Life, Liberty, and the Lack of Paid Parental Leave

MEDIA FRAMING OF PARENTAL LEAVE IN THE UNITED STATES

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Life, Liberty, and the Lack of Paid Parental Leave: Media Framing of Parental Leave in the United States

In this study, I examine how the media frame parental leave in the United States. To do so, I conducted a content analysis of over 200 news articles from the New York Times, *and also created a survey distributed to introductory political science classes. In the content analysis, I find that parental leave is both an episodic and thematic news issue, has less negative coverage than most news issues, and evolved from a merely mentioned issue to an economic issue over time. This research also shows that female and male authors do not frame parental leave differently; in fact, women frame parental leave more negatively than men do. In the survey experiment, I conclude that women are more favorable than men towards parental leave, but it appears that the frames in the survey did not have a large effect on attitudes toward parental leave policies, either for women or men.*

INTRODUCTION

T he United States is the land of the free, the home of the brave, and the only developed country without paid maternity leave. Every OECD country mandates its employers to provide paid maternity leave except the United States (Kurtzleben 2015). In October of 2015, the District of Columbia proposed legislation that would make it the most generous place in the United States for an employee to take paid parental leave. The city is experimenting with a family leave plan that would guarantee 16 weeks of paid family leave for a new parent, whether they work part-time or full-time (Davis 2015).

The District, which currently only offers 16 weeks of unpaid leave, is following four U.S. states that have introduced paid family leave programs in the past decade: California in 2004, Washington in 2007, New Jersey in 2008, and Rhode Island in 2014 (Chokshi 2014). Despite the family leave laws in these states, a gaping discrepancy remains between the United States and other developed countries regarding the generosity of parental leave.

Parental leave is increasingly salient in the United States. Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders have been addressing the topic on the campaign trail; each advocates for paid maternity leave and paid vacation and would call for greater mandatory maternity leave benefits if elected president (Kurtzleben 2015). Earlier in 2015, President Obama also addressed maternity leave in the U.S., saying in his State of the Union address: "we are the only advanced country on Earth that doesn't guarantee paid sick leave or paid maternity leave to our workers" (Obama 2015).

The framing of unpaid maternity leave, via politicians, journalists, and commentators in the media, can potentially shape public opinion. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the media frame parental leave in the United States and how those frames influence public opinion. To answer this question, I examine news articles that mention maternity leave and the frames they use to present the issue to the public. By media frames, I mean "interpretation[s] or evaluation[s] of an issue, event, or person that emphasize certain of its features or consequences" (Chong and Druckman 2011, 238). Scholars have shown that how the media present an issue influences public

opinion, and the media can shift as the balance of stories changes to favor one side or the other (Chong and Druckman 2007).

Current U.S. public opinion favors maternity leave, yet political partisanship prevents its enactment. In a 2012 poll by the National Partnership for Women and Families, 86 percent of voters nationwide expressed support for paid parental leave. Seventy-four percent of voters said they experience challenges trying to balance work and caring for their family, and 72 percent said they would face financial hardships if they had to care for a family member or new child, presumably because of the lack of paid leave (National Partnership). In 2013, two Democratic congresswomen attempted to advance the cause, introducing the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act. This bill would require employers to provide up to 66 percent of the employee's monthly income during the 12 weeks of leave, which is more than the 0 percent employees currently are legally guaranteed to receive in 46 states (Basu 2014). While the bill received strong support from 87 Democrats in the House, not one Republican backed the bill; the GOP argued the bill would hurt small business, and that paid family leave is "pricey" (Basu 2014). Although parental leave is a controversial issue in Congress, the majority of voters nationwide say it is "important" for Congress and the president to consider new laws for paid family leave to "help keep families financially secure" (National Partnership).

