's up to them.

. . .

MARK: Well, excuse me. If I may interrupt, the federal government coming out and making a statement is certainly not forcing the public to do one thing or another, but it's a little bit more than encouragement as well, I think. It's a fairly powerful statement when, you know, the folks that we vote for come out and say, 'Well, we're going to help you make this decision, and if you make this decision, we're going to help you do it better.' I also don't know, you know, what sort of validity there is in our federal government telling us how we're going to have a better marriage. I think that that's a deeply personal thing that may have to do with faith or it may have to do with something else, but it's not a governmental thing. It has nothing to do with running the country. And it seems like...

HORN: Well, one could also...

MARK: ...we're doing less of running the country and more of offering ways for people to live a life that reflects some people in the government.

HORN: Well, one could also argue that parenting is a personal relationship that one has, and government has no right getting involved in helping

> people or not helping people or helping people to become better, more effective parents. And yet we've been providing parenting education subsidized by the federal government for decades now, and I don't hear a whole lot of cry, you know, in the public to get rid of parenting education.

On the other hand, critics of HMRF programs were quick to point out what they viewed were the myriad problems associated with a governmental role in marriage promotion, including an increased risk of domestic violence, a shifting of scarce resources away from women's economic empowerment toward marriage promotion, using marriage as a poverty-reduction mechanism, and a perpetuation of the idea that women, particularly single mothers, were to blame for poverty in the United States (Fineman, Mink, & Smith, 2003). In the same NPR story cited above (Conan, 2004), family historian Stephanie Coontz provided a counter-narrative to Horn's description of the program. In response to a comment from a caller about promoting marriage in the Black community, Coontz replied:

> . . . I am in favor of good marriages, too, but I think there's a lot of naiveté here that is being played upon in this. What about the people that we get married and then get divorced two or three years down the road? Their kids could be worse off. The mothers are more likely to be in poverty if that happens than if they'd never gotten married in the first place. We have to think this through more carefully. And I think it's being thrown out as a political bone to a particular constituency right now, and it's not a really serious, well-thought-out program.

This sort of back-and-forth played out frequently in media narratives about marriage promotion. Wade Horn or other Bush administration proxies sought to frame HMRF programs as a tool couples could choose—*choose* being the operative word—to participate in

as a way to strengthen their relationships. Critics of HMRF programs often countered Horn's claims by explaining the ways in which marriage, when not considered carefully, can essentially backfire on women, leaving them in dire or dangerous situations.

Shifting Meaning of Marriage

Ancient Roman emperor Augustus Gaius Octavius issued a set of laws concerning marriage and childbearing in 9 A.D. that, in some ways, bear resemblance to those issued by the Bush administration thousands of years later. One such reform, the *de maritandis ordinibus,* was implemented to "encourage marriage by members of various classes of citizens" (Frank, 1975). The *lex Papia-Poppaea* outlined a duty to marry among all Roman men 25–60 years of age, and Roman women 20–50 years of age. A quota was placed on procreation, and failure to bear children was punished by the reduction or elimination of inheritance rights. The *lex Papia-Poppaea* also established relationships between marriage, rank, and status and gave preference for political and bureaucratic office to married men with three legitimate children (Frank, 1975, p. 45).

Much like his more contemporary political counterparts, Augustus saw great sociopolitical value in marriage, specifically procreation within marriage. As early as the mid-17th century, colonies were issuing official marriage licenses, and by the mid-19th century, state licensure of marriage was common practice. In 1862, marriage was officially declared a monogamous institution when President Lincoln banned bigamy (Parker, 2009, and more than a century later, the Supreme Court held in *Loving v. Virginia*, the landmark Supreme Court case legalizing interracial marriage, that marriage was one of the "basic civil rights of man" and "fundamental to our very existence and survival" (Parker, 2008, p. 495). Currently, more than 1,000 federal laws privilege married couples over the unmarried, providing innumerable economic incentives, child custody advantages, health- and insurance-related

benefits, and other rights not conferred to any other status, such as spousal privilege in criminal proceedings (DePaulo, 2018).

Marriage in the United States has undergone some radical cultural transformations since settlers brought the tradition first to the American colonies. As historian Stephanie Coontz noted in her 2005 treatise on the history of marriage, "for most of history it was inconceivable that people would choose their mates on the basis of something as fragile and irrational as love and then focus all their sexual, intimate, and altruistic desires on the resulting marriage" (Coontz, 2005, p. 15). To be sure, people throughout history have felt the same kind of romantic love we experience today, but the mores of those eras did not view such intimate connections as necessary or sufficient for the basis of marital unions or child-rearing.

The centrality of marriage to early American family life cannot be understated. It was indeed the foundation of colonial society, so much so that laws were passed forbidding people to live alone. On one hand, these laws reflect the near impossibility of survival on one's own in an unforgiving environment, but on the other, they also reveal "a moral view that the marriage-based family, with the husband at the helm, was the foundation of virtuous community" (Cherlin, 2009, p. 41). However, this does not mean married couples formed their unions as a result of romantic attraction. Prior to the 20th century, spousal selection in the United States was based more on pragmatism, utility, and location than anything else.

> Rural men and women needed competent, hardworking partners to make a go of farming. City dwellers needed a marriage in which the husband was a steady wage earner and the wife raised children, sewed clothes, and perhaps earned some money by taking on borders and lodgers. Without enough help from your spouse, you could become destitute. People hoped and expected to love their partners in a spiritual

way, but they believed that following the lure of romance and sex would lead to poor choices they couldn't afford to make. (Cherlin, 2009, p. 63)

As the economy shifted from agricultural to industrial, more people moved from rural to urban areas, and farming as a family business declined. Child mortality rates also declined, as education reforms and laws against child labor were developed. Families began having fewer children, who lived longer. Men and women started to realize they could spend several years together before having children, and many more together once the children were grown. These shifts led to what Cherlin (2009) referred to as the "companionate marriage," in which couples formed their unions based on the emotional ties, friendship, compatibility, and sexual chemistry. Companionate marriage, put simply, is the type of marriage exemplified in classic American television shows like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and *Father Knows Best*. But these unions were also paradoxical; a love-based relationship presumes partners' equal status, but the husband-as-breadwinner model implies wives' deference to their husbands, as well as separate roles in the household with vastly different degrees of status and influence (Cherlin, 2009).

The companionate model of marriage remained the norm until about 1960, when marriage developed into more of an exercise in individuality, self-actualization, and personal fulfillment. It was at this same time that divorce laws became more liberal, the feminist and women's liberation movements pushed for women's social equality, and family law began to recognize women's autonomy even within the institution of marriage. Dubbed the "individualized marriage" by Cherlin (2009), this type of relationship became disposable when it no longer functioned to fulfill both partners. Because women were no longer economically dependent upon their husbands' earnings, a woman had no reason to stay in the marriage if she was not happy. Further, a growing body of scientific literature examining

the outcomes of children of divorced couples also began to find that living between two separate households or primarily with only one parent (presupposing the receipt of child support and continued involvement of the non-custodial parent) did not inherently mean the children of divorced parents were doomed to a life of substandard achievement.

This, therefore, is the historical context in which the Bush administration found itself at the time it proposed the HMRF: marriage rates were down, divorce rates were up, and research about children of divorced parents had begun to shift slightly away from the doom-and-gloom tone of previous decades, although few of these studies were picked up and discussed by mainstream media outlets. Welfare reform had succeeded in moving millions of previously welfare-dependent women into the labor force, although it had not necessarily moved them out of poverty's grasp. As discussed in the previous chapter, many, if not most, of those women still found themselves living at or only slightly above the poverty level and reliant upon government subsidized healthcare, childcare, food stamps, and other services. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities issued a report in 2001 claiming that while the overall poverty rate had fallen between 1990 and 2000, "those who were poor remained poorer than at any time since 1979" (Jaffe & Bazie, 2001, p. 3). Data also indicate that 1990s welfare reform had failed to reduce rates of out-of-wedlock childbearing, and unmarried women were having children at the same rates as before welfare reform was enacted (Rivers, 2001).

Perhaps most notably, these changes were all occurring at the same time gay and lesbian couples were beginning to push back against the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) signed by Clinton in 1996. The DOMA defined marriage, for federal purposes, as the union of one man and one woman as husband and wife, and although a few states had legalized same-sex marriages or civil unions, they were not recognized on an interstate or federal level.

All these changes taken together posed a serious threat to the patriarchal, heteronormative social order held dear by traditionalists in power at the time. The HMRF initiatives proposed by the Bush administration were one way to continue reinforcing the rhetoric of family values while bulwarking the government's bottom line. Poor people, particularly single mothers and their children, are expensive to take care of, and the Bush administration's assumption, even if they publicly stated to the contrary, was that marriage functioned as a de facto anti-poverty program. It made sense then, in their view, to promote marriage as a way to both strengthen families and reduce spending on social safety net programs.

Bush's Marriage Promotion Agenda

From the beginning of his administration, President Bush was interested in bringing marriage and family to the forefront of American public policy. He used the 1996 welfare reauthorization bill as an opportunity to do just that. The result was *Working Toward Independence*, a proposal presented to the 107th Congress in which the president and his advisors sought to increase work requirements for TANF recipients and rearticulate the initially stated goals of TANF to more explicitly promote marriage. To this end, three measures were proposed. First, TANF goals would be clarified and include specific references to healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood. Second, a funding commitment of $300 million annually would allow states to design and implement programs designed to promote responsible fatherhood and marriage. Third, Bush's proposal required states to devise metrics against which the success of their family formation efforts could be measured (Koons, 2004).

In early 2003, the House reauthorized TANF in H.R. 4, titled the Personal Responsibility, Work and Family Promotion act of 2003. This legislation included many of the changes proposed by Bush, including $1.9 billion in funding over six years for a

combination of marriage and fatherhood promotion efforts and research grants. Several months later, the Senate Finance Committee approved the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone Act, which allocated $1.875 billion over five years to programs similar to those proposed in H.R. 4 (Koons, 2004). As is typical with congressional proceedings, the two chambers could not agree, and the proverbial TANF can was kicked down the road several times via temporary extensions until the innocuous-sounding Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 was ultimately passed by the 109th Congress (Congressional Research Service, 2007). Although the name of the DRA, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, lacks the moralistic undertones of its welfare-reauthorization bill predecessors, it was certainly not lacking potency.

One change in policy between the 1996 welfare reform and the 2005 reauthorization is the way single-parent, cohabiting, and married families are treated under TANF guidelines. Both proponents and critics of welfare reforms have long pointed to so-called "marriage penalties" in TANF that actively discourage marriage among welfare recipients by reducing benefits or eliminating TANF eligibility altogether if a couple marries. Painting a comprehensive picture of these changes and their effects is tremendously complex due to state-by-state variance in policies. Such a review is also unnecessary to situate the current analysis, but a brief explanation of the marriage penalty is useful in contextualizing media discourse about marriage promotion and fatherhood programs.

When a man is present in the household, TANF programs nationwide base benefit eligibility not on marital status per se, but on the biological relationship between the man in the household and the child(ren). If the male in the household is the biological father of the children, programs tend to treat families the same whether the couple is married or cohabiting. However, if the male is not the biological father, TANF programs treat the

mother and her children differently (Moffitt, Phelan, & Winkler, 2017). Summarily, if a low-income mother marries or cohabits with the biological father of at least one of her children, both adults' wages are counted toward the household income, typically resulting in an income above the threshold for TANF eligibility. If the mother cohabits with a male who is not biologically related to the child(ren) in the household, usually only a portion of his income is considered or, depending on the state, not considered at all, in benefit eligibility calculations. Moffitt et al. (2017) contended that these regulations ultimately function to discourage exactly the types of families the Bush administration sought to promote with the HMRF, because while "most welfare-reform elements had no significant effect on women's family structure . . . some work-related waivers and work-related TANF policies increased single motherhood and decreased marriage to biological fathers" (p. 34). These policies and penalties also alter eligibility for other safety net programs, including SNAP benefits, childcare subsidies, Section 8 housing, the earned income tax credit, and Medicaid.

Discussion of marriage penalties surfaced occasionally in media discourse about welfare and marriage promotion, most often in the context of government efforts to remove barriers to marriage for low-income people. This is illustrated in a 2002 *USA Today* article with a pro-marriage promotion stance.

> A single mom with two children who earns $10,000 a year at a minimum wage job qualifies for government financial help . . . . But if this woman marries a man who also earned $10,000, the couple's higher combined income would disqualify the family from many benefits. Overall, the couple would lose $4 out of every $10 the man brought into the home, according to a Brookings Institution analysis. The marriage penalty worsens if the mom draws on Medicaid and federal housing help. (Pro-Marriage Initiative Holds Promise for Poor, 2002, p. 12A)

Divergent Perspectives of Marriage

The ideological underpinnings of both the PRWORA and HMRF are characteristic of what Amato, Booth, Johnson, Johnson, and Rogers (2007) referred to as the marital-decline perspective, a view of marriage espoused by marriage and family scholars who share the following basic assumptions about the nature of marriage:

1. The institution of marriage is weaker now than in the past.
2. The most important cause of this change is the growing and excessive individualism of American Culture.
3. The declining status of marriage has had negative consequences for adults, children, and society in general.
4. We should initiate steps to strengthen the institution of marriage.

The push for marriage promotion in this context makes sense—in fact, it is right out of the marital-decline playbook.

> In terms of specific policies, advocates of this view have called for public education programs focusing on the value of marriage, the introduction of course on relationships skills and conflict resolution in school programs, and greater government funding for marriage counseling and premarital education services. (Amato et al., 2007, p. 6)

A competing school of thought, referred to by Amato et al. (2007) as the marital-resilience perspective, views the cultural shift away from marriage quite differently. These scholars also share a basic set of assumptions:

1. The institution of marriage is changing, but it is not necessarily in a state of decline.

2. Americans have not become excessively individualistic and selfish during the last few decades.
3. Recent changes in marriage and family have had few negative consequences for adults, children, or the wider society.
4. We should support all types of families, not just married heterosexual couples with children.

Those who espoused this view vigorously criticized government interventions into family life on the grounds that they upheld antiquated and privileged ideas about family that no longer reflect of the diversity of American life.

