Politics and Parenthood: An Examination of UK Party Leadership Elections

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As women increasingly campaign for the highest political offices, this original content analysis study examines the extent to which gender and parenthood play a role in political leadership using British political party leadership elections as a case study. Competing hypotheses from the limited literature on politics and parenthood are examined. The article finds that family mentions have varied over time and contrary to some gender literature men's family was at times of greater interest than women's. Evidence is found for the politicisation of motherhood and a possible 'maternal mandate'. In parallel, fatherhood was of increasing interest and the rise of the modern man can be seen. Yet, male candidates appear to have an 'opt-out clause' in any politicisation of fatherhood. Further questions about politics and parenthood begged by this article open future research avenues.

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As women increasingly campaign for the highest political offices—Julia Gillard in Australia, Angela Merkel in Germany and Hillary Clinton in the USA to name a few—questions of parenthood, and specifically motherhood, have come to the fore. Merkel and Gillard have been subject to speculation about their non-motherhood, while Sarah Palin in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election benefited from emphasising her motherhood (Harp *et al.* 2010; Murray 2010a; Wiliarty 2010; Damousi *et al.* 2014). Within this context, this article is an original content analysis study of gender and parenthood's role in political leadership using British party leadership elections as a case study. The limited literature on politics and parenthood offers competing hypotheses and current literature on British party leadership elections pays little attention to gendered aspects such as parenthood. The personalisation of politics thesis intimates politician's private lives are of increasing interest regardless of sex and are used by them to mould their public

image (Langer 2009; Stanyer 2013). International literature on women in leadership suggests this will have differing effects for men and women. Arguably, for men family is more easily used as an asset; women's motherhood is more complex terrain and can be both an asset and a constraint in leadership ambitions (Jamieson 1995; Deason *et al.* 2015). These hypotheses are considered in light of four British party leadership elections in which both male and female candidates competed (1975, 1994, 2015 and 2016). Britain is an interesting case study within which to consider these themes. In 2015, for the first time in a major, national British political party, two women ran in the Labour Party's leadership election. A year later and the UK was set to appoint its second-ever female prime minister as only two women remained in the final ballot for the Conservative Party's leadership election. During both campaigns, the fact that one candidate was a mother and the other a non-mother became a discussion point.

This original research finds that the frequency of family mentions varies over time and contrary to what gender literature might suggest men's family was, at times, of greater interest than the women's. Evidence is found for the politicisation of motherhood in the UK and a possible 'maternal mandate'. Parallel to this, fatherhood was of increasing interest and the rise of the modern man can be seen. Yet, male candidates appear to have an 'opt-out clause' in any politicisation of fatherhood. This exploratory research begs further questions about politics and parenthood, opening future research avenues.

1. Parenthood and politics

1.1 Parenthood and gender: does motherhood benefit female candidates?

The discussion of women and leadership by gender scholars proposes motherhood is distinct when thinking about parenthood and politics. Recently, Deason *et al.* (2015) suggested that there is an emerging Politicised Motherhood in U.S. politics, within the context of an overall increase in mentions of politicians' families over the last few decades. Motherhood has previously been emphasised but this new Politicised Motherhood is different, most importantly for this article in the fact it comes alongside a wider cultural emphasis on mothers as "special different and powerful" (Deason *et al.* 2015: 136). For example, assumptions about a 'mommy brain' which is naturally better at multitasking, diplomacy, budgeting and so on. This politicisation has been aided by the emergence of high profile politicians whose motherhood has been the subject of extensive commentary (Deason *et al.* 2015). In 2008, Sarah Palin used her traditional role as mother to show she was communal, emphasising her devoted and caring nature. She presented herself as a 'hockey mom' who got involved in politics to make things better for her kids (Harp *et al.* 2010). Similarly, Hillary Clinton was pictured arm in

arm with her daughter to show she was 'mom first and politician second' (Stalsburg 2010; Deason *et al.* 2015).

Palin and Clinton emphasising their motherhood went against expectations. Traditionally, motherhood is thought incongruous with ideas of leadership and detrimental to women's leadership ambitions. This leads to the first of two competing hypotheses regarding motherhood: (*i*) *motherhood as detrimental to women candidates.* Deason *et al.* (2015) are concerned that Politicised Motherhood could actually mean an emphasis on traditional gender-based stereotypes given to women which are thought incongruous with political leadership. Women are believed more communal, they are 'warm, gentle, kind and passive', whereas men are linked to more agentic traits thought to be favoured in leaders, they are 'tough, aggressive and assertive' (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993: 121; Eagly and Karau 2002; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008). These stereotypical traits mean women can struggle to break from the traditional view of them as mothers or primary care givers. One of the double binds faced by women in the public sphere is the consistent question of whether their public life is compatible with domestic responsibilities (Jamieson 1995; Heilman and Okimoto 2007; Murray 2010b; Deason *et al.* 2015). In the USA, the media questioned whether Palin as a 'mom of five' had the capacity to fulfil the duties of Vice President (Carlin and Winfrey 2009). Political experiments conducted in the USA by Stalsburg (2010) support this hypothesis; when presented with candidates with varying familial responsibilities respondents thought women with young children were less viable candidates with less time capacity than men with young children.

