

MOTHERS AND OTHERS

THE ROLE OF PARENTHOOD IN POLITICS

Edited by Melanee Thomas
and Amanda Bittner



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To all of the academic moms out there, especially our senior colleagues who have played such a crucial mentorship role. Watching you juggle children and successful academic careers has been inspirational. Motherhood and work in general are a tricky combination, and we are so grateful to have such incredible role models.

Thank you.

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1

The “Mommy Problem”?

Gender, Parental Status, and Politics

MELANEE THOMAS and AMANDA BITTNER

It seems like a classic case of “damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” When women in politics are mothers, reporters and opponents question them about their competence in both their private lives and their public lives. For example, when Attorney General of Illinois Lisa Madigan was rumoured to be running for governor in 2014, she was asked three times in a single interview if she could simultaneously raise her children and be an elected official. First she was asked “whether she could serve as governor and still raise her kids the way she wants to”; then she was “pressed further on whether she could simultaneously hold both jobs – governor and mom” – and when she noted that, as attorney general, she already balanced both jobs she was “reminded that being governor is a lot more demanding than attorney general” (McKinney 2012). She ultimately chose not to run for governor and instead sought re-election as attorney general (Pearson, Long, and Garcia 2013). It is difficult if not impossible to find a case in which a father was comparably harangued about his ability to balance his (potential) elected position and his parental status.

Yet, when political women don’t have children, they face attacks and questions about their ability to understand or care about key policy domains. Members of both the opposition and her own party characterized Julia Gillard, then prime minister of Australia, as being unable to feel empathy because she chose not to have children (Kelly 2011). Similarly, a staffer from

an opposing political party attacked Danielle Smith, a candidate for public office and the potential premier of Alberta, by questioning her sincerity on child and family issues because Smith didn't have "children of her own." In response, Smith released a candid statement about her struggles with infertility (Strapagiel 2012). Again, it's difficult if not impossible to find cases in which men have been likewise attacked for not having children. We are aware of no man who has made a public declaration of his virility or fertility to respond to such a personal attack.

For women in politics, this "damned if you do, damned if you don't" setup gives rise to difficult questions about strategy and practice. For students and scholars of gender and politics, it suggests that we must ask how career politicians, voters, and the media navigate the interaction among gender, parental status, and politics.

Although this literature has yet to be well developed, academic research on politics and motherhood suggests that, to be successful politicians, women must "do politics" as men by downloading family responsibilities onto someone else or eliminating them altogether (McKay 2011; van Zoonen 1998, 2006). The implication is that, unless women can remove or at least minimize family obligations, or the *anticipation* of future family obligations, a career in politics is not an option for them. The same is not perceived to be true for men; instead, they can have families and seek elected office at the same time because it is presumed that someone else is at home to parent the children. However, experimental research shows that female politicians with children are viewed more favourably than female politicians without children. In contrast, male politicians without children are viewed more favourably than male politicians with children (Stalsburg 2010). Why, then, does conventional wisdom state that politics and motherhood – real or anticipated – do not mix? What are the implications of this view for policy outcomes? For broadly held political attitudes? For political careers and campaign strategies? A systematic analysis of how actual mothering roles affect political behaviour, ambition, attitudes, and careers is required. We don't actually know much about the relationship between parenthood and politics.

Unfortunately, conjecture dominates assumptions about gender, parental status, and politics, as evidenced by the experiences of Madigan, Gillard, and Smith described above. Research on political representation has yet to evaluate systematically whether being a parent influences who is elected, how those elected perform their legislative roles, and how they are perceived

and evaluated by the public. Similarly, parental status is certainly presumed to change women’s and men’s political attitudes and behaviour – as shown by prolific media coverage of “soccer moms,” “hockey moms,” and “NASCAR dads” during election campaigns (Carroll 1999; Elder and Greene 2007). Yet, though research on public opinion and political participation confirms the existence of several gender gaps in political attitudes, values, and actions between women and men, it has not yet fully addressed whether parental status informs or changes these gaps.