> Either we can come to grips with the postmodern family condition by accepting the end of a singular ideal family and begin to promote better living and spiritual conditions for the diverse array of real families we actually inhabit and desire. Or we can continue to engage in denial, resistance, displacement, and bad faith, by cleaving to a moralistic ideology of *the family* at the same time that we fail to provide social and economic conditions that make life for the modern family or any other kind of family viable, let alone dignified and secure. (Stacey, 1996, p. 11)

Both the "decline" and "resilience" perspectives were represented in media coverage about Bush's marriage promotion programs. Wade Horn and other conservative politicians like Rick Santorum, Sam Brownback, and Mike Huckabee (who, in 2005, publicly participated in a covenant marriage ceremony with his wife of 31 years) were widely quoted discussing the HMRF and its associated state-level programs, often reiterating that they were not intended to be coercive but rather to function as educational tools to provide couples with the communication and conflict resolution skills necessary to make a marriage work. In a 2004 *New York Times* article, Wade Horn tried to make his point: "'This is not about

influencing the decision-making process," adding that "the initiative is tied to changes in the welfare system because low-income people either don't have money for counseling or such programs don't exist where they live" (Zeller, 2004, p. 3). Even the HMRF's detractors generally agreed that married, two-parent families were good for children and society. What they did not agree with was marriage promotion as a matter of policy and the allocation of already-scarce government resources for efforts that amounted to "thinly disguised social engineering" and "1965-style Great Society liberalism" (Zeller, 2004, p. 3).

Consistent with the marital-resilience perspective, many critics of the HMRF argued that solving more pressing social problems in low-income communities would clear a better pathway to marriage for the poor than any government promotion efforts. Leslie Brett, executive director of Connecticut's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, stated in *The New York Times* that "In order to improve the outcomes for families that do not fit the 'ideal' type . . . we can seek to change and broaden the systems to support more types of families, rather than seeking to change the families themselves" (Zeller, 2004, p. 3). This opinion was often echoed by low-income people featured in news stories about marriage promotion, such as in this exchange:

> Susan Torres, of Cortlandt, said: "Can anybody do something about affordable housing? I pay $900 a month for a one bedroom for me and my son. I have nothing left to eat with." Aldo Duarte, 35, gestured to the group of 50 or so men and a handful of women who sat at tables, waiting their turn to line up for lunch. "All these people need jobs. Better to spend money on getting jobs for all the people out of work." (West, 2004, p. 1)

A Focus on Fathers

Fueling HMRF policies were emergent data about the growing class divide in marriage. Studies had begun to show that upper- and middle-class women were still getting married at roughly the same rates, just later in life, but poor women, particularly poor urban women of color, were often eschewing marriage altogether, just not for the reasons many politicians proffered. Sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas (2005) meticulously documented the lives of several low-income urban single mothers in their book *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. The mothers interviewed by Edin and Kefalas indeed wanted to get married, so much so that if and when they finally walked down the aisle they wanted their lives to be stable. Marriage is, for them, the icing on the cake of an already well-established life.

> . . . these mothers told us repeatedly that they revered marriage and hoped to be married themselves one day. Marriage was a dream most still longed for, a luxury they hoped to indulge in someday when the time was right, but not generally not something they saw happening in the near, or even the foreseeable, future. Most middle-class women in their early to mid-twenties, the average age of the mothers we spoke to, would no doubt say the same, but their attitudes about childbearing would contrast sharply with those of our respondents. While the poor women we interviewed saw marriage as a luxury, something they aspired to but feared they might never achieve, they judged children to be a necessity, an absolutely essential part of a young woman's life, the chief source of identify and meaning. (Edin & Kefalas, 2005, p. 6)

The reverence for marriage and rationale for putting it off so long, or even forever, makes sense in the context of their lives. These women, according to Edin and Kefalas (2005), are

intensely apprehensive of the consequences marriage might have on their autonomy and independence.

> A young mother often fears marriage will mean a loss of control—she believes that saying "I do" will suddenly transform her man into an authoritarian head of the house who insists on making all the decisions, who think that he "owns" her. Having her own earning and assets buys her some "say-so" power and some freedom from a man's attempts to control her behavior. After all, she insists, a woman with money of her own can credibly threaten to leave and take the children with her if he gets too far out of line. But this insistence on economic independence also reflects a much deeper fear: no matter how strong the relationship, somehow the marriage will go bad. Women who rely on a man's earnings, these mothers warn, are setting themselves up to be left with nothing if the relationship ends. (Edin & Kefalas, 2005, p. 9)

While this perspective is certainly reflected in media coverage about the HMRF, it is turned on its head. Rather than single mothers expressing ambivalence about marriage, it is primarily the men featured in stories who are hesitant to head down the aisle. One particularly in-depth *New York Times* feature story by DeParle (2004) followed Ken, an unmarried father in Milwaukee living with his child's mother, Jewell. DeParle's unraveling of the complications of Ken's life was nuanced, thorough, and insightful, interwoven with data about welfare reform, the role of fathers, employment opportunities for men in low-income areas, and other social and cultural issues. Ken, a former drug dealer turned amateur rapper and pizza-delivery man, was the product of a broken home and wanted more for his son Kevion. But despite prodding from his long-term girlfriend, Ken was reluctant to get married.

> . . . now there's Ken, who is in the house and has an income and has a least articulated marriage as a goal. When Jewell became pregnant with Kevion, Ken thought they would finally wed. "I had told my mother that I thought she was a good person, she having my son—I felt like she was the one," he said. "It just didn't happen." He said he doesn't know why, but he does know, at least in a general way. "I ain't having a City Hall wedding," he said. Ken said he sees himself marrying on a tropical beach, like the eponymous star of the sitcom "Martin," who tied the knot with his girlfriend, Gina, among exotic flowers, crashing waves and a cellist in a black tie. His idealization of the wedding extends to the marriage . . . . "Once you get married, that means she's everything in a woman you're looking for and you're everything in a man she's looking for," he said. Jewell says much the same: "It's just you and that person, become one." A marriage, therefore, carries intimidating risks, none greater than your partner cheating. "Oh yes, yes, yes," Ken said. "If you're married, and she goes out there and cheats on you, that's like the worst thing in the world! 'Cause you said those wedding vows. When you get married, you say you got an inseparable bond. So if she goes out there and cheats on you, she's breaking laws and policies!" (DeParle, 2004, p. 27)

A young man interviewed by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Chatterjee, 2004) expressed similar sentiments. Eric Vasquez, 21, was the father of a five-year-old boy conceived during a one-night stand while on vacation. After finding out the woman was pregnant, he brought her and the baby to live with him in Washington. But marriage was not on the agenda.

> Now, as he shuttles from his home to his job as a clerk at a sports shop, he reflects: Should he marry his child's mother? Nah, he concludes. It's too scary. Half of all marriages end in divorce. He doesn't want to be part of that statistic. "Marriage is a

> big step; you have to be sure of what you are doing," he said, afraid that his girlfriend and he wouldn't survive the rigors. (Chatterjee, 2004, p. A02)

If discourse and research during the welfare reform debate almost exclusively focused on single mothers, then the post-reform era shifted that focus 180 degrees and turned the spotlight on unmarried fathers. Perhaps because of the HMRF's emphasis on fatherhood programs, much of the media discourse in this sample featured discussions about unmarried fathers and the role they play, or should be playing, in the lives of their children. News coverage repeatedly discussed the pervasiveness of absentee fathers, the importance of fathers in the lives of children, and profiled programs dedicated to teaching men skills that, at least theoretically, would help them become better role models and providers for their children. An April 2005 *Washington Post* report (Roberts, 2005) detailed a speech given by then First Lady Laura Bush at a National Fatherhood Initiative event. In her speech, Bush applauded the NFI's mission and called for greater social supports for fathers.

> Helping men become good fathers who show their love is what this organization is all about, and that's why your work is so vital . . . . Every father faces challenges, regardless of his circumstances. The father who's absent because he's in prison or the father who's absent because he works 80 hours a week both have children who wish they could see their dads more. The National Fatherhood Initiative provides help for father sin just about every situation imaginable. (Roberts, 2005, p. C01)

What makes this attention to fatherhood notable is the quantity of previous research about women and marriage, and relative dearth of research about how low-income men feel about marriage. For several decades, the focus of much media and scholarly work on and marriage and family trends had been on women and single mothers—why they are not getting married, why they are having babies out of wedlock, why their economic conditions

are troublesome, why they are lacking values and morals, etc. My initial assumption regarding the cause of this shift was that the focus on mothers would continue throughout coverage of HMRF, but that speculation was not supported by the analysis. Coverage of the HMRF and its associated issues almost (with some notable exceptions) entirely ignored single mothers. Perhaps that is because previous efforts at governmental intervention into the lives and behaviors of single mothers (e.g., welfare reform) were met with intense criticism and only semi-successful, so focusing on men seemed to be more a promising strategy. Or, maybe, after spending years moving mothers from welfare to work, political leaders viewed promoting marriage and fatherhood as another step toward reinvigorating the nuclear family—minus a stay-at-home mother—and its dominance in American society.

The Marriageable Men Theory

One common sociological explanation for the retreat from marriage, particularly among low-income individuals, is the so-called "marriageable men" theory. First tendered by Popenoe (1935), it has been extended through the decades and is particularly pertinent to poor and low-income women and men. Initially, this theory hinged exclusively on men's employment status and earnings. W. J. Wilson (1987) initially viewed marriageability as the ratio of employed men to all women of the same age; the assumption, of course, was that all women are equally marriageable, but men's economic position determines their attractiveness on the marriage market. This view has changed somewhat in recent decades, however. A 2015 Brookings Institution report argued that a number of factors have converged to shape perceived marriageability for women.

> [Women] are now the primary breadwinner in 41% of all families. In addition, rising rates of unwed parenthood mean that a growing proportion of young women of marriageable age already have children from a prior relationship. Not only are many

> men understandably reluctant to take responsibility for someone else's child, but the single parents themselves have less time, and perhaps less inclination, to look for a new partner given their child care responsibilities and prior experience with relationships that didn't work out. Women who had their first child outside of marriage are more likely to cohabit and less likely to marry than comparable women without children, and when they do marry, they do not marry as well (i.e., their marital partners are less educated and older). (Sawhill & Venator, 2015, p. 3)

In a mostly indirect way, media coverage did reflect some of these marriageability issues, both via journalistic narrative and sourcing. In a 2006 *National Public Radio* report, journalist Rachel Jones went to a federally funded marriage education class in Baltimore and talked to the couples about their experiences. The couples uniformly agreed that the class helped strengthen their relationships, and many expressed a desire to marry once the conditions were right. "I think everybody that was basically really in the classes was considering marriage at one point," said Alfreda Stewart, a program graduate who has been with her partner, Anthony Polk, on and off for 17 years. "He keep telling me once he in a better job he's like he going to pop the question then." "Once I get myself employed," said Polk, "I can put a ring on layaway or propose to her, you know" (Jones, 2006).

Coverage also highlighted the struggles many low-income men must confront in order to be seen as marriage material. High incarceration and criminal conviction rates among poor Black urban men limit not only their desirability on the marriage market, they also pose major challenges to those who want to form families or rejoin their existing families after being released. *The Washington Post* (Bazelon, 2004) outlined how the Bush administration's proposal hindered efforts at rehabilitation and marriage among men with criminal backgrounds who have served their time and want to move forward with their lives.

> Woods's boyfriend is an ex-convict, and variety of federal policies make marriage—a potential source of stability—more difficult for ex-felons even after their release from prison . . . . Because of his criminal record, he isn't allowed to share Woods's apartment in West Haven, Conn. Woods gets a subsidy from the federal housing program known as Section 8 that pays about half her $762 rent each month. The local housing authority that administers Woods's subsidy bars former drug felons from signing or co-signing leases obtained through Section 8—or even living with a Section 8 tenant. That's because federal laws passed in the 1990s encourage public housing agencies to deny housing to anyone who has committed a violent crime, drug offense, or any other crime that could affect the "health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises." If Woods and her boyfriend want to get married and move in together, they have to find a new home and pay for it themselves. (p. B02)

The story continues, delving into the details of high incarceration rates: "African Americans are 44% of the incarcerated population in Connecticut and 9 percent of the general population. In the District of Columbia, 96% of the incarcerated population is Black compared with 60% of the general population" (Bazelon, 2004, p. B02). The subject of the story, 22-year-old Alisha Woods, described the view of marriage in her community as complex: "Woods says that most of the men she knows have been 'on the street.' The trick for any woman choosing among this pool of men is to find one who will get off the street and stay there" (p. B02). Ultimately, Bazelon concluded, the objectives of the HMRF were at clear odds with existing laws and policies that governed many federal and state social service agencies.

> If the administration wants to get serious about helping ex-cons, it could start by changing the rules that prevent them from living in public housing, hold onto driver's licenses and receiving benefits like food stamps. Then it could use some of the $1.5 billion earmarked for marriage promotion to help former prisoners learn the skills they need to get decent jobs and, in the process, become better potential mates. If the goal is to transform the 13 million Americans with felony convictions into productive citizens—and perhaps reduce the chances that they'll commit another crime—wouldn't it be better to make it easier for them to contribute to raising the families many of them will have? (p. B02)

This is an important point. If the HMRF's agenda is to promote and encourage healthy marriages and two-parent families, it overlooks large sectors of its target population by ignoring those with criminal histories who are not yet fathers. A report by the Pew Research Center (Gao, 2014) highlighted significant race and class disparities in incarceration rates nationwide, with less educated Black men facing the dimmest prospects. "In 2010, all Black men were 6 times as likely as all White men to be incarcerated in federal, state and local jails," the report stated. But more shocking was the finding that Black men ages 20–24 "were more likely to be institutionalized than they were to be employed" (para. 2). The HMRF leaves out poor, previously incarcerated men who are not fathers with few supports and opportunities to improve their educational and economic prospects, and thus their marriageability.