The alternative hypothesis (*ii*) *is that motherhood could benefit female candidates.* Deason *et al.* (2015) contend that while traditionally emphasising family has tended to disadvantage women, it might be beneficial in a changed political context. If motherhood becomes politicised 'female' traits may become more salient and leadership roles seen in more feminine terms. Organisational studies have shown more 'female' styles of leadership are increasing in managerial roles (Eagly 2007). This can be linked to a new cultural emphasis on mothers as 'special' and exhibiting natural competency because of this. 'By adopting a maternal campaign strategy, female candidates can ride the wake of cultural conversations in which mothers' "natural" capacity for multitasking, diplomacy, and budget management is taken for granted' (Deason *et al.* 2015: 143). In support of this hypothesis, Heilman and Okimoto's (2007) US-based experiments found that women who were depicted as successful in male roles were less liked and seen as less favourable bosses. However, when the additional information was included that the women were mothers these evaluations improved. The implication here is that the communality deficit sometimes thought to be faced by women in leadership roles is negated by motherhood. In other words, if women feel they must display 'male' traits to appear competent, they risk being criticised for not

possessing expected 'feminine' communal traits (Rosenwasser and Seale 1988; Jamieson 1995; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010). Motherhood, in contrast, demonstrates women's supposed natural communality and so could reduce this deficit (Heilman and Okimoto 2007).

In contexts where motherhood is politicised, the question is begged about the woman candidate without children. Is there a 'maternal mandate' in play whereby women who do not have children are criticised (Deason *et al.* 2015)? Such a reaction has several mutually reinforcing forms. First, childless women could be perceived as less viable candidates as they lack the maternal mandate. In contrast, men are thought able to opt in and out of any parallel concentration on fatherhood more easily (Deason *et al.* 2015). Secondly, and as noted above, motherhood can help women overcome perceived communality deficits (Heilman and Okimoto 2007). Childless women may not have this option and have been found to be treated with suspicion for failing to conform to the normality of maternity (Murray 2010b). The appearance of seemingly sacrificing family for her career could increase any communality deficit. Indeed, Stalsburg's (2010) experimental design found women with no children did significantly worse on every competency indicator except children's issues and time capacities than childless men. In Germany's 2005 election, Angela Merkel's childlessness was raised directly by her opponent's wife who criticised Merkel for not embodying women's normal experience of balancing career and children (Wiliarty 2010).[1]

1.2 Parenthood and personalisation: the British context

The politicisation of motherhood comes in the context of increased mentions of politicians' families over the last few decades. This has been seen in the British context with mainly male leaders. Stanyer's (2013) cross-national study from 1995 to 2009 found that the UK had the highest mean number of mentions of leaders' spouses in media coverage. Similarly, Langer (2007) found that Tony Blair was the first British prime minister from 1945 to 1999 to have more mentions of his personal life than leadership qualities in the media. Contrary to the USA, where male political candidates are more likely to feature their family in TV ads (Bystrom 2006), recent work by Campbell and Cowley (2017, reference forthcoming) shows that once the fact an MP has children or not is controlled for, male and female British MPs are equally likely to reference their children on their websites. This links to the personalisation of politics thesis within which parenthood and politics is indirectly discussed. There is a certain amount of consensus across British academic literature that UK politics has become increasingly

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[1]It should be noted that there was intersectionality here with geographical stereotypes regarding traditional combinations of motherhood and work in East and West Germany.

personalised. This 'heightened concentration on the individual' (Blick and Jones 2010: 33) means the personal characteristics of political leaders are becoming increasingly synonymous with their competence (Langer 2007). Part of personalisation is the increased emphasis on the traits that make leaders human-beings alongside a greater interest in their private lives; this links to Stanyer's (2013: 72) intimisation of politics which contends 'presidents, prime ministers and ministers have joined the growing class of celebrities'. Stanyer (2007) briefly notes women may face more evaluation of their family life but overall gender is little accounted for in this literature. Nor is it accounted for in a separate body of literature relevant to this article, that on British party leadership elections. This work mainly focuses on electoral processes, parties' priorities in the selection of a leader, such as party unity and electability, and accounts of discrete leadership elections (e.g. Heppell 2008; Quinn 2012). Findings from this article aim to complement the leadership election literature, especially as it little addresses gendered aspects of leadership; however, it is not offered as a specific critique of this work. The personalisation thesis is thought more relevant and leads to a final hypothesis regarding politics and parenthood: *parenthood is of increasing interest both for men and women*. It is easy to see how personality focus and the politicisation of the private persona may result in an examination of all leaders' family lives. In this context, politicians can use their family to manipulate their image and appear more 'human' (Langer 2007). Based on the above gender literature it may then be expected that any increased focus will have differential impacts for the sexes.