Framing theory helps us understand the framing of parental leave by identifying common types of frames, including episodic frames and thematic frames. Often anecdotal, an episodic frame depicts issues in terms of individual instances of specific events, sometimes featuring dramatic visual footage and pictures to further illustrate anecdotes. Episodic framing is the more frequent form of presentation in news stories, mainly because of market pressures (Iyengar 1991). A thematic frame, however, tends to place a public issue in a general context and takes the form of an in-depth background report. Stories with thematic frames tend to be more "sedate" yet contextual, such as story about a war that addresses the historical context of the relations between the two sides (Iyengar 2011). Is unpaid maternity leave framed as an episodic issue, presenting stories of individual women who faced unemployment or returned to work too soon? Or is it framed as a thematic issue, critiquing companies' poor benefits and the government's lack of policies? According to Iyengar (1991), episodic-framed news affects viewers' attributions of responsibility for political issues, and thus has can have serious political repercussions. With episodic news, viewers attributed responsibility not to societal or political forces but to actions of particular individuals or groups. On the other hand, viewers exposed to thematic framing often attribute responsibility for issues to government and society.

To examine media framing of maternity leave, I conducted a content analysis of *New York Times* articles pertaining to family leave programs and unpaid parental leave. Thus I examined how much those frames influence public opinion of parental leave using the survey experiment. I began by defining frames in communication and framing effects. Because there are no prior studies on the framing of unpaid maternity leave, I relied on studies of framing of poverty and public health to provide a foundation for this study. To examine how the media frame parental leave, I conducted a content analysis of over 200 articles from the *New York Times,* recorded the frequency

of frames and identified the most prominent positive and negative frames. A subsequent survey experiment using prominent frames measured the degree to which the frames shape opinion of parental leave. Based on the findings, I draw conclusions about parental leave policies in the U.S. First, the media portray maternity leave using thematic and episodic frames with about equal frequency. Second, the balance of coverage of the issue is roughly equally positive and negative. Finally, I conclude that women are more favorable than men towards parental leave across all conditions, but it appears that the frames in the survey did not have a large effect on attitudes toward parental leave policies, either for women or men.

FORECASTING THE MEDIA FRAMING OF PARENTAL LEAVE

Frames are the lens through which an actor presents an issue. In a social science context, a frame is a central idea or story line that provides meaning to a sequence of events and threads them together (Gamson and Modigliani 1987). A frame emphasizes the facets of an issue, draws connections between them, and thus endorses a particular interpretation, evaluation, or solution (Entman 2004). The different levels of framing help demonstrate the relationship between the purveyor and recipient of a frame.

Political elites, journalists, and citizens comprise these three levels of framing. At the first level, political elites use frames to advance a particular definition of a problem, with the goal of propelling a bill into law or appealing to voters during a campaign. Second, journalists use frames to structure factual details in their stories. Third and finally, citizens "interpret political issues in terms of broad principles that help them structure and organize the political world" (Perloff 2014, 159). Regarding maternity leave, a journalist may report on recently introduced legislation for a family leave program; in the article, the journalist may frame policymakers as effective or ineffective, and/or frame the passing of the legislation as beneficial or detrimental for the individuals who the bill will affect. These frames can influence the public's opinion of the issue. "By defining what the essential issue is and suggesting how to think about it, frames imply what, if anything, should be done" about the issue at hand (Kinder 2007, 158).

Framing Parental Leave

The U.S. debate that led to the historic *Burwell* v. *Hobby Lobby* 2014 case shows that different frames imply different solutions to an issue. In 2012, President Barack Obama's new regulations mandating employers to provide coverage for contraception in their employees' health plan sparked a nationwide debate that took the form of two contradictory frames. Supporters of the new regulations, including the White House, believed they had a strong philosophical case, "framing the issue around women's access to health care and the medical benefits that contraceptives offer women" (Perloff 2014, 160). On the other hand, opponents of the regulations, mainly the Catholic Church in the U.S., used a freedom-of-religion frame, arguing that the new regulations would violate employers' First Amendment rights because they require employers to pay for birth control, a purchase they may oppose on religious grounds. Perhaps because of the

strength of the freedom-of-religion frame, President Obama responded with a revised regulation: religious institutions would not have to pay the coverage (Perloff 2014, 160).