This book seeks to fill a substantial gap in the existing literature on gender and politics. We bring together scholars of political careers, party organizations, political behaviour and representation, and public policy to discuss the role of parental status in political life. Although the role of motherhood is specifically cited in the academic literature and the popular press as a barrier to women’s political careers, empirical evidence suggests that the relationships among gender, parental status, and politics are complex and warrants further investigation. Yet to date this topic has not received much examination.

Our intellectual starting point is that being a parent is a gendered political identity that can influence *how, why, and to what extent* women (and men) engage with politics. The notion that parenthood – that is, caring for and raising dependent children – is a gendered political identity, we think, isn’t controversial. Women and men are affected differently by parenthood, and society perceives mothers and fathers differently, for a number of complex and interrelated reasons. At times, the constituent parts interact: woman and parent (mother), man and parent (father); at other times, patterns might hold for all parents regardless of gender. Importantly, we do not actually know much about the interaction of parenthood and politics, regardless of whether we specifically discuss mothers or fathers. Much of this book focuses on motherhood, though fatherhood is also assessed by a number of the contributors.

Scholars of gender and politics have examined *how, why, and to what extent* women and men engage with politics, providing important insights. It is important to extend this research further, to incorporate *parenthood* into our assessment of these three questions. These questions are citizen focused rather than state or policy focused or something else, and the chapters in this book, in their attempts to answer these questions, are also necessarily citizen focused. We do not assess, for example, public policy making on parental leave, childcare, reproduction, and the like. This book looks at three

main areas of citizen engagement with the political system to assess the role of parenthood: political careers; citizens, media, and party/candidate strategic communications; and public opinion and political participation. We do not claim to cover exhaustively all aspects of politics related to parenthood. We simply aim to take part in a conversation in which parenthood is incorporated as an explanatory variable, influencing the nature of political engagement.

Parental Status and Political Careers

Angela Merkel (Germany), Julia Gillard (Australia), Condoleezza Rice (United States), Helen Clark (New Zealand), and Kim Campbell (Canada) all have two things in common. First, each holds or has held a high executive position in government. Second, each is childless. Studies demonstrate that women legislators are more likely to be single and childless than they are to be mothers, while male politicians are predominantly family men (van Zoonen 1998, 2006). But other women, such as Indira Gandhi (India), Margaret Thatcher (United Kingdom), Erna Solberg (Norway), and Michelle Bachelet (Chile) have been successful political executives *and* mothers. That some women in politics are mothers while others are not is indicative that there is no “one size fits all” rule about motherhood and politics and suggests that more research is necessary to understand the relationships between political women’s careers and key aspects of their private lives, such as their children.

We suspect that gender stereotypes constitute one explanation of the presumption that motherhood specifically is incompatible with a political career. Much of the literature on women candidates suggests that stereotypical views of women’s roles and abilities can damage their political careers, especially when the office that they seek is high powered and masculinized, such as a presidency (Murray 2010). Common gender stereotypes present women as warm, gentle, and kind, while men are seen to be aggressive, assertive, and decisive (Huddy and Capelos 2002; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Masculine stereotypes are more desirable for politics and elected office than feminine stereotypes, especially at the highest levels (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Other gender stereotypes present women as honest, trustworthy, and full of integrity (Fridkin Kahn 1994; Huddy and Capelos 2002). These tropes can be used to women’s advantage in some (but not all) contexts, such as when issues of compassion or care are the most important for an electorate or when scandal leads voters to prefer candidates perceived to be more honest than the status quo (Bruckmüller and Branscombe 2010; Carlin and

Winfrey 2009). This advantage rests on voter knowledge; in low-information contexts, voters are more likely to fall back on gender role attitudes and stereotypes (Alexander and Andersen 1993; also see Cutler 2002).

As a subset of women, mothers are stereotyped both positively as being caring, understanding, and virtuous (Kanter 1977) and negatively as being those who scold and punish (Carlin and Winfrey 2009). Although these stereotypes can be deployed to a candidate’s or politician’s advantage, they can also cue that mothers have responsibilities in the private sphere, undermining their perceived leadership in the public sphere (Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Kanter 1977).