Silencing Single Mothers

Whether intentionally or not, one thing was conspicuously missing from media discourse on marriage and fatherhood education programs: the voices and perspectives of single mothers. When single mothers were present in stories, it was typically brief and

secondary in relation to quotes and perspectives from policymakers, academics, think tank representatives, religious leaders, and single fathers. This finding is surprising for a number of reasons. First, the link between marriage promotion efforts and welfare form indicates an ideological and economic relationship between the two measures on the part of the Bush administration. Connecting the HMRF directly to TANF reauthorization efforts and funding allocation suggests the objective of HMRF initiatives is to reduce poverty among single mothers since they are the primary recipients of TANF benefits. It stands to reason, then, that single mothers' responses to the programs would be at the forefront of the media's agenda.

Second, because mothers are overwhelmingly the custodial caretakers of children born outside of marriage, the success of fatherhood-focused programs would necessarily require a mother's involvement at some point. While it is certainly not necessary for a mother to participate in such programs, it makes sense that she would have to, at a minimum, consent to the participation of the father in her life and her child's. After all, what benefit do fatherhood programs have if the father is estranged from the mother? Or if their relationship is too acrimonious to facilitate shared parenting responsibilities? If there is a history of abuse, is it even in the best interest of the child or mother for the father to remain involved? More than 60% of women receiving TANF have experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner, and battered women are more likely to drop out of education programs and miss days of school or work, thereby decreasing the likelihood they will be able to achieve economic independence (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2004). Given the current cultural view that marriage is something couples do only after they have their individual lives in order, it seems as though more attention should have been directed to

empowering and supporting women who need to leave unhealthy relationships rather than providing economic incentives for them to get married.

Wade Horn, the Bush administration's marriage promotion figurehead, is frequently quoted in media reports about the HMRF and consistently states the programs are not coercive. In a 2002 *USA Today* story, Horn stated that HMRF programs are intended to "help couples who choose marriage for themselves to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to sustain healthy marriages" (Peterson, 2002). He further argued that "the government has no intention of forcing women to marry or to stay in harmful relationships" (Peterson, 2002, p. 1D). But there is still a risk that some poor women in abusive relationships may think marriage promotion programs are required for them to receive TANF, or abusive male partners may see states offering financial incentives to marry and coerce women down the aisle in order to cash in.

For all his rhetoric about wanting to help single mothers and their children, Horn has consistently skirted any substantive discussion of critical issues facing low-income women and single mothers, and instead treated HMRF programs and marriage as a panacea. And although he has denied this view, Horn is betrayed by his own moralizing rhetoric about the benefits of marriage and expressed desire to see states implement policies favoring married couples.

> Marriage is our most vital social institution, the seedbed from which healthy children and, ultimately, a healthy society spring. It is no accident that communities with lower marriage rates have higher rates of social pathology. Marriage matters—to children, adults, and communities. Unfortunately, most states have been reluctant to even mention the word, let alone do something to encourage more of it. When it comes to promotion the formation and stability of health, mutually satisfying

marriage, however, doing nothing hasn't worked. Perhaps doing something might. (Horn, 2001, p. 42)

If states and the federal government focused more on easing the significant economic and social hardships faced by poor single mothers, they would not need marriage promotion programs to encourage them to marry. If single mothers were able to attain some semblance of economic stability, complete education programs, and find safe, reliable, affordable childcare, they would likely eventually marry of their own accord.

Third, single motherhood as a demographic trend has been a prevalent subject in studies of marriage and family, and therefore related media coverage has tended to focus on single mothers as a bloc even if sociological literature on nonmarital childbearing does recognize and acknowledge significant differences across age and racial groups. Although coverage of the HMRF does not lack in its articulation of supporters' claims and critics' objections to government interventions into marriage and fatherhood education, it does lack any meaningful discourse from mothers themselves about their attitudes toward marriage promotion or fatherhood education.

Chapter Summary

There is an indelible connection, in America and most Westernized societies, between marriage and morality. The view of marriage as an intrinsically moral institution dates back centuries and is reflected throughout the Bible and other religious texts. Despite the growing secularization of the Western world (Cooperman, Smith, & Ritchey, 2015), the relationship between marriage and moral standing has endured, even if many of marriage's explicitly religious elements have faded. In order to be legally recognized in the United States, a marriage license must be issued by the government. Referred to as civil marriage, these unions have no ties to any religious institution or entity. Couples can choose to have

their marriage ceremony performed in a church or by a member of clergy, but without a government-issued marriage license, the union is not legally binding.

Also indelible, at least historically, is the relationship between marriage, sex, and childbearing. Christianity, the most common self-reported religious affiliation in the United States, is the only major world religion to prescribe monogamy and views the union between husband and wife as the highest human expression of *agape*, the self-sacrificing love of God for man (Parrinder, 1998). In the view of traditional Judeo-Christian religious doctrine, sex should take place only within the sacred confines of marriage and for the purpose of childbearing. While this view seems archaic, it is rhetorically reconstructed and entrenched in public policy via the PRWORA, TANF, and HMRF initiatives. In a 2007 *USA Today* report, (Jayson, 2007) David Blankenhorn, a founding father of the National Fatherhood Initiative, who self-identifies as a liberal Democrat, sounded more like a member of the Bush administration. He told reporter Sharon Jayson his primary concern was for children:

> We're either going to go in the direction of viewing marriage as a purely private relationship between two people that's defined by those people, or we're going to try to strengthen and maintain marriage as our society's most pro-child institution. (Jayson, 2007, p. 1D)

There is a consistent idealization of the "traditional" nuclear family, the institution of marriage is placed on a pedestal, and there is a repeated focus on the ways in which children benefit from living with married parents. This rhetoric came from both sides of the political aisle. The repeated focus on children and the way families "ought to be" has perpetuated moral regulatory elements in HMRF coverage beyond the policies themselves. Scholars, feminists, and progressive activists have long focused on sexuality as a primary site of women's oppression, arguing, in part, that:

> …sexual relations in church- and state-sanctioned marriage establish a sexual division of labor and structure patriarchal domination; and . . . male sexual violence against women, both within and outside of marriage, works to subdue and contain women who might resist patriarchy. (Jakobsen, 2000, p. 107)

Single mothers, then, eschew the hegemonic patriarchal sociocultural framework in ways that directly threaten the status quo and call into question the legitimacy of these historically oppressive institutions. When women are able to support themselves and raise their children without assistance or interference from the state or a husband, it becomes tremendously problematic for any institution or individual who benefits from or seeks to uphold traditional views about gender roles, family structures, childrearing, and sex. Ralph Reed, founder and chair of the Faith and Freedom Coalition and a senior advisor to the Bush/Cheney campaigns in 2000 and 2004, once complained that AFDC made the state into a father (Sands, 2000). Government marriage and fatherhood promotion efforts attempt to put men back in their rightful place—in control of women and children. Whether the government's efforts succeeded is the partial focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6. BEYOND THE WELFARE QUEEN

> My mother was the one constant in my life. When I think about my mom raising me alone when she was 20, and working and paying the bills, and, you know, trying to pursue your own dreams, I think is a feat that is unmatched.
>
> — Barack H. Obama

In previous decades, discourse about single mothers and single motherhood occurred primarily in the context of other newsworthy social and cultural issues. Earlier chapters have illustrated this by examining depictions of single mothers in coverage about family values politics, welfare reform, and the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood initiative (HMRF). But 2012 seemed to indicate a shift in this trend; rather than discussing single motherhood as a cause or consequence of some other larger social problem, the status itself began to take center stage in media coverage. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* ran a handful of high-profile articles about single motherhood, including several op-ed pieces. Slate.com posted an article arguing single motherhood was bad for children, and *The Atlantic* magazine ran a feature praising single mothers' fortitude.

This year was also the 20th anniversary of Dan Quayle's *Murphy Brown* speech, and many media outlets marked the occasion with think pieces examining whether Quayle was right in his assessment of single mothers. Further, studies were starting to pour in that focused on the results of President Bush's HMRF initiatives, largely concluding they had failed to produce a difference in either relationship quality or the number of low-income couples tying the knot. What is more, the Obama administration loosened many of the work requirements implemented by Clinton in the 1996 welfare reform package, leading conservative critics to assert Obama had given people their welfare back (Ball, 2012). So, while 2012 was not the site of any significant controversies or policy changes altering the

lives of single mothers, it was indeed a year full of discourse about them, which is why it was selected as the final representative anecdote for analysis.

The focus of this chapter is threefold. First, I analyze news media discourse surrounding single mothers and single motherhood from a holistic perspective, focusing on the ways in which discourses rhetorically constructed single mothers without the subtext of an overarching cultural phenomenon like family values rhetoric, welfare reform, or government marriage policies informing the selection of the sample. Second, I compare discourse about single mothers in the current sample to that of previous chapters to examine if, and in what ways, the tone and focus has changed. Third, I revisit and respond to the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and offer a discussion of the significance of these depictions.

Mixed Messages About Single Motherhood

Defining Themselves

The most striking feature of discourse in 2012 is the emergence of single mothers' voices. Mothers have become more actively engaged in constructing their identities than they were in previous discourses. Although not universally present in the stories analyzed for this anecdote, single mothers' voices were discernably proliferated in narratives featuring them. Rather than journalistic narratives dictating the circumstances of their lives, single mothers in this sample actively pushed against negative stereotypes, embraced rather than lamented their status, and positioned themselves rhetorically as good, capable, loving parents.

A June 1 *Washington Post* blog (Henneberger, 2012) not only identified this trend, but illustrated it clearly. While discussing a new memoir by author Bay Buchanan, journalist Melinda Henneberger quoted a passage from the novel articulating how media coverage of single mothers functions to wear them down.

> "Shortly after I became a single mom," she writes, "I began to take note of a continual stream of bad information coming my way. New studies were constantly being released on the impact that fatherless homes had on children—and I'd watch my fellow conservatives take to the talk shows, armed with the latest statistics, to make their case. The evidence is overwhelming, they would argue, a dad in the home is critical to the healthy development of his children. The picture they painted was frightening. I'd start to worry all over again that I couldn't give my kids a childhood as good as my own." . . . Buchanan told me she thinks some on the right have been "afraid to go any further and say, 'Single moms. You can do this.' For fear it would undermine their original argument about the importance of marriage and family. So instead, they act like you might as well keep the TV on all night and 'have marijuana for dessert," she added, "because the message is never 'You can do this.'"
>
> (Henneberger, 2012, p. A02)

Author Buchanan and journalist Henneberger both touched on important points in this article. Media narratives about single mothers have indeed trended overwhelmingly negative, focusing on poverty, welfare, marriage, and all the ways single mothers failed to measure up to White, middle-class standards of contemporary intensive mothering. As Buchanan stated, the media message to these women was rarely, if ever, "you can do it!" or "you are doing a great job," but rather "you are not enough." Henneberger also articulated one of Buchanan's strategies for overcoming the negative rhetoric.

> . . . for her, the first step to succeeding in spite of the naysayers was seeing and presenting her situation as a blessing and announcing to friends, "Hey, I'm a single mom now!" as if she'd won the lotto. Not because she was glorifying the breakdown of the family, or whatever nonsense phrase critics trot out, but because if she

> dragged around thinking she'd drawn the black bean in life, how could that attitude be anything but harmful to her kids? (p. A02)

Adopting a positive mindset and owning her new status was not just a psychological coping mechanism, it was also a rhetorical strategy. By positing herself as capable, competent, and successful, Buchanan (by way of Henneberger) was beginning to carve out a new media narrative of single motherhood.

A second *Washington Post* piece ("One- and two-parent homes," 2012) provides a forum for readers to express opinions about a previously published story focusing on families in the Black community. In the compilation of reader feedback, another single mother echoed Buchanan's sentiments. While she acknowledged the value of fathers, she also sought to define her own identity as a single parent and pushed against common stereotypes. Under the screenname "salonjoy1," this mother stated:

> Although I am glad to see a father in the home, I just wanted to say as a single mom of a 15-year-old black male, I think I have done a GREAT JOB. My son is going into his senior year of high school, he is a peer leader and he is co-captain of his football team with a 3.3 GPA. My son's father went to jail when he was 6 months old. He did not meet his father until he was 10 years old. Even now, his father is not in his life, but that does not stop him from focusing on his future. I think we focus too much on the fathers not being there are not enough focusing on what else the child needs to be complete. A father is needed, don't get me wrong, but if they are not there, we have to learn to do the best we can and move on. (p. B02)

This sentiment was a common one. Mothers seemed to be acutely aware of how society perceived them, and they made a conscientious effort to dismantle and deconstruct the narratives positioning them as less than capable. Moreover, they expressed resentment about

these stereotypes and called out politicians and pundits who wanted to place the blame for every social ill squarely on their backs.

In an October 20, 2012, *New York Times* op-ed about a town hall–style presidential debate between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, columnist Gail Collins discussed a controversial gun control question posed to the candidates by a member of the debate audience. The questioner, Nina Gonzales, asked the candidates to discuss their views of gun control, but Romney's response was not she was expecting.

> Romney followed up with a long discussion on the virtues of two-parent families. ("But, gosh, to tell our kids that before they have babies, they ought to think about getting married to someone—that's a great idea. . . .") It was about here that he lost Nina Gonzales. "Single mothers have enough problems. Leave them alone," she said. "Why are we even talking about that? That's not the issue." (Collins, 2012, p. A23)

The notion that single mothers were responsible, at least in part, for a buffet of social problems has, in no small way, fed the larger—mostly conservative—cultural argument that single mothers in and of themselves constituted a social problem. That was part of what made this line of discourse so important; the construction and salient articulation of single mothers' counter-narratives starved, or at least weakened, the sociopolitical beast that has for so long sought to devour them. Mothers in this sample were fighting back, using their agency to define their lives for themselves.

Journalism professor and author Katie Roiphe is a vocal and ardent contributor to these counter-narratives. In an August 12, 2012, *New York Times* Sunday Review essay, Roiphe chided the bipartisan moralizing and handwringing about single mother families. She thrust herself, a single mother of two children by two different fathers, into the spotlight,

using her platform and privilege to question cultural assumptions about single mothers and their families. She called out vague media references to "studies" that faulted single mothers for all manner of social pathologies. She directly addressed the role academics played in constructing and perpetuating these narratives, calling out by name Princeton sociologist Sara McLanahan—a frequent contributor to media stories about marriage, children, and poverty—for taking a myopic view of single mothers.