The cause of this debate was President Obama's announcement of new regulations. In this case, U.S. public opinion was reactive to issues rather than proactive. The public can influence the framing process, but "the public is ordinarily reactive, taking a back seat to frames wielded by policymakers and the press" (Perloff 2014, 174). Furthermore, the catalyst for the Hobby Lobby debate was the juxtaposition of frames: one frame for women's rights and public health, and the other frame for religious freedom.

According to Dorfman, et al. (2005, 323), "Framing battles in public health illustrate the tension in our society between individual freedom and collective responsibility." Regina Lawrence (2004) illustrates this dichotomy in the U.S. debate on obesity. One frame demands the government use its legislative power to address an increasingly obese nation. On the other hand, another frame presents the government as unable to legislate individuals' habits or choices, such as eating less and exercising more. Many individuals see government intervention in citizens' public health as inhibiting personal choice and responsibility (Zernicke 2003). The debate over whether obesity is a "private matter" or a "public health issue that society needs to help solve" pervades many public health issues (Zernicke 2003). These opposing frames can also shape who the public blames for the condition; does the public attribute blame to individuals or societal conditions?

A recurring pattern in U.S. history of public health is the ongoing struggle between community needs and individual rights. The latter part of the twentieth century has brought a cultural shift toward the individual side of the spectrum (Lawrence 2004). The prized American values of individualism and limited government deter the public from understanding public health through a systemic frame. This cultural resistance towards systemic frames reinforces the political resistance of influential organizations, because we, individual citizens, fear backlash from the public. Thus, the implementation of a government public health regulation often involves a "serious battle" for political and popular support (Lawrence 2004, 58). Reframing the issue can sway the public, increasing or decreasing the likelihood of public policy response.

Parental leave differs from other public health issues because it is a policy, not a health risk, and thus may provoke a different response from the public. For health risks such as obesity, tobacco smoking, or cancer, framing shapes public opinion because the public responds to issues of self-interest, especially where there is potential danger (Lawrence 2004, 59). Framing an issue in terms of risk – "involuntary risk, universal risk, environmental risk, and knowingly created risk," for example – heightens the probability of an "opinion environment" that can facilitate public policy solutions that burden powerful groups (Lawrence 2004, 59). Thus, "the success of health-related social movements" is associated with "the articulation of a socially (as well as scientifically) credible threat to the public's health" (Nathanson 1999, 421). Exposing an individual to a frame that implies one's health is in danger will engage the individual in considering the frame and the argument it presents. Parental leave does not pose a health risk like other public health issues; rather, it is a policy issue regarding a male or female employee's excused absence from work to care for a newborn. In contrast to health risks, most of the disadvantages of unpaid

maternity leave are economic, familial, or cultural effects. Thus, I expect to encounter more thematic frames – specifically economic and political frames – in news articles about parental leave, rather than episodic (or individual) frames.

Public health can be subject to a variety of competing frames, each frame suggesting a different group bears responsibility for the issue at hand. Behavioral and episodic frames tend to imply individual responsibility, whereas environmental and thematic frames tend to ascribe societal and external causes. This paper's content analysis will demonstrate whether the coverage of parental leave focuses primarily on episodic or thematic frames.

Anticipating the Effects of Parental Leave Frames

A framing "effect" occurs when individuals arrive at different positions on an issue after exposure to a frame that gives priority to certain considerations (Chong and Druckman 2007). According to Chong and Druckman (2011), scholars have demonstrated framing effects through studies analyzing a range of issues, such as government spending, campaign finance, support for the Supreme Court, and evaluations of foreign nations (Chong and Druckman 2011, 242). In these cases a journalist or politician may introduce a frame (e.g., the economic benefits of paid maternity leave for women in the labor force) that increases the weight an individual attaches to a certain dimension or consideration (e.g., women's financial security), thereby shaping the person's overall opinion (i.e., increased support for paid parental leave).