Although these stereotypes might seem to be straightforward, their effects in politics are not. Research suggests that women in politics are also stereotyped as a specific subset of women. Notably, female politicians are stereotyped as having considerably lower levels of integrity and empathy than women in general as well as lower levels of leadership ability and competence than male politicians (Schneider and Bos 2013). Furthermore, women professionals are more likely to be stereotyped as competent and capable leaders than women in politics, leading scholars to conclude that “female politicians seem to be ‘losing’ on male stereotypical qualities while also not having any advantage on qualities typical of women” (Schneider and Bos 2013, 17). What does this mean for mothers who seek political careers? It is not immediately clear that there is sufficient justification to assume that stereotypes about women in general or subsets of women – politicians and mothers – will map easily onto each other. One might expect that these stereotypes cut a number of ways, some positively and others negatively, so further investigation is needed.

Stereotypes comprise only some of the challenges facing mothers with political careers. Another is the double day, especially the difficulties of navigating childcare. Time-use studies suggest that many women, but not many men, put in a double day of paid work outside the home and unpaid work inside it. Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001) found that the household division of labour in 1990 was similar to that of the 1950s. More recent time-use surveys indicate that, though married men perform more housework now than in 1965, women continue to spend far more time on household chores than men, even when they are working comparable hours outside the home (Eagly and Carli 2007; see also Hook 2006; Lowndes 2004; Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch 2002; Ravanera, Rajulton, and Turcotte 2003). The same studies also show that “mothers provide more childcare [now] than in earlier generations,” such that “employed mothers in 2000

spent as much time interacting with their children as mothers without jobs did in 1975” (Eagly and Carli 2007, 52, 54).

In politics, the difficulties caused by gendered time use with respect to children and the double day were shown in sharp relief by Anne Marie Slaughter as she left her post as the first female director of policy planning at the State Department. She suggested that rigid political schedules prevented her from being “both the parent and [the] professional I wanted to be” (Slaughter 2012, 1). Importantly, this was not the case in her demanding academic career prior to politics, nor does it appear to be the case for many men or at least for as many men as women. This suggests that the rigid political schedule conflicts with gendered expectations and experiences of parenting.

In this book, we probe what this means for women who have, or want to have, political careers, and many of the chapters here begin by asking different types of questions. If women choose to have children as well as political careers, what supports are there to help balance this particular kind of work and family life? Are these supports comparable to those of other workplaces in the private or public sector? Are political contexts such as legislatures able to facilitate mothers in politics? If so, how? If not, which specific barriers are in place, and how might they be removed? Are women in politics less likely to be mothers? If yes, is it because it is too difficult to balance a political career with the double day or modern expectations of the hours that mothers must dedicate to childcare? Or are political parties and elites less likely to recruit women with children to political careers because of the stereotypes outlined above? How and why is this different for fathers? Are men in politics able to download their parental responsibilities onto others in ways that women cannot or choose not to? Or do they face comparable difficulties balancing political work and family life?

The chapters in this book assess many of these questions in different political contexts. In Chapter 2, Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs, for example, assess legislative careers and recruitment in Britain to understand better how parties target and treat mothers (if at all). They ask how the mother politician and representations of motherhood play out in UK politics, and they assess how motherhood – and gender – can best be integrated into the legislature. They argue that incorporating an ethic of care into political institutions is likely to be most effective for both women and parents.

Barbara Arneil assesses in Chapter 3 tangible challenges faced by legislators who are or will become mothers with infants while in office. In particular, she asks about the effects of being elected for only a four- to five-year

window on availability of and willingness to take maternity leave. She also asks about the impact of working in a “formal and ritual-laden chamber” as well as the lack of control over the daily schedule (division bells, unpredictable vote times) compared with a more informal workplace for lactating women and on breastfeeding generally. Arneil also notes the pressure on legislators to be public role models and advocates for “breast is best,” a pressure that many mothers find difficult (even when not in the public eye), and she wonders what impact that might have on legislators’ strategies for balancing motherhood with legislative careers. To answer these questions, Arneil assesses recent experiences in Canada, Australia, and Britain, and she finds that female MPs face particular challenges because of the nature of parliamentary careers, arguing that it is only with a combination of mother-friendly policies instituted in legislatures that mothers can really balance these competing pressures.