2. Method and hypotheses

Party leadership elections offer a rare opportunity in the British political system to examine candidates running for high executive office and it is often when discussion around what makes a 'good' political leader or prime minister plays out as candidates are vetted for leadership. This article studies the only four leadership elections for the UK's two main governing parties, Conservative and Labour, in which women were serious contenders (a full list of candidates is in Table 1).[2] These elections act as a vehicle by which to examine gender and parenthood in British political leadership.

Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was carried out on newspaper coverage of these leadership campaigns. To obtain balance in the sample, a left-leaning and right-leaning broadsheet and tabloid were selected for analysis, determined by how the papers declared in the 2010 General Election. All weekday articles about the leadership elections were collated from the first candidate

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[2]Diane Abbott ran for Labour leader in 2010, however she was eliminated after the first ballot with only 7.4% of the votes.

Table 1 Number of articles mentioning candidate's family by politician and election

Election		Candidates	Parental status	N	No. of articles overall	Coverage (%)
Conservative 1975	Male	Ted Heath	Unmarried, No children	4	229	1.7
		Geoffrey Howe	Married, Children	0	35	0.0
		Willie Whitelaw	Married, Children	3	120	2.5
		John Peyton	Divorced, Children	0	29	0.0
		James Prior	Married, Children	3	54	5.5
		Hugh Fraser	Married, Children	1	41	2.4
	Female	Margaret Thatcher[a]	Married, Children	29	228	12.7
Total				39	310	12.6
Labour 1994	Male	Tony Blair[a]	Married, Children	19	219	8.7
		John Prescott	Married, Children	2	115	1.7
	Female	Margaret Beckett	Married, No children	0	107	0.0
Total				21	259	8.1
Labour 2015	Male	Andy Burnham	Married, Children	12	438	2.7
		Jeremy Corbyn[a]	Divorced, Children	13	605	2.1
	Female	Yvette Cooper	Married, Children	23	407	5.6
		Liz Kendall	Unmarried, No children	17	385	4.4
Total				45	829	5.4
Conservative 2016	Male	Michael Gove	Married, Children	3	156	1.9
		Stephen Crabb	Married, Children	1	72	1.4
		Liam Fox	Married, No children	0	53	0.0
	Female	Theresa May[a]	Married, No children	17	194	8.8
		Andrea Leadsom	Married, Children	23	161	14.3
Total				36	271	13.3

[a]Winner of leadership election, $N = 1,669$.
Some articles for individual politicians counted twice as mention more than one candidates' family.

announcing their leadership bid to the results being announced. Articles mentioning candidates' family status (excluding mentions of only marriage or partner) were retained for analysis. Within these articles the statements made about candidates' family life were coded by the author according to whether and how it made an evaluation about the politician's career, competence, or their career affecting their home life via discussion of family life. Each statement was coded as positive, negative or neutral (i.e. factual or no evaluation being made). For example, a positive statement was a quote from a constituent saying 'Margaret Thatcher has great potential because she is a mother with a family' (Ryan and Elliott 1975). Some general hypotheses are given to guide analysis although the paper remains primarily exploratory.

H1: *Mentions of candidates' families will increase across time, regardless of the sex of the candidate*

Given the personalisation of UK politics as well as trends identified in the USA it is expected that, for both sexes, mentions of politicians' family will increase over the past four decades. Yet, this may have distinct impacts for male and female candidates as per the further hypotheses.

H2: Female candidates will more often face evaluation through discussion of their family lives than male candidates

Although international literature offers competing hypotheses on what parenthood means, a strong theme is that women's family life is more often used to make an evaluation of their competency or personal traits.

H3: Women without children will be portrayed negatively

A maternal mandate on female candidates could result in women without children portrayed as non-viable candidates as they fail to occupy the norm.

3. Results

H1: Mentions of candidates' families will increase over time, regardless of the sex of the candidate

Table 1 shows the number of articles that mentioned family status for each candidate and the total articles to mention one or more candidate's family status overall. There is no support for the first hypothesis. The 1975 campaign saw a high frequency of mentions of candidates' family status which then decreased from 1994 to 2015. However, 2016 presented a break in this trend with mentions rising. This may be because the campaign was cut short, in part, by Andrea Leadsom's comments about motherhood which are discussed further below. In line with the personalisation thesis, it was not always the women's family that was of interest. In 1975, the higher number of articles on politicians' families resulted from the focus on Thatcher who punctuated the equilibrium as a woman and mother running for leadership. In 1994, the concentration was on Blair who punctuated the norm as a 'new man', using his family in the presentation of himself as a modern working father. The years 2015 and 2016 saw a concentration on the women again—although the difference was more prominent in 2016.

H2: Female candidates will more often face evaluation through discussion of their family lives than male candidates

Each statement about a candidate's family life was coded according to whether and how it made an evaluation about the politician's career, competence or their career affecting their home life. Each was coded as positive, negative or neutral (i.e. factual or no evaluation being made). Table 2 provides full data for each candidate.