> Studies like those done by Princeton sociologist Sara S. McLanahan, who is one of the foremost authorities on single motherhood and its impact on children, show that conditions like poverty and instability, which frequently accompany single-mother households, increase the chances that the children involved will experience alcoholism, mental illness, academic failure, and other troubles. But there is no conclusive evidence that, absent those conditions, the pure, pared-down state of single motherhood is itself dangerous to children. Professor McLanahan's studies over the years, and many others like them, show that the primary risks associated with single motherhood arise from financial insecurity. They also offer evidence that, to a lesser extent, particular romantic patters of the mother—namely introducing lots of boyfriends into children's lives—contribute to the risk. What the studies don't show is that long for a married father at the breakfast table injures children. (Roiphe, 2012, p. SR8)

Roiphe did not stop there. She railed against America's unwillingness to address the structural and institutional deficiencies that contribute to single mothers' financial instability.

> There is no doubt, however, that single motherhood can be more difficult than other kids of motherhood. In France, the response to the added difficulty is to give single

> mothers preferential access to excellent daycare. Here the response is moralism disguised as concern and, at other times, simply moralism. (Roiphe, 2012, p. SR8)

Roiphe was right that other industrialized nations have far more progressive views and have taken concrete steps to improve the material conditions of single mothers and their children. In Iceland, where 67% of babies are born to unmarried mothers, social structures and attitudes have adapted to allow unmarried women with children to thrive. Mothers are not subjected to a stream of criticisms from social and political elites, and universal health care and paid parental leave policies help ease the financial burdens single mothers in American often face. Moreover, the language itself is different; single mothers in Iceland are not rhetorically positioned as problematic, deviant, or deficient. A 2017 CNN.com report (not included in the sample of analytic texts) speaks to how differences in language influence public perceptions of mothers.

> You have this horrible term in English, "broken families," . . . "Which basically means just if you get divorced, then something's broken. But that's not the way it is in Iceland at all. We live in such a small and secure environment, and the women have so much freedom. So you can just, you can choose your life." (Weir, 2017)

While America may never look to Iceland or the European Union for inspiration about social policymaking, discourse in this anecdote did point to a shift in media narrative about single mothers and the language used to describe them. A September 2, 2012, *New York Times* piece (Kaufman, 2012) describes the home renovation project of single mother Joy Tomchin. Journalist Joanne Kaufman described Tomchin as a homeowner whose only child was leaving for college—two oft cited markers of middle-class success. A washingtonpost.com style section article (McCarthy, 2012) used the term "devoted" to describe single mother Sara Harding. Instead of talking about poverty and struggle, Harding

said she was happy with her life before she met her husband: "I was content being a single mother . . . . I loved my job. I had a ton of friends. I have two great kids. I was done" (p. T17). Another *Washington Post* story (Jenkins, 2012) focused on the success of opera singer Marlissa Hudson: "A single mother, she wanted security for her family. But one day she knew what her purpose in life was: to follow her gift of expression" (p. B02).

Rather than constant refrains about single mothers in poverty or descriptions of mothers struggling to survive, the tone of media narratives seemed, on the whole, to have become more tolerant in the year 2012. Single mothers were often described as complete people leading rich, complex, fulfilling lives without partners. And while discussions of poverty still frequently referenced single mothers, depictions within these narratives focused less on why mothers themselves were problematic and more on structural and institutional flaws that functioned to keep them in poverty. There was far more attention paid to structural issues like low wages, childcare, discrimination, transportation, food insecurity, and other complex social conditions than was present in previous historical representative anecdotes. While this is evidenced in stories throughout the sample for this anecdote, a few provide particularly clear illustrations. In a January 5, 2012, *Washington Post* story about a mother who received a vehicle from a local nonprofit organization, journalist Alex Ruoff explained how access to transportation can help improve earnings.

> The group gives vehicles because vehicle ownership is proven to help boost income . . . of the 3,600 people who have benefitted from the group since its inception in 1999, 70% have seen their income rise by an average of $7,000 a year in the year after they received a vehicle . . . . Vehicles offer more freedom in choosing jobs, gaining education and the flexibility of their hours. (Ruoff, 2012, p. T17)

Another *Washington Post* story (Boodman, 2012) examined the intricate relationship between poverty and health. It uses 35-year-old single mother Treshawn Jones as a jumping-off point, beginning with a description of how she was jobless, behind on her utilities, and worried about keeping her child fed. Through a local nonprofit dedicated to identifying and meeting the unmet needs of at-risk families, Jones was able to participate in a job training course and get clothing, food, utility, and shelter assistance for herself and her son; within three months she landed a $37,000 a year job with health insurance benefits. Journalist Sandra Boodman also described the results of a study that found a curious correlation between health and poverty:

> [A] 2006 report in the journal *Pediatrics* found that children whose families cannot pay their utility bills are 30% more likely to be hospitalized—the medical and social service systems have long operated in largely separate and disconnected spheres. Too often, that results in a medical revolving door, as when doctors prescribe asthma medicines for children living in mold-infested apartments, only to have them wind up in the emergency room because their housing conditions were never addressed. (Boodman, 2012, p. E01).

The media elaboration on structural issues is significant not just for its contextualization of the lives of the poor, but also because it shifted the focus from the rhetoric of morality, "personal responsibility," and "family values" to the material conditions resulting from long-entrenched policies that perpetuate oppression—racism, classism, and other "-isms" associated with the traditional institutions of American life. Williams (1995) argued that the absence of media coverage of structural issues undermined the public's understanding of the causes of poverty.

> Such omissions create inaccurate perceptions, which make it easier to blame the victim and to see poverty as a personal problem of the individual, thereby relieving society of any responsibility to support programs designed to help groups escape poverty. (pp. 1169)

When media narratives ignore, minimize, justify, or misrepresent the multitude of factors that cause and preserve poverty, it becomes complicit in the maintenance of those conditions. News stories, despite claims of objectivity, do not report events neutrally (Williams, 1995), and these value-laden depictions inform public opinion that then informs public policy. Gilens (1996), for example, found that poverty was disproportionately portrayed as a "Black" problem. While it is true that, at 21%, poor African Americans are a greater percentage of the overall population than poor Whites (9%) (Fontenot, Semega, & Knollar, 2017)—Gilens (1996) argued that media representations are responsible, at least in part, for the public's gross overestimation of the actual racial composition of the poor. By comparing national survey data about poverty to media representations, Gilens found a correlation between media depictions of poverty (was it Blacks or Whites who were featured in stories?) and public opinion poll questions about whether African Americans are more likely to be poor than Whites (who is more likely to be poor, Blacks or Whites?).

> . . . the poverty population shown in news magazines—primarily black, overwhelmingly unemployed, and almost completely nonelderly—is not likely to generate a great deal of support for government antipoverty programs among white Americans . . . . By implicitly identifying poverty with race, the news media perpetuate stereotypes that work against the interests of both poor people and African Americans. (Gilens, 1996, pp. 537–538)

Despite the noticeable shift in narrative tone, in 2012 there was still plenty of moralizing about single motherhood as a status—mostly from social and media elites who continued to insist upon the primacy of marriage and fret about the outcomes of single mothers' children. On May 25, 2012, almost 20 years to the day after Dan Quayle's infamous *Murphy Brown* speech, *The Washington Post* ran an op-ed piece written by economist and co-director of the Center for Children and Families, Isabel Sawhill. The article, entitled "20 Years Later, It Turns Out Dan Quayle Was Right about Murphy Brown and Unmarried Moms" (Sawhill, 2012), expresses continued concern about shifts in family structure, arguing that marriage benefits mothers, is good for children and has economic benefits that cohabitation does not. "In the end, Dan Quayle was right," Sawhill wrote. "Unless the media, parents and other influential leaders celebrate marriage as the best environment for raising children, the new trend—bringing up baby alone—may be irreversible" (p. 3).

Two months later, on Sunday, July 15, 2012, *The New York Times* ran a front-page, above-the-fold feature exploring the lives of two women, Chris Faulkner and Jessica Schairer (DeParle, 2012). Both women were White, from the Midwest, about the same age, worked at the same childcare center, and had children. Chris was a college graduate and a married mother of two. She was also the supervisor at the center where she and Jessica worked. Jessica dropped out of college when she got pregnant by her boyfriend, and by age 30 had three children and no husband, although she did eventually earn a two-year degree from a local community college. The story details the stark contrast between the lives of the two mothers. Chris and her husband made about $95,000 per year, and their children spent weekends being shuttled to and from scouts, swimming, baseball, and soccer. Jessica earned $24,500 a year and relied on food stamps, and her children were lucky to participate in one extracurricular each per year.

The story, titled "Two Classes, Divided by 'I Do," made waves, drawing response pieces by HuffingtonPost.com, *The Nation*, *Forbes*, PsychologyToday.com, and other *New York Times* contributors, to name just a few. It even inspired a five-part series by the Center for Economic and Policy Research dedicated to exploring DeParle's claims about the relationships between family structure and social class (Fremstad, 2012). Some authors criticized DeParle's depiction of Jessica Schairer as stereotypical, simplistic, and moralizing. They offered structural critiques of systems and institutions that keep women like Jessica from achieving greater economic security. Others argued that DeParle's narrative was accurate; single motherhood is hard and does not bode well for women or their children. Jessica and women like her made poor choices, and poverty is one of the unfortunate consequences.

Within the DeParle (2012) piece alone, there are a number of salient rhetorical elements worth noting. One of the most remarkable things about this story is what was missing; at no point did DeParle discuss any hardships research would suggest Chris Faulkner and her husband might face. Nor did he mention any of the difficulties they likely faced juggling full-time careers, childcare, multiple extracurriculars, and running a household. He did not even so much as hint at the possibility of any past or present marital conflict. If anything, he venerated the life they had, stating, "They did not inherit wealth or connections or rise on rare talent. They just did things in standard order: high school, college, job, marriage and children. . . . The result is a three-bedroom house, two busy boys and an annual Disney cruise" (DeParle, 2012, p. A1).

Given that about half of first marriages are expected to eventually end in separation or divorce (Amato, 2010; Raley & Bumpass, 2003), the omission of any discussion about marital discord is glaring. Moreover, Chris Faulkner was hardly present in the story; rather, it

was her husband, Kevin, who was featured most prominently in the journalistic narrative. Moreover, when DeParle discussed an element of the Faulkner's life, it was frequently immediately contrasted with Schairer's circumstances. "Ms. Faulkner goes home to a trim subdivision and weekends crowded with children's events. Ms. Schairer's rent consumes more than half her income, and she scrapes by on food stamps." Later, the pattern repeated:

> The secret to their success resides in part in old-fashioned math: strength in numbers. Together, the Faulkners earn nearly three times as much as what Ms. Faulkner earns alone. Their high five-figure income ranks them near the 75th percentile—hardly rich, but better off than nearly three of four families with children. For Ms. Schairer, the logic works in reverse. Her individual income of $24,500 puts her at the 49th percentile among parents: smack dab in the middle, but with only one paycheck, her family falls to the 19th percentile, lagging more than four out five. (DeParle, 2012, p. A1)

It is worth mentioning that even if Jessica Schairer were to marry someone who earned as much as she did, their family of (at least) five would still be within 185% of the poverty level for 2012—hardly a comfortable middle-class income (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Also notable is DeParle's use of research by Princeton sociologist Sara McLanahan's—the same academic expressly criticized by Katie Roiphe—to support his claims.

DeParle (2012) delved at some length into Jessica Schairer's economic circumstances and pathway to single motherhood. Her college boyfriend, the father of her three children, had promised marriage but eventually became abusive and they split. When Jessica met someone new, she waited a year before asking him to move in. Six months and one call to the police later, he was gone too. DeParle went on to describe how Jessica's children ate

generic breakfast cereal and how she avoided giving her son, who had Asperger's syndrome, $2 to buy a bagel at school. He mentioned a friend of Jessica's daughter, who always wanted to raid the cabinets when she came over, so Jessica encouraged them to play elsewhere. DeParle described Jessica as "weary," starved for adult interaction, and strapped for time as well as money. No such descriptions of Kevin or Chris Faulkner were offered.

These two stories (DeParle, 2012; Sawhill, 2012) were not the only ones in the sample that maintained a deleterious tone about single mothers, but what makes these stories in particular so remarkable is that they held up the cultural yardstick for success and then quite literally compared single mothers against it. This is particularly evident in the DeParle (2012) article. Jessica's life was hard, exhausting, chaotic; Chris's life was joyful, promising, orderly. To use the words of one columnist who wrote a response to DeParle's narrative, "The single mother and her children have a terrible life, and the married mother and her children have a great one" (Dougherty, 2012).

As Hays (1996) asserted in her articulation of the ideology of intensive mothering, "it is neither self-evidently natural nor, in any absolute sense, necessary; it is a social construction" (p. 4). Our cultural standards of mothering, the time, labor, and financial resources required to be considered a "good" mother were largely out of reach for single mothers—even those not on the precipice of poverty. These injurious, largely one-sided depictions of single-mother headed families not only reinforced the ideology of intensive mothering and the impossible double bind they created for all working mothers, they also functioned rhetorically to position single mothers as "bad" mothers because they could not possibly fill the cultural prescriptions intensive mothering required. Shallow depictions of single mothers that neglected to address the full structural complexities of their lives also reinforced the legitimacy of the hegemonic patriarchal institutions that created many of

those complexities in the first place—like marriage. Reporter Nancy Folbre began to articulate this in a July 23, 2012 *New York Times* blog post:

> Most discussions of single mother focus on their choices, faulting them for deciding to raise a child without a secure commitment from a father. Yet the majority have been to the altar (or a justice of the peace) at least once. In 2010, about 62% of custodial mothers living with children whose biological father was absent were either divorced or married. (Folbre, 2012, paras. 4–5)

Unlike DeParle's (2012) interpretation of single mother Jessica Schairer's life, or Sawhill's (2012) selective recitation of data impugning single mothers, Folbre's (2012) blog post explicated the multitudinous factors that contributed to single mothers' material lives. In a mere 842 words, Folbre discussed marriage, nonmarital birth rates, fatherhood, poverty, the wage gap, access to healthcare benefits, child support, unemployment, and middle-class privilege, and linked them together in a way that helped explain how institutional structures worked against single mothers who try to help themselves.