In Chapter 4, Susan Franceschet, Jennifer Piscopo, and Gwynn Thomas turn our attention to a different part of the world, asking questions particularly important in the Latin American context. They ask how maternalism shapes Latin American politics today. In particular, they wonder whether (as has been the case in the past) female politicians are seen to be caretakers of nationwide “families”; whether motherhood structures legislative behaviour when they are in office and their access to politics more generally; and whether policies designed to increase participation and equality continue to be shaped by maternalism. They find that the gendered division of labour continues to shape women’s political opportunities and that society continues to apply gendered norms of caretaking and social issues to the understanding of women’s politics. The authors also find that democracy has strengthened discussions of women’s rights and equality, thus expanding opportunities for women’s political engagement and involvement.

For some time, scholars have assumed that local municipal politics are more female friendly and perhaps more family friendly than state-level or national-level legislative careers. Rebecca Hannagan and Christopher Larimer assess in Chapter 5 the impact of gender quotas on local boards and committees in Iowa. They ask whether more and younger women are involved in local politics and whether their involvement indicates a perception that local politics facilitates greater balance between family and work responsibilities or whether there is something entirely different about local politics that attracts younger women. They find that recent legislation is indeed supportive of young families (including mothers) since it facilitates increased participation of women in local politics.

Ronnee Schreiber shifts the focus yet again in Chapter 6, in which she looks at the constructions of motherhood by leaders of national conservative organizations representing women's interests. The focus on conservative women is interesting because they have had dual pressures placed on them, including both promoting traditional gender roles and encouraging women's political participation. Specifically, Schreiber asks how these women characterize motherhood and articulate their views of it in relation to their professional goals and those of other political women; she essentially seeks to understand how they see and deal with the "juggle" of personal and professional responsibilities. Through in-depth interviews with these leaders, she finds that their perspectives are varied but that the women are unified in seeing the mommy struggle or work-life balance in private terms. That is, they do not see a role for the state in "helping" them to manage their personal and professional lives, but they recognize as essential the roles of their husbands (and extended families) in supporting their careers.

The chapters in this section fit closely with one another, questioning the nature of the political career, the stereotypes about motherhood/parenthood, and the practical challenges that parents face in political careers. In many ways, they raise more questions than answers, pointing to the need to continue this avenue of research in the future.

Communications and Campaign Strategy

Another important set of questions arises once women are in politics, either as candidates or as elected officials. How does parental status influence their strategic actions, communications, and interactions with constituents and the media? Are these considerations driven by an awareness of gender-based stereotypes or broadly held views about mothers or by other factors, such as party affiliation and ideology? And how, why, and to what extent do the media frame and respond and contribute to the relationships among gender, parental status, and politics?

It is safe to assume that women in politics (just like men) are rational actors (Dolan 2005, 42), which suggests that their motivations for seeking public office are multifaceted and contain many factors outside their gender identity. This suggests that, though gender-based factors might spark some women's interest in politics, that interest could be sparked by many other factors. Furthermore, because women are rational actors, they are probably aware of the stereotypes about them and evaluate when, how, and why to take them into account when presenting themselves to the public through their communications. This would lead us to expect that female

politicians’ communications and media interactions might be different from men’s but in specific, strategic, and subtle ways.

Research confirms that this is the case: few differences emerge in women’s and men’s campaign websites that cannot be explained by other factors, such as party affiliation, confounding stereotypical expectations that women and men will emphasize different issues in their campaigns. Slight variations might appear when women run against other women rather than men, indicating that emphasizing certain issues in campaign communications might be “strategic behaviour on the part of these women to simultaneously counter and benefit from gender-based stereotypes voters may hold about them” (Dolan 2005, 37). Although women and men in politics present themselves in similar ways, their motivations to do so might be different, especially in relation to their parental status.

Even the most careful communications strategy cannot entirely control how the media cover, frame, and analyze women in politics. Research shows that the media might simply not give women in politics as much coverage as men in politics (Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005); although this trend appears to be diminishing over time for candidates for executive office (Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010; Trimble 2007), it might still hold for other levels of government and politics. Studies also show that the media tend to focus on women politicians’ personal characteristics, appearances, and private lives but on men’s skills and abilities (Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010; Trimble 2007; Trimble et al. 2013). In some contexts, coverage of women politicians’ private lives is explicitly about their children (van Zoonen 2006), while in others children are ignored in favour of marital status and sexuality (Trimble et al. 2013).

