



[Sociology 428: Research in Gender Inequality](#)

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Research in Gender Inequality: The End of the Gender Revolution?

Spring 2009

Lefrak OACS computer room #1

Monday Wednesday 2:00 - 3:15

Office hours: MW 3:30-5:00

[Prof. Reeve Vanneman](#)

This course will enlist you in current research at the University of Maryland. Research is exciting, tedious, rewarding, frustrating, challenging, time-consuming, and uplifting. Pushing the boundaries of human knowledge is an especially important endeavor, and I hope you all learn to value the challenges as much as your instructor does.

Not everybody is well suited to the uncertainties and frustrations of research. If you are intrigued by the possibility of discovering new ideas, then research can become addictive, a true calling. But if you're just not into new discoveries, that's fine too — but you are probably signed up for the wrong course. If you're unsure, stick around and see if we can convince you.

Our focus is on "The End of the Gender Revolution". [Trends in the United States](#) show that most of the great advances made in gender equality during the 1970s and 1980s came to an unexpected halt in the middle of the 1990s. **We don't know why.** (Actually, many observers aren't sure that it even happened — more on that later). *If* we are extremely lucky and hardworking, by the end of the semester we may be closer to an answer why so much changed in the mid-1990s. (But we may also end up even more confused than when we began — that's always the gamble in doing research).

Our guiding hunch will be that *something* happened in American *culture* in the 1980s and 1990s that reduced Americans' emphasis on achieving gender equality. Our work will be designed to specify exactly what that *something* is. Cultural explanations are not the only or even the most common answers in sociology, but we will see why most other ("structural") explanations don't work.

Fortunately, we can benefit from the work of several very smart predecessors who have given us an intriguing list of which parts of the culture changed that eroded support for gender equality. Lists of potential causes are a great start, but we need to test them more rigorously to see which suggestions, if any, bear up to systematic testing.

Our main test this semester will be to develop systematic *measures* of these cultural themes and to trace their *changes* over time. If their time trends coincide (or better, precede) the trends in gender equality, we have some support for their role as causes of "the end of the gender revolution". This would be only weak evidence — but it would be a first step. We will have much to discuss about the nature of evidence and "proof" in social science later.

Our main tool for testing these cultural ideas will be systematic **content analysis**. We will concentrate on the content of newspapers but will also look at other sources (magazines, TV, films, novels) as well. Newspapers

have the great advantage of being readily available electronically through LexisNexis available from the UoM library: <http://researchport.umd.edu/func=databases>

- [Required readings](#)
- [Content analysis exercises](#)
- [Term Paper and Poster](#)

Grading:

class discussion =	20%
four (or more) exercises =	40%
term paper =	40%

If you have a documented disability, the Sociology Department is experienced in making accommodations. Please contact me by the end of the first week of classes, and we'll discuss those arrangements.

The web address of this home page is <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/socy/vanneman/socy428>

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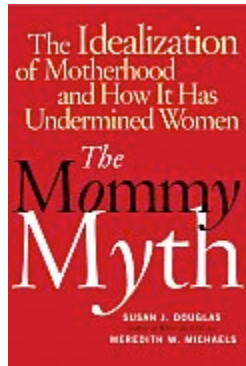
Sociology 428: Readings

Class reading will be taken from two books you need to purchase, one booklet that will be distributed, and from some professional articles available on the web:

Books:

David A. Cotter, Joan M. Hermsen, and Reeve Vanneman. [*Gender Inequality at Work*](#). New York: Russell Sage Press. 2004.

(an overview of gender inequality trends in the last 30 years with emphasis on the lack of change since the mid 1990s.)



Susan J. Douglas, Susan J. and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women*. New York: Free Press. 2004.

(a media scholar's analysis of changes that attacked mother's employment: the source of most of our specific hypotheeses about trends in the popular media.)

Robert Philip Weber, *Basic Content Analysis* Beverly Hills: Sage. 1990.