Revisiting Past Rhetoric

This chapter has already discussed one way in which rhetoric about single mothers was different in 2012 from previous representative anecdotes. The increased presence of single mothers' voices was a definite shift in media narrative. But that was not the only thing that changed. While the explicit moralization of single mothers was still present, it was far less prominent during this timeframe. There were stories dedicated solely to countering and deconstructing the previous negative depictions of single mothers. One such story, published on *The New York Times* blog (Dell'Antonia, 2012a), argued that DeParle's (2012) narrative was unhelpful because it was heavy on the moralizing but light on solutions.

Consequently, Dell'Antonia asked if it was possible to promote parental preparedness without condemning single mothers:

> . . . the questions for society, and for parents raising children in a world of changing norms become complex and unwieldy. How can we help Ms. Schairer to best raise her children to be independent, happy and successful—to defeat the inequalities that could lead to a cycle of "diverging destinies"—while encouraging different choices? Many of us (myself included) don't miss the days of moral judgements that coincided with a time when fewer children were being raise in single-parent households, but if children raised in unintentional out-of-wedlock households continue to struggle in comparison with children in two-parent homes. We need to find a way to replace the force of those social norms without going backward in social acceptance. (para. 6)

Other stories took similar stances. Another *New York Times* blog (Dell'Antonia, 2012b) called into question the legitimacy of our cultural assumptions and expectations about mothering. "Fathers help create those demanding proto-humans, too, and it's long past time we stopped assuming that women are the default provider of that 24/7 care" (para. 9). Folbre (2012b) also criticized the role of public policy in the perpetuation of poverty for low-income families.

> Today, in an era of serious economic distress, in which the best promises of capitalism have been broke, low-income mothers and children are threatened with major cuts to public assistance, yet conservatives staunchly defend the unprecedented riches of the top 1 percent . . . . (para. 16)

These kinds of narratives were largely absent in previous representative anecdotes in which discourse focused more on personal choices, personal responsibility, and morality. Contextualizing single motherhood in this way lent legitimacy to structural critiques and

showed the absurdity of the distinction between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. When the lives of single mothers were depicted in ways that examined not only their personal choices but the circumstances that might limit or define those choices, media coverage served the civic good. It was not only inaccurate to portray all single mothers as poor, struggling, desperate to get married, or neglectful to the needs of their children, it was irresponsible journalism. Yes, single mothers might experience higher rates of poverty than other demographic groups, but the majority of them were not poor even though media coverage has historically depicted them primarily in this context.

A February 10, 2018, *New York Times* Sunday Review op-ed penned by three sociologists (Brady, Finnegan, & Hubgen, 2018) argued that single motherhood has not been the primary cause of poverty in the United States, despite perceptions to the contrary.

> Single motherhood is one of four major risks of poverty, which also include unemployment, low levels of education and forming households at young ages . . . . The reality is we have unusually high poverty because we have unusually high penalties for all four of these risk factors. For example, if you lack a high school degree in the United States, it increases the probability of your being in poverty by 16.4%. In the 28 other rich democracies, a lack of education increases the probability of poverty by less than 5 percent on average. No other country penalizes the less educated nearly as much as we do. (para. 11)

What is particularly unsettling is that single fathers fare much better than do single mothers. According to a 2017 report by the Institute for Family Studies, single fathers are more likely to be White, divorced, and better educated than single mothers. They also fare far better financially than do single mother families; the median household income for a single father with two children is about $40,000 per year, versus $26,000 a year for a single

mother (ElHage, 2017). But despite these advantages, Coles (2015) found that the children of single fathers seem to fare about as well as those of single mothers despite fathers' higher age, educational attainment, and better financial position. She attributed this to a difference in parenting styles and argued that "resources play a lesser role than parental processes in these outcomes. . ." (p. 30).

If the children of low-income single mothers fare just as well as children of higher-income single fathers, then all the media and political pearl-clutching about the outcomes of children raised by single mothers did not provide a complete picture. Indeed, other research has found income plays less of a role in child outcomes than other factors. Waldfogel, Craigie, and Brooks-Gunn (2010) argued that family instability seems to matter more than family structure for behavioral and mental health outcomes. Put another way, "children raised by stable single or cohabiting parents are at less risk than those raised by unstable single or cohabiting parents" (p. 1). Moreover, Waldfogel et al. (2010) argued that research about family structure, stability, and child outcomes holds "that is in large part the stability of the traditional family structure that gives it its advantage" (p. 2).

Thus, if stability matters more than structure, if children raised by low-income single mothers fare just as well, if not better in some cases, than children of single fathers, what explains the political, cultural, and media preoccupation with castigating single mothers? To explore this question, I turn once again to the moral regulation research of Hunt (1999) and Corrigan and Sayer (1985) explored in Chapters 2 and 3.

Moral regulation is "a project of normalizing, rendering natural, taken for granted, in a word 'obvious,' what are in fact ontological and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order" (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985, p. 4). Put another way, moral regulation attempts "to make some human social forms appear to the people subjected to

regulation as the natural and only possible ones" (Ruonavaara, n.d., p. 2). The traditional biological, two-parent, married, nuclear family is exactly that—a taken-for-granted historical social order that has been idealized and upheld as the "good," "right," and "best" arrangement for couples and children. Historically, as Coontz (2000) explained, it was not the norm, nor was it intrinsically better or worse than any other family structure. But as a society we have come to view it that way, for better or worse, till death do us part. People are simply not marrying at the same rates they used to, and the median age of first marriage is nearing 30 for both men and women (Jordan, 2018). Not only that, but nearly 40% of Americans believe the institution of marriage is becoming obsolete (Taylor, et al., 2010), and Census Bureau (2018) data suggested married couples now make up only about half of all U.S. households. By contrast, 61% of U.S. households were married in 1990 and 71% were married in 1970. While these trends have also made headlines, discourse about them typically employs the same moralizing "family decline" rhetoric in previous anecdotes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined news media discourse about single mothers during the calendar year 2012. It found a marked increase in the presence of single mothers as subjects, as well as greater inclusion of the voices of single mothers and their allies. It further found that media narratives were more likely to contextualize poverty and the struggles of single mothers and their children by offering explanations about the structural and institutional challenges faced by these families.

While stories painting single mothers and single motherhood stereotypically or negatively were still present, they were somewhat less salient than in previous historical periods. This shift marks a divergence from the previously analyzed news media narratives, which infrequently provide space for mothers to construct their own identities, portray

mothers almost exclusively in the context of poverty, and generally view single mothers as "lacking."

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

> You have policy makers that are still stuck in the sort of idealized 'Leave it to Beaver' families where the wife stays home and the husband is the breadwinner. The reality for my constituents is most them are in two-parent, working-family households. And many of them are single-parent working households.
>
> — Linda Sanchez, U.S. Congresswoman, 2018

This research has examined news media discourse about single mothers over the course of a 20-year timeframe. It explored five specific research questions about the rhetorical construction and ideological assumptions of these narratives. In the section that follows, I readdress each of these five research questions, examine the limitations of this study, and offer a discussion of the significance of this work to the media sociology literature.

Research Questions

RQ 1. How is the definition of single mother articulated rhetorically within news media?

Single mothers in this analysis were rhetorically constructed as low-income women parenting without partners. While this may seem obvious, it is notable for two reasons. First, there was little discussion of co-parenting or cohabiting mothers in the sample. Given the increases in cohabitation and divorce, this is somewhat surprising. It would be reasonable to expect more discourse about mothers co-parenting with their ex-spouses or cohabiting partners, but this was not the case; women were most often described as living only with their children. Second, single mothers were rhetorically situated in relation to men. Media coverage typically included reference to a mother's marital status, using terms like "divorced single mother" or "never married single mother" to describe the subject of a narrative.

Reference to widows was extremely rare. By positioning mothers in this way, media narratives propped up the patriarchy; single mothers were not in and of themselves complete people—they were constructed as being part of a "broken" family; they, rhetorically speaking, were incomplete.

RQ 2. What overarching themes are associated with discourse about single mothers in news media?

Consistent with previous research, single mothers featured in news media coverage in this analysis were most commonly associated with the theme of poverty. This holds true throughout each representative anecdote, although it is less salient in the final one. A second common theme, also previously identified, is morality. Much of the media coverage examined here ideologically positioned single mothers in the context of conservative moral rhetoric about their life choices and the consequences of those choices on their children.

With regard to the theme of poverty, several subthemes were present. First, single mothers were consistently depicted as struggling. To be sure, raising a child in poverty is not an easy or ideal circumstance, but media narratives consistently focused on the ways in which single mothers did not measure up to the standards of intensive mothering. While intensive mothering was not articulated by name in media discourse, the standards it prescribed were so deeply entrenched that nonadherence to them became grounds for condemnation. A second subtheme associated with poverty was personal choice. This theme is most salient in the first and second representative anecdotes, when the rhetoric of family values, welfare dependency, and personal responsibility were deployed leading up to and during the welfare reform debates. Media coverage consistently ignored, minimized, or justified the structural inequities of many American institutions that functioned to keep single mothers and their children in poverty. While these topics were addressed in media

narratives, it was typically in the context of outcomes for children—that is, narratives primarily discussed structural institutions as they related to child achievement. The children of single mothers were often draped in a cloth of inferiority; they scored lower tests, performed worse in school, were more likely to involved in criminal activity, had higher rates of substance use/abuse, etc. This line of discourse contributed to the moralization of single mothers.

As mentioned above, the theme of immorality is commonly attached to discussions about the outcomes of children of single mothers. Single motherhood was constructed most often in terms of deficiency or lack, particularly when their children were involved. Single mothers lacked good jobs, healthcare coverage, childcare, education, good decision-making skills, scruples, resources, partners, and on and on. One of the only conditions single mothers seemed to occupy in abundance was poverty. And because American culture most often viewed poverty as a personal character deficiency rather than a mere lack of money, mothers continually had their moral compasses questioned.

RQ 3. How are media discourses about single mothers connected to larger sociocultural, policy, and political institutions?

This question yields mixed results. Yes, discourses about single mothers were frequently explicitly tied to larger political and policy institutions. But again, it most often in terms of how they and their children failed to measure up against the standards these institutions have created that defined success in America. In the discourse following the Dan Quayle speech, mothers were situated rhetorically in relation to the institutions of family and government. In the welfare reform anecdote, they were considered most often in relation to work/employment, education, and government. In the marriage promotion anecdote, mothers were situated most closely to the institution of marriage, and, finally, in the most

recent discourse, mothers were discussed in the contexts of social class and family, although narratives in this final historical representative anecdote were overall decidedly more positive than in the previous three.

These connections are most often articulated as a way to explain or describe single mothers' difficult lives, and how mothers' adherence to the prescriptions of these institutions would benefit them. This is most salient in the discourses of welfare reform and marriage promotion; if single mothers got jobs or got married, they would no longer burden the government, their children would fare better, and their behavior would be morally compliant.

The ideological positioning of these narratives varied by anecdote. In the first three portions of the analysis, a conservative, traditional ideological position was favored. This is evidenced by the preoccupation with family values rhetoric, moral, and sexual regulatory nature of TANF and the PRWORA, and upholding of marriage as a primary social institution. In the final representative anecdote, the ideological position was mixed. While there was still a considerable amount of discourse that reflected a traditional view of family, there was a significant increase in the presence of discourses that reflected single mothers' lives and perspectives more fully, providing a critique of the structural institutions that perpetuated poverty and patriarchy.

RQ 4. Do stories about single mothers primarily feature the voices of single mothers?

In the first three historical representative anecdotes, the voices of single mothers were minimized. While they were present, they were not salient features of the rhetoric. Mothers' voices were secondary to those of political pundits, think tank representatives, academics, community leaders and organizers, and other institutional stakeholders.

Journalists did not position single mothers at the heart of their stories—rather, they were used as examples of family decline, a rationale for welfare reform, a scapegoat for the problems of patriarchy. In the fourth anecdote, this changed. Mothers' voices were much more salient. They were considerably more prominent within narratives, even in stories like DeParle's (2012) exploration of marriage and social class.

RQ 5. In counter-discourses, how do single mothers and their allies discuss themselves and the condition of single motherhood?

When mothers were given space to construct their own identities, they often used it to position themselves as good mothers whose children were loved and cared for. In 2012 particularly, even when mothers were depicted as poor or in need, their voices were often accompanied by an institutional critique that was not present in previous historical representative anecdotes which situated them as "deserving" poor rather than social leeches. Their allies were sometimes academics, sometimes progressive policy wonks, and sometimes journalists who centered mothers' voices over those of other stakeholders.

News media narratives about single mothers largely supported what I have argued is a decades-long project of moral regulation undertaken by political and social elites who have a vested interest in maintaining the patriarchal status quo. When Dan Quayle made his comment about Murphy Brown, "mocking the importance of fathers and calling it just another lifestyle choice," it sparked a moral panic about shifting demographic and social trends that undermined the "natural" social order of American family life. A few years later, a different presidential administration proposed and implemented a wholesale reformation of welfare policies that were seen to encourage single motherhood. Single mothers were pushed into the workplace even when evidence consistently demonstrated that their families were not necessarily economically better off as a result. When, as critics predicted, those

policies proved controversial and yielded mixed results, yet another presidential administration undertook a different strategy—encouraging women to marry. While the Bush administration denied this was a coercive effort, allocating hundreds of millions of dollars over nearly a decade to marriage programs was an unprecedented expenditure that ultimately proved fruitless—marriage rates continued to fall and divorce rates remained stable (Manning, Brown, Payne, & Wu, 2014).

Practical Applications

As a former journalist and educator who will likely be training the future generation of media professionals, the pragmatic uses of this work are of central importance. There are several key points that current and future media practitioners should consider. First, journalists would be wise to consider the ways in which race and social class are positioned in narratives about single mothers, their children, and the political issues that affect them. Research on heavily racialized and stereotypical depictions of poverty in media is not new, and these depictions can affect public perceptions and public policy. Journalists, editors, and producers should more carefully consider who they choose to feature in stories about poverty, particularly when addressing single motherhood.