Like the stereotypes outlined above, communication strategies and coverage can cut a number of ways, and it is not entirely clear when and why the cut is positive for some women in politics but negative for others. Part of the explanation might rest with a female politician’s ability to present herself plausibly as a “good” or traditional mother. For example, Sarah Palin is a self-described “hockey mom” and has been framed by the media as a traditional mother. As a result, after she gave birth while in office as governor of Alaska, the overall tone of the coverage was positive and sympathetic, especially after the child was diagnosed with Down’s syndrome (Loke, Harp, and Bachmann 2011). In contrast, another governor who gave birth while in office – Jane Swift of Massachusetts in 2001 – was vilified as a mother while her competence as a politician was questioned. Media reports consistently challenged how she would balance work and family, even

though her husband was staying at home with the children. Importantly, the media presented her husband as a man who couldn't possibly be happy but who also couldn't possibly care for their children as well as Swift herself (Loke, Harp, and Bachmann 2011). Palin and Swift are similar enough on policy and party grounds – both are Republicans who oppose equal marriage – suggesting that the differences in their media coverage rest with other factors. Because there was no question that Palin would be her child's primary caregiver, she did not disrupt the dominant narrative of white, heterosexual, middle-class families in the United States. Swift, as the breadwinner with a stay-at-home husband, did disrupt that narrative and apparently was punished for doing so.

Three chapters in this section examine the issue of women and motherhood in the media more extensively. Melanee Thomas and Lisa Lambert open the section by looking in Chapter 7 at the actions of politicians, focusing on the political communication strategies of members of Parliament in Canada. They ask to what extent (and why) legislators choose to present their families and discuss their parental status in their official communiqués (both online and in their constituencies through the mail). Their research suggests that the decisions of MPs appear to be conditioned by gender, party affiliation, and province. Interestingly, Thomas and Lambert also find that some women choose not to integrate their parental status into their campaigns out of security concerns, a consideration not echoed by their male peers.

In Chapter 8, Melissa Miller shifts the focus and looks at press coverage of female political candidates, zooming in on the campaigns of two high-profile “political mothers,” Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, in their respective 2008 runs for executive office. Miller asks whether traditional stereotypes continue to plague women's (and mothers') media coverage and whether motherhood actually benefits female candidates. The comparison of Clinton with Palin is particularly useful in that Clinton downplayed her role as a mother, while Palin celebrated and drew attention to motherhood in her campaign. Miller finds that voter stereotyping of women on the campaign trail seems to be on the decline and that voters might perceive feminine traits (and motherhood) in a particularly positive light. Both Miller and Thomas and Lambert highlight the strategic choices made by mothers on the campaign trail and in office, since either downplaying or promoting their parental status can benefit them in different situations.

Carrie Langner, Jill Greenlee, and Grace Deason take our focus to a new domain in Chapter 9 as they assess the extent to which parenthood has

become politicized in recent years and whether or not this increased politicization (for both women and men) has affected the political engagements and activities of mothers and fathers. They argue that the Internet and social media have played major roles in politicizing motherhood (and, increasingly, fatherhood), and as a result parents have become more vocal. This fascinating chapter straddles the topics of media and individual behaviour and provides a good segue into the next section, which looks more closely at the impact of parenthood on the opinions, attitudes, and actions of “regular” citizens.

Parenthood and Opinion, Participation and Behaviour

We know a great deal about the effect of gender on public opinion and political participation. Women vote at comparable, or even slightly higher, rates to men in most post-industrial democracies (Beckwith 1986; Campbell 2006; Gidengil et al. 2004; Welch 1977). In some contexts, women are as likely as men to participate in protest activities (Gidengil et al. 2004), and women are considerably more likely than men to engage in political and ethical consumerism (Childs 2004; Stolle and Micheletti 2013). However, men are considerably more likely than women to participate in more conventional political activities, such as working on political campaigns, donating to campaigns or causes, joining political organizations or parties, contacting government officials, and running for elected office (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Childs 2004; Gidengil et al. 2004; Inglehart and Norris 2000; Young and Cross 2003).