(a brief "how-to" of content analysis; useful for review and reference)

Articles and Papers:

- Cotter, David A., Joan M. Hermsen, and Reeve Vanneman. 2008. ["The End of the Gender Revolution? Attitudes from 1974 to 2006."](#) Working paper, College Park, MD: Department of Sociology, University of Maryland.
- McAdam, Doug. 1983. ["Tactical innovation and the pace of insurgency."](#) *American Sociological Review* 48(6): 735-754.
- Pescosolido, Bernice A., Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa A. Milkie. 1997. ["Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children's Picture Books Through the Mid- and Late-Twentieth Century."](#) *American Sociological Review* 62(3): 443-464.
- Melissa Milkie, Robin W. Simon, and Brian Powell. 1997. ["Through the Eyes of Children: Youths' Perceptions and Evaluations of Maternal and Paternal Roles."](#) *Social Psychology Quarterly* 60(3): 218-237.
- others...

For specific assignments from these readings, see the [schedule](#)

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Sociology 428: Research in Gender Inequality

Schedule

Revised January 25, 2009

The semester is divided into four phases:

- [Gender Trends](#)
- [Content Analysis Methods](#)
- [Media Analyses](#)
- [Own research](#)

However, there will be much overlap and back-and-forth. We won't wait until the end to start doing research. We'll get started before we fully understand what we're doing!

Jan 26 Introduction

Trends: What has happened to gender inequalities in the last half century?

date	topic	reading
Jan 28	employment	Cotter et al. , pp. 1-9
Feb 2	earnings etc.	Cotter et al. , pp. 10-30
Feb 4	gender attitudes	"End of Gender Revolution"

Content Analysis Methods: How do we do it?

Feb 9	counts: an example	"Tactical Innovation"
Feb 11	LexisNexis	Exercise 1
Feb 16	Exercise 1 tabulations	
Feb 18	Exercise 2: better counts	
Feb 23	Coding content	"Children's essays"

Mommy Wars: What happened in popular culture during the 1980s?

Feb 25	Media analysis	Douglas: Intro & Chapter 1
Mar 2	Media analysis 2	Douglas: Chapters 2-4
Mar 4	Exercise 3: Celebrity Moms	"Blacks in Children's Picture Books"
Mar 9	Media Analysis 3	Douglas: Chapters 5-7
Mar 11	Media Analysis 4	Douglas: Chapters 8-10 & Epilogue

Spring Break

Coding and Research

Mar 23	Reliability & Validity	Weber
Mar 25	Exercise 4	
Mar 30 +	Research Project	

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Assignment #1

Due February 16 9:00AM

1. Use the "Boolean" search in LexisNexis to count the annual number of "working mother" stories in the New York Times from January 1, 1981 to December 31, 2008. Here's the search string we will start with:

(work! OR employ! OR career) w/2 mother!

Plot the counts on a spreadsheet and draw a fitted curve (a polynomial of order 2). Compare the overall trend with the trend found for the Washington Post articles. Is the NYTimes trend also curvilinear, peaking at a similar time?

2. The total number of articles is too many to code manually. We might be able to do more coding if we used just a sample of these articles. But would a sample show the same trend as the entire population?

How would the trend results above in #1 be any different if we sampled just one four week period each year? Use your two assigned 4-week periods and repeat step #1 above for each of the two sampled 4-week periods. Are the two trend curves basically similar to the total curve? If you added the two 4-week periods together into an eight-week sample?

3. The computer search counts many articles that don't really mention working mothers (e.g., "He worked with Mother Teresa"). Human coding can eliminate some of these errors. Is the human coding worth the extra effort?

Repeat step 2 above for each of the two monthly counts, but count only articles that genuinely mention working mothers. Use the "extended list" results from LexisNexis to identify erroneous articles. Occasionally you may need to look at the article itself.

List any cases that you found marginal or difficult to classify as actually mentioning working mothers. What was your final judgment and why?

What proportion of all the articles identified by the Boolean search are erroneous? Plot the two combined 4-week revised counts of correct articles (i.e. an eight-week count). Does the trend look any different than the uncorrected trend?

4. Suggest an alternative search string that you suspect might do a better job of identifying articles that mention working mothers. Do you think your alternative would have fewer incorrect hits? Would your alternative search string identify more articles about working mothers that were skipped by our first definition?

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