Figures 1 and 2 show the proportions of statements which were positive, negative or neutral for all candidates. Evidence supporting the second hypothesis was seen in 1975, 2015 and 2016. In these elections, the proportion of statements

Table 2 Tone of statements within articles by politician

		1975							1994			2015				2016				
		Male						Female	Male		Female	Male		Female		Male			Female	
		Ted Heath[a]	Geoffrey Howe	Willie Whitelaw	John Peyton	James Prior	Hugh Fraser	Margaret Thatcher	Tony Blair	John Prescott	Margaret Beckett[a]	Andy Burnham	Jeremy Corbyn	Yvette Cooper	Liz Kendall[a]	Michael Gove	Stephen Crabb	Liam Fox[a]	Theresa May[a]	Andrea Leadsom
Tone of Statement	Positive	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	3	0	0	1	0	16	0	0	0	0	2	16
	Negative	1	0	0	0	0	0	6	5	0	0	0	4	6	18	0	0	0	11	6
	Neutral	3	3	0	3	2	3	30	19	3	0	16	14	22	5	3	1	0	19	27
	Total	4	3	0	3	2	3	43	27	3	0	17	18	44	23	3	1	0	32	49

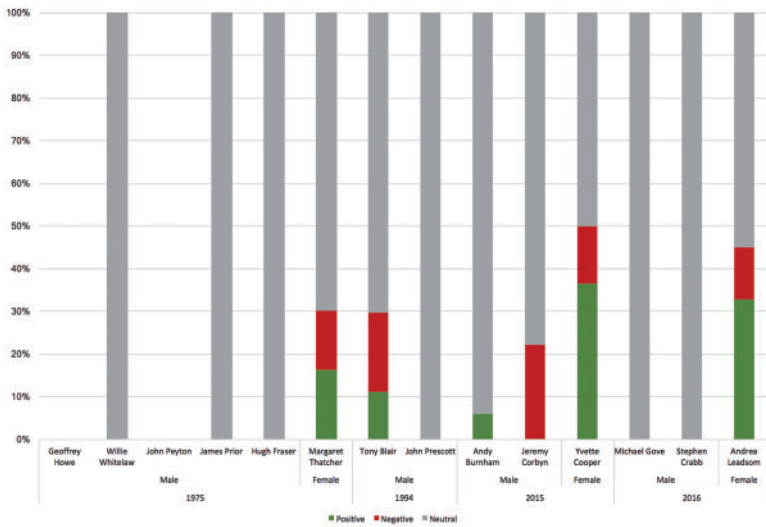[a] No children, all other candidates are parents, $N = 1{,}669$

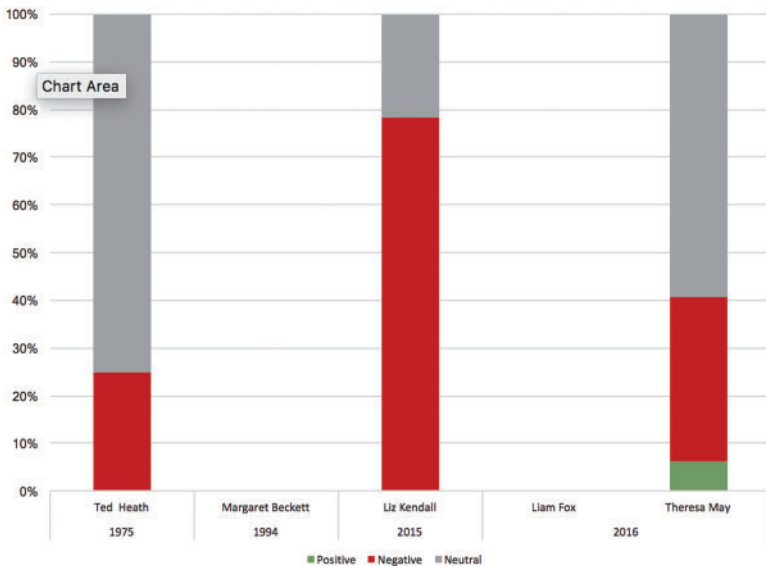**Figure 1.** Tone of statements for candidates with children.

Figure 2. Tone of statements for candidates without children.

about the women's family that were positive or negative—i.e. making an evalua-
tion—was higher than for the men. The year 1994 was different as there were no
mentions of the only female candidate, Margaret Beckett's, family status rather,
the concentration was on the men, contrary to the second hypothesis. To further
disentangle what is happening each election is examined in detail.

3.1 Conservative leadership election 1975

The 1975 campaign fits the more traditional pattern for women entering the public sphere. Evaluations were made of Thatcher's family life, which were not there for her male rivals. For the men, the few mentions were simple factual statements such as 'Mr Whitelaw lives with his Scottish wife in a fine country manor . . . and they have four children' (Weaver 1975). All mentions for the men were coded neutral save one Guardian commentator's suggestion that the Conservative party may want change after ten years of Heath's 'manly bachelorhood' (Norman 1975).

There was a fascination with the dynamics of the Thatcher family. Papers wanted to know how her 21-year-old twins felt about her running and what went on around her breakfast table. Thatcher was often placed in a 'mother of' frame with her motherhood listed alongside other qualifications and mentioned when it bore no relevance; 'Besides being a politician, she is a research chemist, a tax lawyer, a mother, a competent housewife' (Lancaster 1975a). It was not simply Thatcher that won the leadership but, 'A radiant Mrs Margaret Thatcher, 49-year-old wife of a business executive and mother of twins' (Boyne 1975). These resulted in the high proportion of neutral statements.