Similarly, we know that women and men have different partisan preferences. Women are more likely than men to support left-leaning parties in a number of established democracies (Carroll 1988; Gidengil et al. 2003, 2005; Inglehart and Norris 2000). In some cases, notably the United States, this gender gap in vote choice is driven by men’s shift to the right (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Wirls 1986). Considerable gender gaps exist in policy preferences as well: women are more likely than men to support social programs and the welfare state (Schlesinger and Heldman 2001) and to use their concerns about these programs to evaluate economic issues (Gidengil 1995). Women are also less likely than men to support war and military intervention (Brooks and Valentino 2011; Conover and Sapiro 1993; Togeby 1994) and some forms of supranational integration, such as the European Union (Nelsen and Guth 2000). Women are more likely than men to support liberal policies on civil rights with respect to race (Hutchings et al. 2004) and sexual orientation (Herek 2002).

It is also well established that women are less psychologically engaged with politics than men. Women report lower levels of political interest (Bennett and Bennett 1989), subjective political competence (Bennett 1997; Thomas 2012), and political ambition (Fox and Lawless 2011) than men. Men consistently score higher than women on political knowledge measures (Stolle and Gidengil 2010), in part because men are more likely than women to guess (Mondak and Anderson 2004). The stereotypes discussed above also play roles in this knowledge gap, for women cued with a negative stereotype about women in politics tend to perform more poorly on political knowledge tests (McGlone et al. 2006; Thomas, Harell, and Gosselin 2013). Importantly, the gender gap in political knowledge disappears when knowledge about government programs and services is evaluated rather than just the names of cabinet ministers and political executives (Stolle and Gidengil 2010).

Although we know less about the effects of parental status on political attitudes and behaviour, analyses of parental status and politics are often gendered. If pundits or party activities are any guide, parental status should have a considerable effect on individuals' political behaviour, preferences, and participation. In the 2004 American presidential election, for example, candidates courted "NASCAR dads" and "security moms." The latter trope presents mothers as a bloc hawkishly concerned about security and defence, presumably open to the Republicans' tough talk on these issues. Similarly, NASCAR dads are presented as low- to middle-income white fathers in suburban and rural areas; although the Democrats' economic policies should be attractive to such fathers, the social conservatism of the Republican Party often wins them over (Elder and Greene 2007). The appeal of both tropes for pundits is apparent, but neither security moms nor NASCAR dads appear as a voting bloc in American politics. Instead, Elder and Greene (2007) find differences between mothers and women without children on social welfare issues but few differences between fathers and men without children. These findings suggest that parental status is related to political attitudes and behaviour for women in ways that might not be the same for men (Elder and Greene 2007).

Taken together, research findings suggest that, like gender, parental status is but one identity that can affect political behaviour, public opinion, and policy preference. These identities can create conflicting policy choices and behaviour options. Sorting through the conflicts might depend on how an identity is cued. One experimental study (Klar 2013) cued parental and partisan identity by naming the identity, cuing it in terms of efficacy

(i.e., the group is empowered, and the government listens to it), and then cuing it in terms of threat. The results show that identities cued with equal strength tend to cancel each other. However, threatened identities outweigh other cued identities, giving the threatened identities the most influence on policy preferences (Klar 2013).

We suspect that gender and parental status are but two of several, potentially conflicting, identities that influence political attitudes and behaviour. Research on the combined effects of gender and other politicized identities, such as race, suggests that behaviour and attitudes that underpin “average” or “typical” gender gaps are exhibited only by specific subgroups of women. For example, the gender gap in presidential vote choice in the United States is a predominantly white phenomenon (Lien 1998). Similarly, though women perform as well as men on political knowledge tests about government programs and services, some women who need them the most – low-income, immigrant, and older women – know the least about them (Stolle and Gidengil 2010). When these results are taken together with Elder and Greene’s (2007) conclusion that parental status affects women’s political attitudes and behaviour differently than men’s, the implication is that the relationships among gender, parental status, and politics are complex.