Second, the use of single mothers as sources in stories that do not focus on poverty or welfare would more accurately reflect the reality that most single mothers are not, in fact, poor. The present study suggests journalists are starting to do this more frequently, but depictions of single mothers in general news and feature stories that do not focus on stereotypical subjects could help reposition single mothers in a more positive light.

Third, single mothers should not be used merely as "humanizing" elements in stories about single motherhood, poverty, welfare policy, or other issues frequently associated with single motherhood. They should be positioned as subjects, not just background sources.

Their voices, and those of their allies, should be featured more prominently, and mothers should be able to construct their own identities within these narratives. Journalists should rely less on thinktank spokespeople and politicians to construct stories, and more on the people whose lives are impacted by policies and programs that often occupy a central location in media narrative.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, news and media professionals should, as a matter of ethics, include greater discussion of the structural barriers faced by the subjects of their narratives, particularly in the contexts of poverty, welfare, education, and other institutional pillars of American life. This recommendation does not apply only to stories about single mothers however; a more thorough contextualization of these barriers is necessary to accurately represent and discuss the lives of any marginalized population. Again, this study suggests progress is being made in this realm, but there is still much room for improvement.

Limitations

This research is limited in a number of ways that require acknowledgment and consideration. First, the application of critical theory to this study is a useful way to view discourse and policy in the context of gender, power, and oppression, but it is only one tool in the theoretical toolbox. Critical theory does not demand impartiality, ideological neutrality, or detachment on the part of the researcher. Therefore, this work is not intended to provide an impartial or objective textual analysis. I entered the texts with an explicit ideological position in order to extract and examine rhetorical constructions of single mothers. Second, this work does not seek to examine the numerical frequency of discourses, nor does it situate itself in a framework of generalizability—that is, the sample is not intended to capture all, or even most, of the discourse about single mothers for each anecdote. Nor do I claim that the

sample, even if precisely replicated, could be analyzed by another researcher with similar results. Third, the sample for this project is intended only to function as a snapshot of discourses about single mothers and does not consider all discourse or seek to examine the proportion of single mother–focused discourse in relation to all available discourse. Fourth, the selection of four discrete historical representative anecdotes limits the sample and analysis to primarily major national publications and news programs. The selection of additional or different representative anecdotes, or an analysis of different texts, may yield different results. Further, the selection of texts is limited due to the availability of full-text articles and transcripts via academic databases. Finally, the analytic method employed here is insufficient to claim any causal relationship between discourse and policy. While I do suggest media discourse and representations of single mothers might have informed policy positions, this analysis does not claim there is a correlation between the events. However, given the rhetorical frame of this analytic mode, significance comes from the analysis of the contextual relationship between media discourse and public policy.

Future Research

The cultural shifts away from marriage and toward greater rates of single and unmarried motherhood show no signs of abating. These are important social signals worthy of media attention and scholarly evaluation. Future research should continue to examine the relationship between these demographic trends and media representations of mothers who bear and/or raise children alone. Because social media allows previously stifled voices to enter and engage in public discourse, further analyses focusing more narrowly on social media discourse about single motherhood could more closely examine public opinion and the ways in which single mothers position themselves rhetorically. More specifically, looking at the reader comments and responses to media narratives may provide greater insight into

contemporary discourse about single motherhood. Additionally, greater attention should be paid to how mothers respond to these discourses. Focus group or interview-based analyses that give single mothers the opportunity to address their depictions in media coverage would also be useful in providing more nuanced contexts to media representations.

Discussion

This study has considered media discourse about single mothers in the contexts of moral regulation, moral panic, and intensive motherhood, and has sought to extend the applicability and utility of these concepts in the study of media discourse. To be sure, this work is not the first to consider these frameworks as they relate to media representation and discourse, but it is unique in its focus on the ways in which these concepts intersect and interact to position single mothers politically and culturally.

News media narratives invoked moralizing language that added fuel to the moral panic fire about "family decline." Rather than positioning or refuting the claims of conservative politicians who demonized single mothers, news media discourse instead gave it greater credibility by failing to properly situate their claims in sociopolitical context. This, in turn, helped bolster the top-down projects of moral regulation undertaken by consecutive presidential administrations, first with welfare reform, then with marriage and fatherhood promotion programs. Media played a central role in establishing the legitimacy of these projects by largely ignoring important critiques of the programs and excluding single mothers from discourse about them. Moreover, news media narratives contribute to the perpetuation of the ideology of intensive mothering by positioning single mothers as deficient. Since being a "good" mother under this ideology requires women to invest all of their time, financial, and emotional resources to the care of their children, and single mothers are typically depicted as lacking time, money, and energy, it is incongruous for these

women to also be "good" mothers. Morality, or at least the perception of it, is an innate feature of intensive mothering, thus women who are unwilling or unable to adhere to its tenets are, by definition, immoral. Notably, a new ideology of mothering has become prominent amongst employed mothers. Christopher (2012) argues the ideology of "extensive mothering" is beginning to replace that of intensive mothering, particularly among women who are employed. Extensive mothering reframes "good" mothering practices as being "in charge" of, and ultimately responsible for, the well-being of children. This includes the delegation of routine child care, and a rejection of the "ideal worker" script that permits employment to infringe upon family life (Christopher, 2012).

If, as the saying goes, politics are all about perception, news media narratives about single mothers in the 1990s and early 2000s contributed to the perception—and thus the politics—that intruded upon and regulated the private lives of women who did nothing to deserve it. Single mothers are not criminals, nor are their children, and yet the American government has engaged in ideologically driven rhetoric and policy that has contributed to negative public opinion, which serves to bolster punitive policies. Meanwhile, the news media has largely played along, only recently shifting its narrative tone to include structural critiques and mothers' voices. There are, however, some recent promising developments in the political realm that could have a powerful effect on not only media discourse, but also on public policy.

In the 2018 midterm elections, approximately 2,200 women, single or not, ran for federal, state, or local offices, including no fewer than nine single mothers. Pattillo (2018) declared in the *Pacific Standard* magazine that "Single Mothers Are Having Their Moment in American Politics." Not surprisingly, these mothers face an uphill battle in the arena of public opinion. A 2017 study conducted by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation (Lee, 2017)

found that voters were concerned about female candidates' abilities to simultaneously raise children and hold public office. The same report also found that voters believed the age of a female candidate's children is significant, and voters were less readily to accept younger children than older children.

In a timely twist of irony, the television show *Murphy Brown* recently returned to network television, with showrunner Candace Bergen reviving her famed role behind the desk. Murphy did not waste time taking digs, by name, at President Trump and senior members of his administration. Murphy criticized Trump's use of Twitter to convey policy decisions, discussed "fake news," and seemed to be actively trying to stir up controversy (Saraiya, 2018). So far, it does not seem as though President Trump has taken the bait, History, it has been said, often repeats itself, and I for one am anxious to see what kinds of rhetoric—and policies—might follow.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abramovitz, M. (1996). *Regulating the lives of women: Social welfare policy from colonial times to the present*. Boston: South End Press.

Alvarez, L. (1996, September 2). Who needs emergency shelter? Mothers there speak out. *The New York Times*, p. 23.

Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of marriage and family*, *72*(3), 650-666.

Amato, P. R., Booth, A., Johnson, D. R., Johnson, D. R., & Rogers, S. J. (2007). *Alone together: How marriage in America is changing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Arneson, K. W. (1996, June 1). Workfare rules cause enrollment to fall, CUNY says. *The New York Times*, p. 1.

Bazelon, E. (2004, February 15). A punishing way to start anew. *The Washington Post*, p. B02.

Bell, W. (1965). *Aid to dependent children*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Benoit, W., L., & Anderson, K., K. (1996). Blending politics and entertainment: Dan Quayle versus Murphy Brown. *Southern Journal of Communication*, *62*(1), 73–85.

Bishop, M. J., & Hall, A. C. (2009). *Mommy angst: Motherhood in American popular culture*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1995). *The crisis of public communication*. New York, NY Psychology Press.

Bock, J. D. (2000). Doing the right thing? Single mothers by choice and the struggle for legitimacy. *Gender & Society*, *14*(1), 62-86.

Boodman, S. G. (2012, June 19). Giving patients more than medicine. *The Washington Post*, p. E01.

Borchers, T. (2006). *Rhetorical theory: An introduction*. London: Thomson.

Brady, D., Finnigan, R. M., & Hubgen, S. (2018). Single mothers are not the problem. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/10/opinion/sunday/single-mothers-poverty.html

Brenner, E. (1992, June 21). Mothers struggle to manage on their own. *The New York Times*. Westchester Weekly ed., pp. 1-4

Brummett, B. (1984). Burke's representative anecdote as a method in media criticism. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 1, 161-176.

Bullock, H. E., Fraser Wyche, K., & Williams, W. R. (2001). Media images of the poor. *Journal of Social Issues*, *57*(2), 229–246.

Bumpass, L., & Lu, H. H. (2000). Trends in cohabitation and implications for children s family contexts in the United States. *Population studies*, *54*(1), 29-41.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2007). *Changes in men's and women's labor force participation rates*. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2007/jan/wk2/art03.htm

Burke, K. (1969). *A grammar of motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Cain, J. (1993). Solo moms. *Essence*, *23*(4), 96.

Carbone, J. (2007). Is fertility the unspoken issues in the debate between liberal and conservative family values? *Law & Social Inquiry*, *32*(3), 809–839.

Casey, T. (2011, January 1). *Single mothers since 2000: Falling farther down*. Legal Momentum. Retrieved from https://www.legalmomentum.org/sites/default/files/reports/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf

Casey, T., & Maldonado, L. (2012). *Worst off – single parent families in the United States: a cross-national comparison of single parenthood in the U.S. and sixteen other high-income countries.* Legal Momentum. Retrieved from https://www.legalmomentum.org/sites/default/files/reports/worst-off-single-parent.pdf

Chandra, A., Martinez, G. M., Mosher, W. D., Abma, J. C., & Jones, J. (2005). Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of US women; data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16532609

Chatterjee, S. (2004, January 17). As election nears, Bush marriage initiative gets new attention. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, p. A02.

Chen, J. & Wenge, R. (1995, September 23). Welfare mothers say welfare is not the easy way out. [Television broadcast]. New York, NY: CNN News.

Cherlin, A. (2009). *The marriage-go-round: The state of marriage and the family in America today*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

ChildTrends Databank. (2015). *Births to unmarried women: Indicators on children and youth.* Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/75_Births_to_Unmarried_Women.pdf

Christopher, K. (2012). Extensive mothering: Employed mothers' constructions of the good mother. *Discourse & Society, 26*(1), 73-96.

Clawson, R. A., & Trice, R. (2000). Poverty as we know it: Media portrayals of the poor. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *64*(1), 53–64.

Cloud, D. (1998). The rhetoric of: Scapegoating, utopia, and the privatization of social responsibility. *Western Journal of Communication*, *62*(4), 387–419.

Cohen, S. (2011/1973). *Folk devils and moral panics*. London: Routledge.

Coles, R. L. (2015). Single-father families: A review of the literature. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *7*(2), 144-166

Collins, G. (2012, October 20). The least popular subject. *New York Times,* p. A23.

Conan, N. (2004, January 22). Explanations and criticism of president Bush's new marriage promotion plan. [Television program]. Talk of the Nation: National Public Radio

Condit, C. (1990). Rhetorical criticism and audiences: The extremes of McGee and Leff. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, *54*(3), 330–345.

Congressional Research Service. (2007). *Welfare reauthorization in the 109th Congress: An overview* (No. RL 33418). Washington, DC.

Coontz, S. (1999, November). The American family. *Life Magazine*. Retrieved from http://www.stephaniecoontz.com/articles/article10.htm

Coontz, S. (2000). *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap*. New York: Basic Books.

Coontz, S. (2005). *Marriage, a history: How love conquered marriage*. New York: Penguin Books.

Cooperman, A., Smith, G., & Ritchey, K. (2015). *America's changing religious landscape*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Corrigan, P., & Sayer, D. (1985). *The great arch: English state formation as cultural revolution*. New York, NY: Blackwell.

Cox, K., & Spriggs, W. E. (2002). *Negative effects of TANF on college enrollment* (No. SRR-01-2002). Washington DC: National Urban League.

Crawford, W. (1986, October 30). 91 in area charged with welfare fraud. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1986-10-30-8603210599-story.html

Critcher, C. (2003). *Moral panics and the media*. Buckingham; Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Critcher, C. (2008). Moral panic analysis: Past, present and future. *Sociology Compass*, *2*(4), 1127–1144.

Curtin, S., Ventura, S., & Martinez, G. (2014). *Recent declines in nonmarital childbearing in the United States* (Data Brief No. 162). Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Dan Quayle's Fictitious World. (1992, May 22). *The New York Times*.

Davis, A. (2007). *The mediation of power: A critical introduction*. New York: Routledge.

Dean, M. (1994). "A social structure of many souls": Moral regulation, government, and self-formation. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *19*(2), 145–168.

DeJean, S. L., McGeorge, C. R., & Stone Carlson, T. (2012). Attitudes toward never-married single mothers and fathers: Does gender matter? *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, *24*(2), 121–138.

Dell'Antonia, K. (2012a, February 19). For younger mothers, out-of-wedlock births are the new normal. [Blog post]. *The New York Times*.

Dell'Antonia, K. (2012b, July 16). Is it 'I do' or 'I plan' that divides us? [Blog post]. *The New York Times*.

DeParle, J. (1996, December 8). The Ellwoods: Mugged by reality. *The New York Times*, p. 64.

DeParle, J. (2004, August 22). Raising Kevion. *The New York Times*, p. 27.

DeParle, J. (2012, July 15). Two classes, divided by 'I do.' *The New York Times*, p. 1A.

DePaulo, B. (2018). Unearned privilege: 1,000+ laws benefit only married people. [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/living-single/201804/unearned-privilege-1000-laws-benefit-only-married-people

Dill, B. T., & Williams, B. B. (1992). Race, gender, and poverty in the rural South: African American single mothers. In C. M. Duncan (Ed.), *Rural poverty in America* (pp. 97-110). Westport, CT: Auburn House.