The media portrayed Thatcher as a housewife and mother who kept the household running while also having a career. Thatcher also depicted herself in this way to show she was in touch with ordinary people. It is seen here how it can be difficult to unpick candidate strategy from the media's framing. Thatcher told the *Daily Mirror* (Dunne 1975), 'I am a very ordinary person who leads a very normal life. I enjoy it – seeing that the family have a good breakfast'. Such representations worked both for and against her. There was no real difference in the numbers of positive and negative statements. She was said to have 'never failed at anything yet . . . research chemist, tax lawyer, wife, mother of twins'. Yet, questions were raised about whether she could still fulfil her 'duties' at home and 'whether she wants to be Prime Minister or Housewife of the Year' (Dunne 1975; Lancaster 1975b).

3.2 Labour leadership election 1994

In 1994, it was men's—or rather Tony Blair's—family who were of interest. There was a fascination (like that with Thatcher) in Blair's family dynamics as a father of young kids whose wife also had a successful career. He was 'a family man, 41 years old, with a household of children' (Williams 1994) who was often found 'looking after the three young Blairs . . . when his wife is working late' (Grice 1994). Again, Blair was in part responsible for this image. He presented himself as the 'New Man', giving an interview from the family home and speaking about fitting in time with the kids around his schedule—'he is determined to get

back to the school run when the leadership contest is over' (Williams 1994). One *Daily Telegraph* commentator cast aspersions on Blair's intellect when he said his first thought in the morning was 'my daughter's nappy needs changing' (Letts 1994). Elsewhere, Blair was praised as a 'family man' and a friend admired how she had found him 'cooking, changing nappies, and discussing economics with Gordon Brown on the phone' when his wife was ill; 'the amazing thing is he could do it all' (Grice 1994).

3.3 Labour leadership election 2015

Although differences in the number of articles about male and female candidates' family in 2015 was less pronounced, evaluative statements were higher for the women in line with the second hypothesis (Figures 1 and 2). Recall that this was the first leadership election with two women running, one with children and one without. Parental status was used by the media and Cooper's campaign to differentiate the two female candidates. It was an aide of Cooper's that tweeted comments by Helen Goodman MP who said she was supporting Cooper because 'as a working mum, she understands the pressures on modern family life' (Anon 2015a). In the media and among some MPs, these comments were seen—and it was suggested may have been orchestrated as—a direct attack on Kendall as single and childless. Statements regarding Kendall's family status were over three-quarters negative (78.2%) and none positive. Kendall's lack of motherhood was consistently portrayed as something for opponents to attack, a weakness. It was said, 'Kendall's supporters fume at single and childless slur' (Blanchard 2015) and that Cooper deliberately emphasised her credentials as a working mum to '"dog whistle" over Kendall's childlessness' (Hodges 2015).

In contrast, Goodman's comments and other statements presented Cooper as the 'how-does-she-do-it' woman. Here her role as a working mum was positively related to her competence. Cooper must juggle family and work just like everyone else and hence had to be—and was—hardworking and organised. This role gave Cooper extra (maternal) credit. A Guardian editorial conceded, 'It is true that juggling childcare and homework as well as a very demanding job takes a high degree of focus and good-time management' (Anon 2015b). And 'friends talk with admiration about the military organisation required' to coordinate ministerial schedules with her children's social activities (Brooks 2015).

For the men, the coverage of their fatherhood was majority neutral. Andy Burnham stressed his 'local' credentials giving interviews in his parents' home with his children and spoke about settling his family locally (Bletchly 2015; Deacon 2015). The modern man image came through on occasion. In an interview with *The Guardian*, he '[turned] up with the girls in tow' (Pidd 2015) and his campaign video featured him baking with his daughters. The negative

coverage of fatherhood came from criticisms of Jeremy Corbyn. He had put principles and politics before fatherhood. Married for the third time, it was said the reason for his second divorce was a political argument over his son's schooling as Corbyn was opposed to his wife sending him to a selective school. His ex-wife told newspapers he was, 'first the politician and second the parent' and *The Daily Telegraph* labelled him 'a hypocrite' (Pearson 2015).

3.4 Conservative leadership election 2016

The 2016 campaign saw a return to the more traditional pattern of the focus on the female candidates. For the men, there was little to no discussion of their family status with largely biographical statements, such as Stephen Crabb has 'a son and a daughter at state secondary school' (Pierce 2016). All were coded neutral and the men did not appear to use their family in the campaign.