The final set of chapters in this book not only increases our understanding of the role of parental status in political participation and attitudes but also demonstrates the complexities of these competing identities. In Chapter 10, Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant and Amanda Bittner assess Canadian attitudes on three issue dimensions – cultural activities, social welfare, and crime and security – to determine whether there are consistent parental gaps. They find that parents tend to be more conservative on issues related to both culture and crime and security but that there are few gender-based parent gaps. That is, mothers and fathers do not differ much from one another, though they do differ from non-parents fairly consistently. Why these differences occur is much less clear, and their research points to the need for further investigation.

Janine Giles looks at political knowledge in Chapter 11 to assess whether parental status has a role in the acquisition of political information. She focuses on aggregate patterns at the local level to determine whether gender gaps in knowledge remain in “gender progressive” contexts. In particular, she asks whether the socio-economic context (including parenthood) has an impact on the level of political knowledge. She finds that this context does indeed influence women’s levels of knowledge but that parenthood has little impact.

In Chapter 12, Allison Harell, Stuart Soroka, Shanto Iyengar, and Valérie Lapointe focus on attitudes toward public policy as they assess the extent to which traditional ideologies about gender roles influence voters' perceptions of parental leave policies. Assessing attitudes from surveys in Canada, Britain, and the United States, they find that those supporting traditional gender roles are less likely to support generous terms of parental leave and that these individuals are also more likely to penalize "non-traditional" leave seekers (e.g., fathers and single mothers). Their chapter points to the important links between basic values and state support for family policies.

Brenda O'Neill and Elisabeth Gidengil turn our attention in Chapter 13 to political participation, focusing on parental gaps among women because of the gendered impact of parental status. They ask two main questions. First, does motherhood affect women's civic and political participation? Second, if it does affect such participation, to what extent is this effect mediated by the age of children at home? They find that the mere presence of children in the home is not enough to decrease women's political participation (except among single parents) but that the ages of children are important: women with children aged five to 12 are more likely than other women to participate in some activities. Apparently, having school-aged children *increases* women's likelihood of doing volunteer work and signing petitions.

Michele Micheletti and Dietlind Stolle assess still another piece of the puzzle in Chapter 14, also focusing on the increased political activity of parents. They assess whether children help to mobilize their parents by examining political consumerism in Sweden. They find that parents of older children are more aware of environmental sustainability issues in relation to food and toys and that there is a gendered parent gap in awareness and concern: mothers are more concerned than fathers about these issues. Taken together, all of these chapters point to the complex relationships among gender, parenthood, and citizen engagement. Parenthood can influence and mobilize parents in some circumstances, and the effect is not always equal for mothers and fathers.

Understanding the Impact of Motherhood on Politics

This book uses the questions outlined above – how, why, and to what extent parental status affects how citizens engage with politics – to examine the three domains of political careers, media and campaign strategy, and participation and behaviour. Each chapter highlights the existing knowledge about gender, parental status, and politics as it relates to the topic before

presenting new research on the extent to which (gendered) parental status matters.

The volume touches on a number of pertinent issues and controversies related to gender and politics. The chapters look at the role of parenthood in different contexts and from different angles, using different research methodologies and data sets, to bring together cutting-edge insights into contemporary issues in gender and politics. By combining analyses that use data from a variety of sources (including opinion surveys, government-collected national statistics, party- and candidate-produced flyers, websites, and other mailouts, national media reports, and qualitative interviews with candidates and other political activists), this book sheds light on the impact of motherhood on politics in a way that has not been done to date.

Although there is a rich literature on gender and politics, and a rich literature on the impact of motherhood in a number of other disciplines (e.g., sociology, labour studies, and health, to name a few), there is little work to date on the role of motherhood (or parenthood) in politics. This book attempts to push that dialogue forward, furthering our knowledge while also raising more questions in the process and pointing to issues that we still don't really understand.

Our concluding chapter re-evaluates the questions presented and the contributions made by our authors, and it assesses newly collected comparative data that will help us to understand what we might expect in politics in the future from both parents and non-parents. One thing that comes through clearly in our conclusion is that most states agree that paid work and private care responsibilities (i.e., parenting) must be balanced with one another and that the state has a large role to play in that balance. We find it striking that the same is not said about political careers. We contend that important discussions are required in most democratic states about the roles of parents, and mothers in particular, in politics. We also propose a research agenda to further evaluate the roles of gender and parental status in politics.

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