Dougherty, M. B. (2012, July 17). This child's view of single motherhood. [Blog post]. *The American Conservative*. Retrieved from https://www.theamericanconservative.com/2012/07/17/this-childs-view-of-single-motherhood/

Douglas, S., & Michaels, M. (2005). *The mommy myth: The idealization of motherhood and how it has undermined all women*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Dowd, N. E. (1997). *In defense of single-parent families*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Edin, K, & Kefalas, M. (2005). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Edin, K., & Lein, L. (1997). *Making ends meet* (Vol. 8). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Edleman, P. (1997, March). The worst thing Bill Clinton has done. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1997/03/the-worst-thing-bill-clinton-has-done/376797/

ElHage, A. (2017, December 5). Five facts about today's single fathers. [Blog post]. Institute for Family Studies. Retrieved from https://ifstudies.org/blog/five-facts-about-todays-single-fathers

Elliott, S., Powell, R., & Brenton, J. (2015). Being a good mom: Low-income, Black single mothers negotiate intensive mothering. *Journal of Family Issues*, *36*(3), 351–370.

Engstrom, E. (2012). The marriage gradient as representative anecdote in AMC's "Mad Men." *Media Report to Women*, *40*(4).

Eyer, D. (1996). *Motherguilt: How our culture blames mothers for what's wrong with society*. New York: NY: Random House.

Fairclough, N. (1995a). *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.

Fairclough, N. (1995b). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Language in social life series. New York: Pearson Education Limited.

Falkof, N. (2018). On moral panic: Some directions for further development. *Critical Sociology*.

Farkas, S. (1995). *Public attitudes toward welfare and welfare reform: A focus group report by Public Agenda* (No. 1045). Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

Farkas, S., Johnson, J., Friedman, W., & Bers, A. (1996). *The values we live by: What Americans want from welfare reform: a report from Public Agenda*. Public Agenda.

Feasey, R. (2012). *From happy homemaker to desperate housewives: Motherhood and popular television*. New York, NY: Anthem Press.

Fertig, B. (1996, June 19). New York City's workfare gives mixed results. [Radio program]. *All things considered*. National Public Radio

Fessler, A. (2006). *The girls who went away: The hidden history of women who surrendered children for adoption in the decades before Roe. v. Wade*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Fineman, M. L. (1991). Images of mothers in poverty discourses frontiers of legal thought: Gender, race, and culture in the law. *Duke Law Journal*, *1991*, 274–295.

Fineman, M., Mink, G., & Smith, A. M. (2003). No promotion of marriage in TANF! *Social Justice*, *30*(4), 126–134.

Firestone, D. (1996, August 17). Homeless parents in New York City face a work mandate. *The New York Times*, p. 1.

Folbre, N. (2012a, July 23). Discouraged dads. [Blog post]. *The New York Times*.

Folbre, N. (2012b, December 10). Capitalism and the kids. [Blog post]. *The New York Times*.

Follman, M. (2102, October 17). Romney points finger at single moms on gun violence. *Mother Jones*. Retrieved from https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2012/10/romney-guns-single-moms/

Fontenot, K., Semega, J., & Kollar, M. (2017). *Income and poverty in the United States: 2017* (No. P60–263). United States Census Bureau.

Frank, R. I. (1975). Augustus' legislation on marriage and children. *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, *8*, 41–52.

Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994a). A genealogy of dependency: Tracing a keyword of the U.S. welfare state. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *19*(2), 309–336.

Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994b). "Dependency" demystified: Inscriptions of power in a keyword of the welfare state. *Social Politics*, *1*(1). pp. 4-31

Fremstad, S. (2012). Family structure is overrated as an explanation of family income inequality. [Blog post]. Center for Economic Policy Research. Retrieved from http://cepr.net/blogs/cepr-blog/family-structure-is-overrated-as-an-explanation-of-inequality

French, M. A. (1992, June 28). The simple truth about middle America: It's not so simple anymore. Surprising voices from Quayle Country. *The Washington Post*, p. F1.

Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. New York, NY: WW Norton & Company.

Gao, G. (2014). *Chart of the week: The black-white gap in incarceration*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/18/chart-of-the-week-the-black-white-gap-in-incarceration-rates/

Garland, D. (2008). On the concept of moral panic. *Crime, Media, Culture*, *4*(1), 9–30.

Gilens, M. (1996). Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *60*, 515–541.

Gilens, M. (2009). *Why Americans hate welfare: Race, media, and the politics of antipoverty policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gilliam, F. D. (1999). *The "welfare queen" experiment: How viewers react to images of African-American mothers on welfare* (Research on Media Coverage). Los Angeles: UCLA: Center for Communications and Community.

Golden, T. (1996, August 1). The welfare bill: The recipients; people on welfare, too, find a lot to criticize. *The New York Times*, p. 23.

Goode, E., & Ben-Yehuda, N. (1994). Moral panics: Culture, politics, and social construction. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *20*(1), 149–171.

Gordon, L. (1994). *Pitied but not entitled: Single mothers and the history of welfare*. New York: Free Press.

Gordon, L., & Batlan, F. (2011). *The legal history of the Aid to Dependent Children Program*. Social Welfare History Project. Retrieved from https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/public-welfare/aid-to-dependent-children-the-legal-history/

Gordon, L., & McLanahan, S. (1991). Single parenthood in 1900. *Journal of Family History*, *16*(2), 97–116.

Gray, K., Chancellor, C., Hill, D, & Findlen, B. (2018). *The status of women of color in the U.S. news media 2018*. Women's media center. Retrieved from http://www.womensmediacenter.com/reports/the-status-of-women-of-color-in-the-u-s-media-2018-full-report

Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J., & Woollacott, J. (Eds.). (1982). *Culture, society, and the media*. New York: Routledge. Retrieved from http://didik.mercubuana-yogya.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Culture-Society-and-the-Media.pdf

Habermas, J. (1962). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Hall, S. (1982). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order* (Transferred to digital print). London: Macmillan.

Hancock, A.-M. (2004). *The politics of disgust: The public identity of the welfare queen*. New York: NYU Press.

Handler, J. F., & Hasenfeld, Y. (1991). *The moral construction of poverty: Welfare reform in America* (Vol. 144). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Hansen, J. E. (2011). *Origins of the state and federal public welfare programs (1932–1935)*. Social Welfare History Project. Retrieved from https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/public-welfare/origins-of-the-state-federal-public-welfare-programs/

Harter, L. & Japp, P. (2001). Techology as the representative anecdote in popular discourses of health and medicine. *Health Communication,* 13, 409-425.

Hays, S. (1996). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Healthy Marriage. (n.d.). Retrieved November 13, 2018, from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/healthy-marriage/healthy-marriage

Henneberger, M. (2012). Let's hear it for the single mom. *Washington Post*. p. A02.

Herbst, S. (1998). *Reading public opinion: How political actors view the democratic process*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Herrnstein, R. J., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: The reshaping of American life by differences in intelligence*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Hertz, R. (2006). *Single by chance, mothers by choice: How women are choosing parenthood without marriage and creating the new American family*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hier, S. P. (2002). Conceptualizing moral panic through a moral economy of harm. *Critical Sociology*, *28*(3), 311–334.

Hier, S. P. (2008). Thinking beyond moral panic: Risk, responsibility, and the politics of moralization. *Theoretical Criminology*, *12*(2), 173–190.

Hier, S. P. (Ed.). (2011). *Moral panic and the politics of anxiety*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hier, S. P., Lett, D., Walby, K., & Smith, A. (2011). Beyond folk devil resistance: Linking moral panic and moral regulation. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, *11*(3), 259–276.

Hill-Collins, P. (1994). Shifting the center: Race, class and feminist theorizing about motherhood. In D. Bassin (Ed.), *Representations of motherhood* (pp. 371–388. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Holden, K. C., & Smock, P. J. (1991). The economic costs of marital dissolution: Why do women bear a disproportionate cost? *Annual review of sociology*, *17*(1), 51-78.

Horn, W. (2001). *Wedding bell blues: Marriage and welfare reform*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/articles/wedding-bell-blues-marriage-and-welfare-reform/

Horn, W., & Bush, A. (1997). *Fathers, marriage, and welfare reform*. Washington D.C.: Hudson Institute.

Horyn, C. (1992, September 21). Single parenthood: The best choice I ever made. *The Washington Post*, p. D1.

Howard, C. (1992). Sowing the seeds of "welfare": The transformation of mothers' pensions, 1900–1940. *Journal of Policy History*, *4*(02), 188–227.

Huda, P. R. (2001). Singled out: A critique of the representation of single motherhood in welfare discourse. *William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, *7*(2), 341–381.

Hulbert, A. (2003). *Raising America: Experts, parents, and a century of advice about children*. New York: Random House.

Hunt, A. (1999). *Governing morals: A social history of moral regulation*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Isenberg, N. (2016). *White trash: The 400-year untold history of class in America*. New York: Viking.

Iyengar, S. (1990). Framing responsibility for political issues: The case of poverty. *Political Behavior*, *12*(1), 19–40.

Iyengar, S. (1996). Framing responsibility for political issues. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *546*, 59–70.

Jaffe, J., & Bazie, M. (2001). *Poverty rates fell in 2000 as unemployment reached 31-year low*. Washington DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Jakobsen, J. (2000). Why sexual regulation? Family values and social movements. In K. M. Sands (Ed.), *God forbid: Religion and sex in American public life* (p. 104). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Jayson, S. (2007, March 14). Family guy with a cause; Stance: Gay marriage not good for children. *USA Today*, p. 1D.

Jenkins, C. L. (2012, June 8). Why I didn't turn away from a gift. *The Washington Post,* p. B02.

Johnson, D., & Swanson, D. (2006). Constructing the "good mother": The experience of mothering ideologies by work status. *Sex Roles*, *54*(7–8), 509.

Johnson, D., & Swanson, D. (2007). Cognitive acrobatics in the construction of worker-mother identity. *Sex Roles*, *57*, 447–459.

Johnson, S. (2014). "Maternal devices," social media and the self-management of pregnancy, mothering and child health. *Societies*, *4*(2), 330–350.

Jones, R. (2006, August 23). Can marriage help alleviate poverty? [Radio broadcast]. News and Notes with Ed Gordon: National Public Radio.

Jordan, J. (2018). U.S. Census Bureau releases 2018 families and living arrangements tables. [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/families.html

Katz, M. (2013). *The undeserving poor: America's enduring confrontation with poverty*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kaufman, J. (2012, September 2). Supersizing the empty nest. *The New York Times*, p. RE1.

Keen, J. (1992, September 22). Value issue comes full circle. *USA Today*, p. 2A.

Kellner, D. (2006). 9/11, spectacles of terror, and media manipulation: A critique of jihadist and Bush media politics. *Critical Discourse Studies, 1(*1) pp. 41-64

Kennedy, S., & Bumpass, L. (2008). Cohabitation and children's living arrangements: New estimates from the United States. *Demographic Research*, *19*, 1663.

Kilborn, P. T. (1996, November 12). Welfare mothers losing bonus to track fathers. *The New York Times*, p. 12.

Kinchloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (1997). Critical theory. In C. L. Grant & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), *Dictionary of multicultural education* (pp. 51–53). Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx Press.

Kinchloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (2002). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In K. Hayes, S. R. Steinberg, & K. Tobin (Eds.), *Key works in critical pedagogy* (Vol. 32, pp. 285–326). Netherlands: SensePublishers.

Kinnick, K. N. (2009). Media morality tales and the politics of motherhood. In A. C. Hall & M. Bishop (Eds.), *Mommy angst: Motherhood in American popular culture* (pp. 1–28). Santa Barbara, CA, US: Praeger.

Koch-Baumgarten, S., & Voltmer, K. (2010). *Public policy and the mass media: The interplay of mass communication and political decision making*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kolbert, E. (1992, September 23). The 1992 campaign: Political memo; "Murphy Brown" feud: When art replaces life. *The New York Times*, p. A21.

Koons, J. E. (2004). Motherhood, marriage, and morality: The pro-marriage moral discourse of American welfare policy. *Wisconsin Women's Law Journal*, *19*. pp. 1-45

Kost, K., & Henshaw, S. (2014). *U.S. teenage pregnancies, births and abortions, 2010: National and state trends by age, race and ethnicity*. Guttmacher Institute. Retrieved from https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/ustptrends10.pdf

Kroll, A., & Murphy, T. (2012, March 6). Santorum: Single moms are breeding more criminals. *Mother Jones*, *6*.

Kuypers, J. (2008). *Rhetorical criticism: Perspectives in action*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc.

Lamont, M. (2000). *The dignity of working men: Morality and the boundaries of race, class, and immigration.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Race, class and family life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Larson, M. S. (1996). Sex roles and soap operas: What adolescents learn about single motherhood. *Sex roles*, *35*(1-2), 97-110.

Lee, B. (2017). *Modern family: How women candidates can talk about politics, parenting, and their personal lives*. Barbara Lee Foundation. Retrieved from http://oe9e345wags3x5qikp6dg012.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/BL_Memo_Final-3.22.17.pdf

Leo, J. (1992). A pox on dad and murphy. *U.S. News & World Report*, *112*(21), 19.

Levin, J. (2013, December 19). The welfare queen. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2013/12/linda_taylor_welfare_queen_ronald_reagan_made_her_a_notorious_american_villain.html

Lewin, T. (1992, October 5). Rise in single parenthood is reshaping U.S. *The New York Times*, p. 1.

Little, M. J. H. (1998). *No car, no radio, no liquor permit: the moral regulation of single mothers in Ontario, 1920–1997*. Toronto; New York: Oxford University Press.

Lucaites, C. M., & Condit, J. L. (1993). *Crafting equality: America's Anglo-African word*. Chicago: University of Chicago Pres.

Lundstrom, R. (2011). Between the exceptional and the ordinary: A model for the comparative analysis of moral panics and moral regulation. *Crime, Media, Culture*, *7*(3), 313–332.

MacLeod, L., Montero, D., & Speer, A. (1999). America's changing attitudes toward welfare and welfare recipients, 1938–1995. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, *26*, 175–186.