For the second time ever for a main UK party, the campaign included two female candidates, a mother and a non-mother. Once again, motherhood was used to differentiate between the women; this time explicitly by one of the candidates. In an interview with *The Times*, Andrea Leadsom distinguished herself from Theresa May, by saying that May, 'possibly has nieces, nephews, lots of people. But I have children who are going to have children who will directly be part of what happens next.' She prophesised that, 'being a mum means you have a real stake in the future of our country' (Moir 2016). Leadsom's comments were taken to mean that she, as a mother, had a larger stake in the future of society than May who is childless. Commentators thought her remarks showed incompetence and inexperience, and her handling of the fallout in part led to her quitting the contest and May's automatic appointment as leader.

The 'famously private' May spoke out during the campaign (before Leadsom's comments) about her and her husband's disappointment at not being able to have children (White 2016). Only twice were common stereotypes about the childless career women applied to May: *The Daily Telegraph* thought that not having children 'could be a turn off for some but it does mean she is less likely to be distracted on the job' (Denyer 2016); and the *Daily Mail* reported her sadness at not having children was 'part of the reason she immerses herself so very deeply in her work' (Levy 2016).

H3: Women without children will be portrayed negatively

Table 3 shows the number of articles that mentioned candidate's childlessness. It is clear something was different in 2015 and 2016. There was a direct interest in Kendall and May's family status compared to infrequent or non-existent mentions of childlessness for previous candidates and May's male opponent Liam Fox. In both campaigns, the motherhood of one candidate was directly contrasted to the childlessness of the other female candidate suggesting some form of maternal mandate. In 2015, Cooper's motherhood showed her competence as the

Table 3 Number of articles mentioning childlessness

	1975	**1994**	**2015**	**2016**	
	Ted Heath	Margaret Beckett	Liz Kendall	Theresa May	Liam Fox
N	4	0	17	17	0

N = 38

'how-does-she-do-it' woman and was often directly contrasted with Kendall's childlessness, statements on which were over three-quarters negative. However, the comparison was not always negative for May. May's childlessness was contrasted to Leadsom's motherhood but was more of a personal misfortune than a weakness; just 34.3% of the statements were negative. That said, in 1994 Beckett's childlessness was not discussed in the press. Beckett was unlikely to win the leadership which could account for the lessened concentration on her private life. However, Prescott and she were also in an even contest for the deputy leadership; furthermore, in 2015, Kendall was unlikely to win yet faced discussion of her childlessness. Overall, these elections suggest a more complex picture of the maternal mandate (considered in the discussion below).

3.5 Against the norm

It is worthwhile to look beyond just parenthood and non-parenthood to consider whether there is an expected 'normal' family life and what happens when candidates go against this norm. In 2015, Jeremy Corbyn was criticised for putting his political convictions above family. Corbyn ticked the box of parenthood but was non-conventional as twice-divorced and married to his third wife, 20 years his junior. This poses the question of what we mean by parenthood, is it simply having children? It should be considered whether when we talk about parenthood, often what we are talking about is the '(heterosexual) married-with-two-kids' mould and there is punishment for going against that, be it Kendall's single and childlessness or Corbyn's divorces.

4. Discussion

A limitation of individual leadership elections is they are small *N* case studies which are often context specific. Yet, telling the story of what is happening over these elections reveals interesting parallels and themes and changing images of parenthood in modern British political leaders, although findings and conclusions remain tentative.

In the British context, parenthood and politics is discussed indirectly via the personalisation of politics. In this original case study analysis, no support was found for the hypothesis that stems from this thesis, that parenthood is increasingly important regardless of sex of the candidate. Counter-intuitively, family mentions as a proportion of overall coverage were lower in 1994 and 2015 than in 1975, although they rose again in 2016. Support for personalisation was seen regarding the male candidates in 2015 and 1994 when their family were of more interest than in 1975. In 2016, however, there was a decline in the attention paid to the male candidates' family supporting perhaps the contention by Deason *et al.* (2015) that men can opt in and out of the politicisation of family in a way not available to women. In further support for personalisation, at varying points across all elections both male and female candidates used their family to manipulate their image.

It is plausible that the interest in family stems from when a candidate is the 'novelty' in the race. But *why* you are a novelty could be gendered. In 1975, Thatcher's sex punctuated the norm and discussion of family by her and the media may stem from this. Thatcher's inability to break free from the traditional frame of her as wife and mother supports this idea—it was not 'Margaret Thatcher' who won the election but 'Mrs Margaret Thatcher, 49-year-old wife of a business executive and mother of twins' (Boyne 1975). As women (and mothers) are more visible in the public sphere interest in their domestic arrangements could be decreasing, only 4.3% of MPs elected in the 1974 (October) General Election were women, compared to 29% in 2015 (UK Political Info, no date). Blair punctuated the equilibrium again given the unusualness of the more feminine image of the 'New Man'. In addition, he did not have the usual supportive wife looking after the children, his wife was a successful Barrister. In 2015 and 2016, two women running against each other was a novelty, especially given the last stage of the 2016 campaign meant the UK was guaranteed its second-ever woman prime minister. This would suggest the personalisation of politics thesis may be more complex and gender plays a role in this.

4.1 Politicised Motherhood

The clear finding through these elections was that when mothers ran their motherhood was undoubtedly of interest. Furthermore, in two elections for opposing parties only a year apart where two women ran their differing parental status became a discussion point in both campaigns.

This raises the question of whether motherhood is being politicised in the way it has been suggested in the U.S. case. Studying the British case lends some support to Politicised Motherhood being present in the UK context and may have begun earlier than found in the U.S. literature. How motherhood was politicised

varied between candidates. The representations of Thatcher and Cooper resonate with concepts of Politicised Motherhood, specifically in the case of Cooper. As her colleague Goodman implied there was something about being a mother that made Cooper different and arguably better than the non-mother candidate. Hence she was presented in line with the cultural emphasis seen in the USA of mothers as 'different, special and powerful' with a 'mommy brain' (Deason *et al.* 2015: 136). Cooper's competency as a leader was intimated through her mothering ability both by Goodman's comments and in the resulting analysis; 'friends talk with admiration about the military organisation required' (Brooks 2015). The 'mommy brain' was also seen in coverage of Thatcher and in how she presented herself, choosing to stress her traditional role as wife and mother to show her competency has strong parallels with Sarah Palin who presented herself in a traditional motherhood frame over 30 years later. Both Cooper and Thatcher appeared to utilise the 'maternal mandate strategy' suggested by Deason *et al.* (2015). Leadsom once alluded to similar themes saying, 'I know, as a woman, how to succeed in a man's world and how to fight the unfortunate prejudice many working mums experience' (Slack 2016).

These parallels between Thatcher and Cooper suggest motherhood may not have substantively changed across these elections. The image of Cooper as the how-does-she-do-it woman may simply be a more modernised version of Thatcher as the competent housewife. For both, there is a representation of their family life as showing their normality and as gender norms change over time we would expect this 'normal' to diversify too. Thatcher was depicted as the domestic housewife, a more common role for women at the time. Cooper represented a modern norm of a working mother. Her friends recall her 'ducking out of a party event to buy plimsolls for her children or applying eyeliner on the bus into Westminster' (Brooks 2015). For both, their balancing of domestic and public life was thought to show an added level of competency and special ability. Given that we might expect a decrease in gender-based stereotypes as social roles and norms change this finding is particularly interesting as it seems that what a mother can look like may have changed but the media are still framing women via their motherhood in line with traditional ideas of gender-stereotyping. Leadsom offered on occasion a more traditional image of motherhood talking about her enjoyment in making roast dinners for her husband and children. Further research would be beneficial to examine partisan differences in images of motherhood as both Conservative women presented this more traditional picture.

4.2 Maternal mandate

If motherhood is politicised this begs the question of whether we see a resultant maternal mandate? Evidence for a mandate can be seen but it is not necessarily that there is a *penalty* for women. For both Kendall and May, their childlessness was portrayed as a point of weakness for their opponents to attack. For Kendall, however, as a single and childless woman coverage was more negative; whereas for May, who chose to speak publically about her private disappointment, coverage was more mixed. The maternal mandate may be more complex than originally conceptualised above.

Kendall was not criticised for a lack of communality via discussion of her childlessness, instead it was directly contrasted with Goodman's positive representation of Cooper's motherhood in line with the cultural emphasis on mothers' distinct competency and a resultant maternal mandate. Childlessness was a weakness. In contrast, May's childlessness was a personal tragedy which it was insensitive for Leadsom to capitalise on. The press defended May against Leadsom's comments and made favourable comparisons with another childless leader, Angela Merkel. Yet, the 'famously private' May had chosen to talk on the subject prior to Leadsom's comments (White 2016). At this point one can only speculate on the reasons for this and an avenue for future research could be to conduct interviews with those involved in the election campaign. There are two possible explanations. Firstly, did May believe her childlessness would be a point of discussion and therefore addressed it early on—the expectation of a maternal mandate? It is worth noting that Nicola Sturgeon, the childless First Minister of Scotland, more recently spoke about her experience of a miscarriage and childlessness (Brooks 2016). Secondly, discussing such a personal issue could have allowed May to show a more 'human' side, demonstrating her communality in a way that motherhood may do for others.

In contrast, Beckett's childlessness was not of interest in the press. Again, only speculation can be made here. Was there, for instance, a gentlemen's agreement that it would look bad for the male candidates to attack the only woman for her lack of children? Wiliarty (2010: 151) notes that it was more appropriate for a woman to criticise Merkel's childlessness as 'with the ultra-macho Gerhard Schröder as its candidate, the SPD was wary that overly-vicious attacks on Merkel would seem very ungentlemanly'. In 2015 and 2016, when two women were running this may not have been present. Could it be that this maternal mandate is made explicit when there are multiple women in a race? Yet, this maternal mandate is more complex than my original hypothesis. It does not seem that women are necessarily criticised for being childless but it is a point of discussion for women, which they may feel obligated to publically address, in a way not seen for men.