Manning, W. D., Brown, S. L., Payne, K. K., & Wu, H. (2014). Healthy marriage initiative spending and U.S. marriage & divorce rates, A State-level Analysis (FP-14-02). National Center for Family & Marriage Research. Retrieved from http://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/ BGSU/college-ofarts-and-sciences/ NCFMR/documents/ FP/FP-14-02_ HMIInitiative.pdf

Martin, J. A., Hamilton, B. E., & Osterman M. J. K., et al. (2017) Births: Final data for 2015. National vital statistics report, *66*(1). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr66/nvsr66_01.pdf

Martin, K. A. (2005). William wants a doll. Can he have one? Feminists, child care advisors, and gender-neutral child rearing. *Gender & Society*, *19*(4), 456–479.

Mather, M. (2010). U.S. children in single mother families. Population reference bureau: data brief. Retrieved from https://assets.prb.org/pdf10/single-motherfamilies.pdf

McCarthy, E. (2012, August 12). Sara Harding & Rob Devlin. *The Washington Post*, p. T17.

McCombs, M. (2014). *Setting the agenda: Mass media and public opinion*. Malden, MA: Polity Press

McGee, M. C. (1980). The "ideograph": A link between rhetoric and ideology. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *66*(1), 1–16.

McKeever, M., & Wolfinger, N. H. (2001). Reexamining the economic costs of marital disruption for women. *Social Science Quarterly*, *82*(1), 202-217.

McKerrow, R. (1989). Critical rhetoric: Theory and praxis. *Communications Monographs*, *56*(2), 91–111.

McLain, L. C. (2006). *The place of families: Fostering capacity, equality, and responsibility*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mink, G. (2001). Violating women: Rights abuses in the welfare police state. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *577*(1), 79–93.

Misra, J., Moller, S., & Karides, M. (2003). Envisioning dependency: Changing media depictions of welfare in the 20th century. *Social Problems*, *50*(4), 482–504.

Moffitt, R. (2008). A primer on U.S. welfare reform. *Focus*, *26*(1), 15–26.

Moffitt, R. A., Phelan, B. J., & Winkler, A. E. (2017). *Welfare rules, incentives, and family structure.* National Institutes of Health. Retrieved from https://www.nber.org/papers/w21257.pdf

Mount, C. (1985, October 23). 23 people indicted for welfare fraud. *Chicago Tribune.*

Murphy, J. M. (2003). "Our mission and our moment": George W. Bush and September 11. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, *6*(4), 607–632.

Murray, C. (1993, October 29). The coming white underclass. Retrieved from http://www.aei.org/publication/the-coming-white-underclass/

National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2004). *Victims of Domestic violence and TANF reauthorization.* Retrieved from https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2016-09/DVTANF.pdf

Newman, H. D., & Henderson, A. C. (2014). The modern mystique: institutional mediation of hegemonic motherhood. *Sociological Inquiry*, *84*(3), 472–491.

Oldenberg, D. (1992, July 7). Focus; national checkup; Visions of their family values. *The Washington Post*, p. C5.

One- and two-parent homes. (2012, June 14). *The Washington Post*, p. B02.

Parker, A. (2009). Can't buy me love: Funding marriage promotion versus listening to real needs in breaking the cycle of poverty. *Southern California Review of Law and Social Justice*, *18*(2), 493.

Parrinder, G. (1998). *Sexuality morality in the world's religions*. Oxford: OneWorld.

Pattillo, N. (2018, May 23). Single mothers are having their moment in American politics. *Pacific Standard.* Retrieved from https://psmag.com/news/single-mothers-are-having-their-moment-in-american-politics

Peterson, K. (1992, May 28). Families give strength to single moms. *USA Today*, p. 1D.

Peterson, K. (2002, July 20). The president's family man. *USA Today*, p. 1D.

Pew Research Center. (2015). *Parenting in America: Outlook, worries, aspirations are strongly linked to financial situation*. Retrieved from http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/

Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: investigating processes of social construction*: London: Sage Publications.

Phillips, L. J. & Jorgensen, M. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. London: Sage Publications.

Popenoe, P. (1935). Where are the marriageable men? *Social Forces*, *14*(2), 257–262.

Pro-Marriage Initiative Holds Promise for Poor. (2002, February 12). *USA Today*, p. 12A.

Quayle, D. (1992). *Address to the Commonwealth Club of California*. Speech. Retrieved from http://www.vicepresidentdanquayle.com/speeches_standingfirm_ccc_1.html

Rains, P. M. (1970). Moral reinstatement: The characteristics of maternity homes. *American Behavioral Scientist, 14*(2), 219-235.

Raley, R. K., & Bumpass, L. (2003). The topography of the divorce plateau: Levels and trends in union stability in the United States after 1980. *Demographic Research*, *8*, 245-260.

Reese, E. (2005). *Backlash against welfare mothers: Past and present*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Rivers, K. L. (2001). Has welfare reform reduced nonmarital births? *Population Today*, *26*(2).

Roberts, B. W. (2009). *The macroeconomic impacts of the 9/11 attack: Evidence from real-time forecasting* (Working Papers). U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Roberts, R. (2005, April 20). Giving fatherhood some pop; At NFI gala, Laura Bush touts role of dads in families. *The Washington Post*, p. C01.

Roiphe, K. (2012, August 12). In defense of single motherhood. *The New York Times* p. SR8.

Romano, S. (2018). *Moralizing poverty: The "undeserving poor" in the public gaze*. New York: Routledge.

Rothman, L. (2016, August 19). Why Bill Clinton signed the welfare reform bill, as explained in 1996. *Time Magazine*. Retrieved from http://time.com/4446348/welfare-reform-20-years/

Royce, E. C. (2009). *Poverty and power: The problem of structural inequality*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ruoff, A. (2012, January 5). Four wheels give mother, children new lease on life. *The Washington Post,* p. T17.

Ruonavaara, H. (1997). Moral regulation: A reformulation. *Sociological Theory*, *15*(3), 277–293.

Ruonavaara, H. (n.d.). Are movements of moral regulation just status politics? Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved from http://www.utu.fi /fi /yksikot/soc/yksikot/sosiologia/oppiaine/henkilokunta/ruonavaara/Documents/Movements_of_Moral_Regulation.pdf

Sack, K. (1992, September 3). The 1992 campaign: The vice president; Quayle tries to separate family values and Murphy Brown. *The New York Times*, p. 20.

Sands, K. M. (2000). Public, public and private: Religion in political discourse. In K. M. Sands (Ed.), *God forbid: Religion and sex in American public life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Saraiya, S. (2018, September 25). Review: The New Murphy Brown was made to infuriate Donald Trump. *Vanity Fair*. Retrieved from https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/09/murphy-brown-candice-bergen-review

Sawhill, I. (2012, May 27). Why Dan Quayle was right about Murphy Brown. *The Washington Post*, p. B03.

Sawhill, I., & Venator, J. (2015). *Is there a shortage of marriageable men?* (Brief No. 56). Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, Center on Children and Families. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/56-Shortage-of-Marriageable-Men.pdf

Schnarr, N. (2011). Nowhere else to go: Homes for unwed mothers in Canada during the 20th century. Retrieved from http://www.theclayandglass.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2011/08/Unwed-Mothers-research-Nancy-Final.pdf-FOR WEBSITEPROVIDE-PDF-PG2.pdf

Seccombe, K. (2000). Families in poverty in the 1990s: Trends, causes, consequences, and lessons learned. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *62*(4), 1094–1113.

Semuels, A. (2015, June 24). America's shame: How U.S. housing policy is failing the country's poor. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/06/section-8-is-failing/396650/

Sexton, J. (1996, October 14). Welfare mothers and informal day care: Is it up to par? *The New York Times*, p. 1.

Shapiro, D. (2007). *Is the welfare state justified?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shaver, J. (1996, August 23). What the welfare law may mean for certain recipients. *The New York Times*, p. 22.

Shepard, B. (2007). Sex panic and the welfare state. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, *34*(1), 155–172.

Sherman, C. (2018, June 18). Single moms running for office face toxic stereotypes even in the year of the woman. *Vice News*. Retrieved from https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/qvnmyq/single-moms-running-for-office-face-toxic-stereotypes-even-in-the-year-of-the-woman

Silbergleid, R. (2002). "Oh baby!": Representations of single mothers in American popular culture. *The Journal of American Popular Culture*, *1*(2). Retrieved from http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall_2002/silbergleid.htm

Skocpol, T. (1995). *Protecting soldiers and mothers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Smith, A. M. (2002). The sexual regulation dimension of contemporary welfare law: A fifty state overview. *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law*, *8*, 121–218.

Smith, A. M. (2007). *Welfare reform and sexual regulation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, D. S., & Hindus, M. S. (1975). Premarital pregnancy in America 1640-1971: An overview and interpretation. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, *5*(4), 537-570.

Smith, H. (1995, January 30). CBS This Morning. [Television program]. Single mothers on welfare find it hard to get a job. New York, NY: CBS Broadcasting

Some Look at the Welfare Plan with Hope, but Others Are Fearful. (1996, August 4). *The New York Times*, p. 26.

Stacey, J. (1996). *In the name of the family: Rethinking family values in the postmodern age*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Stanger-Hall, K. F. & Hall, D. W. (2011). Abstinence-only education and teen pregnancy rates: Why we need comprehensive sex education in the U.S. *PLoS ONE*, 6(10). Retrieved from https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0024658&type=printable

Sunderland, J. (2006). 'Parenting' or 'mothering'? The case of modern childcare magazines. *Discourse & Society*, *17*(4), 503-528.

Suro, R. (1992, May 26). For women, varied reasons for single motherhood. *The New York Times*, p. 12.

Swarns, R. L. (1997, October 25). In a policy shift, more parents are arrested for child neglect. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/25/nyregion/in-a-policy-shift-more-parents-are-arrested-for-child-neglect.html

Taylor, P., Parker, K., Wang, W., Morin, R., Horowitz, J., & Cohen, D. (2010). *The decline of marriage and rise of new families* (Social and Demographic Trends). Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.

Thompson, K. (2005). *Moral panics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Thurer, S. L. (1994). *Myths of motherhood*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1995). *Report to Congress on out-of-wedlock childbearing* (No. 95–1257). Hyattsville, MD.

U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, (2012). 2012 HHS Poverty Guidelines. Retrieved from https://aspe.hhs.gov/2012-hhs-poverty-guidelines

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2017, June 28). About TANF. Retrieved November 13, 2018, from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/tanf/about

Urschel, J. (1992, September 22). Life in the Murphy zone: Place where "reality ends, fiction begins." *USA Today*, p. 1A.

Usdansky, M. L. (2003). *Single-parent families and their impact on children: Changing portrayals in popular magazines in the US, 1900–1998*. Princeton, NJ: Bendhiem-Thoman Center for Child Wellbeing.

Usdansky, M. L. (2008). The emergence of a social problem: Single-parent families in U.S. popular magazines and social science journals, 1900–1998: *Sociological Inquiry*, *78*(1), 74–96.

Usdansky, M. L. (2009). A weak embrace: Popular and scholarly depictions of single-parent families, 1900 - 1998. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *71*(2), 209–225.

Valdivia, A. N. (1998). Clueless in Hollywood: Single moms in contemporary family movies. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *22*(3), 272–292.

Valverde, M. (1994). Moral capital. *Canadian Journal of Law and Sociology*, *9*(1), 213–232.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & society, 4*(2), 249-283.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1996). Discourse, power and access. *Texts and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis*, 84-104.

Vespa, J., Lewis, J. M., & Kreider, R. M. (2012). *America's families and living arrangements: 2012* (No. P20–570) (p. 34). United States Census Bureau.

Wagner, D. (1997). The universalization of social problems: Some radical explanations. *Critical Sociology*, *23*(1), 3–23.

Waldfogel, J., Craigie, T. A., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2010). Fragile families and child wellbeing. Center for the Future of Children, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, *20*(2), 87.

Walgrave, S., & van Aelst, P. (2006). The contingency of the mass media's political agenda setting power: Toward a preliminary theory. *Journal of Communication*, *56*(1), 88–109.

Weir, B. (2016, March 24). Iceland: A culture moving beyond marriage. CNN. Retrieved from http://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/wonder-list-bill-weir-iceland/index.html

Welch, W. M. (1993, December 14). Age-old debate on morality takes on new life. *USA Today*, p. A8.

Welter, B. (1966). The cult of true womanhood: 1820-1860. *American Quarterly*, 151-174.

West, D. (2004, February 1). On marriage and other pressing concerns. *The New York Times*. Westchester Weekly Desk, p. 1.

White, L. E. (1993). On the consensus to end welfare: Where are the women's voices commentary on the welfare of single mothers and their children. *Connecticut Law Review*, *26*, 843–856.

Whitehead, B., D. (1993, April). Dan Quayle was right. *The Atlantic*, pp. 50-84.

Wilcox, B. (2009, Fall). The evolution of divorce. *National Affairs*, 81–94.

Williams, L. A. (1995). Race, rat bites, and unfit mothers: How media discourse informs welfare legislation debate. *Fordham Urb. LJ*, *22*, p. 1159.

Williams, L. A. (2011). Race, rat bites and unfit mothers: How media discourse informs welfare legislation debate, *22*(4), 1159.

Wilson, J. Q. (1993). *The moral sense* (1. Free Press Paperbacks ed). New York: Free Press Paperback.

Wilson, J. Q. (2002). *The marriage problem: How our culture has weakened families*. New York: Harper Collins.

Wilson, W. J. (1987). *The truly disadvantaged*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wiltz, T. (2016, July 13). Growing number of states repeal family welfare caps. PBS News Hour. Retrieved from https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/growing-number-states-repeal-family-welfare-caps

Wines, M. (1992, May 21). Views on single motherhood are multiple at White House. *The New York Times*, p. A1.

Wolf, J. (2011). *Is breast best? Taking on the breastfeeding experts and the new high stakes of motherhood*. New York: New York University Press.

Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O. (2000). *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text*. London: Sage Publications

Wright, S. (2015). Moral panics as enacted melodramas. *British Journal of Criminology*, *55*(6), 1245–1262.

Yang, J. E., & Devroy, A. (1992, May 21). Quayle: "Hollywood doesn't get it;" Administration struggles to explain attack on TV's Murphy Brown. *The Washington Post*, p. A1.

Zeller, T. (2004, January 18). Two fronts: Promoting marriage, fighting poverty. *The New York Times*, p. 3.