4.3 Politicised fatherhood

If there is some evidence for Politicised Motherhood in the UK case, it is notice-able that fatherhood was not framed in the same way. In 1975 and 2016, little was made of fatherhood. In 1994, Blair displayed 'modern man' credentials; this was framed as him helping his wife: 'looking after the children whilst his wife is work-ing late' (Grice 1994). Blair's position as a working dad was not framed as giving him a natural competency as it was for Cooper, nor did it show his ordinariness, in fact it showed his novelty, he was a '*New* Man'. In 2015, the two fathers' family lives were discussed but the sort of evaluations made of Cooper were not present. In the context of Helen Goodman's comments there was no discussion of Burnham as a working father with young children or Corbyn's fatherhood (his children are older) save *The Guardian* twice pointing out that men's work/life balance was not being discussed.

Yet, fatherhood was of interest. A key difference between 1994 and 2015 in comparison to 1975 was an increasing interest in male candidates' families. The rise of the 'modern man' can be followed through these campaigns. There were several references to this idea in 1975, although not specifically about parenthood. Willie Whitelaw tried to show himself as the modern suburban husband washing up saucepans in the kitchen which was said to be a response to images of Thatcher bringing in the milk bottles. This suggests having a woman in the race changed the male behaviour. Geoffrey Howe reacted against this, during an inter-view in his study an aide observed 'there is a bookcase behind him. That's the im-pression we want to create. We don't want any saucepans, and neither do you' (Barker 1975). It was in this context that one journalist suggested the Conservative party may want a change from Heath's 'manly bachelorhood' (Norman 1975). By 1994, the 'modern man' frame was clear as Blair was 'the ca-pable embodiment of New Man' (Grice 1994) and this was directly related to his parenthood. In the 2015 campaign, Andy Burnham, like Blair, had young chil-dren and his wife has a successful career but this did not seem to warrant the same levels of attention with no specific articles around the couple's competing careers and children. This could be down to changing gender norms, maybe this modern man image is no longer unusual enough to warrant increased attention.

Yet, 2016 saw a return of minimal, factual information about the male Conservative candidates' family. It should be considered 2016 was a shorter cam-paign where the men were voted out earlier than the women. Just as the Conservative women presented a more traditional image of motherhood the Conservative men shied away from the modern man image. Partisanship's role in the concentration on fatherhood should be an avenue for future research. Beyond possible partisanship, 2016 highlights an 'opt-out clause' of any politicisation of parenthood may be more readily available to men than their female colleagues.

Deason *et al.* (2015) supposed that Politicised Motherhood could lead to more feminised ideas of leadership. What should be further considered is the possible effect of this 'feminisation' on male candidates. Does it allow men to occupy more feminised domestic images? This may suggest that the personalisation of politics for men and a resultant focus on the domestic could also stem from changing ideas around gender and leadership. Further questions flow from this as to what it means for different types of fatherhood, such as the more traditional idea of the breadwinner father with a wife at home? And, can male candidates more readily opt-out of any increased focus on family than their female counterparts?

5. Conclusion

This original case study analysis examined the role of gender and parenthood in political leadership via the media coverage of four party leadership elections in the UK. The story was more complex than expected. No evidence was found for the hypothesis stemming from the personalisation thesis, that family increasingly plays a role in the images of politicians. The frequency of family mentions varied over time and contrary to what gender literature might suggest the women's family was not always of greater interest than the men's. The presence of women could change how parenthood is portrayed when considering political leaders:

(i) When the field was all men with traditional supportive wives looking after the children perhaps family was less of a point of discussion.

(ii) The arrival of a woman (and mother) punctuated this equilibrium and may have changed the political leadership terrain. In 1975, Thatcher came to the fore and used her family to portray a certain image. It was suggested the male candidates reacted to this within the domestic sphere.

(iii) By the 1990s, family was now central to male leadership contenders. In 1994, the focus is on Blair as a family man.

(iv) By 2015 and 2016, we have women running against each other which brought motherhood to the fore. In both elections, motherhood (or lack of) was used to differentiate between the female candidates and non-motherhood was an issue suggesting a form of maternal mandate was present.

This article's findings beg several questions about politics and parenthood that warrant further research. Firstly, are there two streams of personalisation dependent on the sex of the politician? Potentially, women's family were of disproportionate interest when women were more of a novelty in politics and over time this has decreased in line with men. Secondly, is there a maternal mandate in the

UK when a woman with children runs against a woman without? Thirdly, has the image of leadership and parenthood become more feminised? If so, how does this affect views of fatherhood and the domestic images men portray? Fourthly, how does differing from the norm of '(heterosexual) married-with-two-kids' affect evaluations of leadership contenders? And finally, what role does partisanship play in the use of parenthood by politicians?

What is clear is that there is a gender effect when we consider the role of parenthood in political leadership. When two women ran against each other in contests for differing political parties no more than a year apart their motherhood was an issue, whether that was raised by the media or by the candidates themselves. Alongside this, the representation of Cooper and Thatcher 40 years apart resonated with concepts of Politicised Motherhood from the USA. These findings coincide with a change in the way politicians' lives have been viewed in the media. Looking at this simply from a gender angle is not sufficient on its own. A systematic view of both men and women over four decades tells a story about how candidates such as Blair and Thatcher punctuated the norm and how there can still be a trade-off for childless women in the public sphere.

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