In general, framing effects are most effective when aligned with an individual's preexisting beliefs (Boyle et al. 2006). In addition, media frames are likely to have a greater impact when the idea is new or novel (Perloff 2014). However, when people hold strong opinions on the issue, frames do not usually change the attitudes of these partisans (Shah et al. 2009). For individuals without a highly-developed opinion of parental leave, media framing can strengthen opinions on parental leave.

In summary, the literature points to specific expectations. The prominence of systemic and thematic frames in public health leads me to expect to find more economic and political frames in news articles about parental leave rather than individual or episodic frames. I also expect frames to affect participants' attitudes toward parental leave policies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To examine how news articles tend to frame family leave, I conducted a content analysis of the *New York Times* from January 1, 2000 to October 31, 2015. My approach follows Chong and Druckman's (2011) methods as closely as possible. The *New York Times* is a prestigious and popular paper, commonly referred to as "the paper of record." Furthermore, the *New York Times* has the second-largest circulation in the United States (after the *Wall Street Journal*) and the largest circulation among metropolitan papers (Associated Press 2013). Perhaps more importantly, the

New York Times coverage typically sets the agenda for other news outlets, making it a reasonable proxy of coverage nationwide.

I examined articles from January 1, 2000, to the date I conducted my data research, October 31, 2015. During this period, all four states and Washington, D.C. passed legislation for family leave programs. The first of these, California, introduced its paid family leave program in 2004. Washington passed its paid family leave law in 2007, and New Jersey followed in 2008. Thus, the 2000s have been a decade of dialogue about and legislative action on paid maternity leave in the U.S., culminating in Rhode Island's paid family leave law in 2014 and Washington, D.C.'s recent family leave program that all employees are entitled to, introduced in October of 2015.

To identify appropriate *New York Times* articles, I searched: "BODY(maternity leave) AND SECTION(A) OR SECTION(B)." This search produced 261 results; I omitted blogs and letters to the editor in order to focus on news articles. This left 171 articles in the content analysis.

Following Chong and Druckman's (2011) method, I identified whether the article's publication date is within the time period, and I skimmed the article to determine whether its content relates to this study. I recorded which section the article is published under (News or Business/Financial), and then recorded if the article is an editorial or news article, and whether the author is a female or male. Next, I recorded whether the article employs each frame. I look for four different types of frames. First, "Economic Pro" and "Economic Con" focus on whether parental leave is an economically-beneficial or detrimental policy, which is determined by how it affects the labor force, family's wages, companies' worker benefits, and so on. Second, "Comparative Pro" and "Comparative Con" frames present parental leave as a policy implemented in European countries and other regions of the world, but not in the United States. Third, "Political Pro" and "Political Con" frames focus on the importance and probability of passing legislation to implement family leave. Fourth, "Individual Pro" and "Individual Con" frames present parental leave through the example of an individual, conveying how parental leave has benefitted or hindered his or her life in the workplace and at home. Lastly, if the article mentions parental leave, but employs no discernable frame, the article is coded as a "mere mention" of the issue. I also accounted for an "Other Frame" category to record additional frames that were more frequent than I anticipated, but I did not encounter any notable to include in this study.

To avoid ambiguity among the frames, like Chong and Druckman (2011) I have defined the components of each frame in Appendix 1. If one of the components from Appendix 1 was present in the article, only then I coded the frame was employed. The articles were coded with a 1 if the frame was present in the article and a 0 if it was absent; this coding allowed me to calculate the total amount of coverage of family leave and to calculate the percent of coverage employing each frame.

To examine the impact of the most frequently employed frames on attitudes toward family leave policies, I also conducted a survey experiment (see Appendix 2 for questionnaire). First, all of the survey participants received the same opening questions about various current events and issues besides parental leave; the participants answered these questions with a scale of 1-6, where 1-3 is "strongly disagree," "disagree," "slightly disagree," respectively, and 4-6 is "slightly agree,"

"agree," and "strongly agree." The survey also has a "no opinion" option, since persuasion can switch individuals from having no opinion to having an opinion (Iyengar 2011, 258). Next, to measure family leave policy attitudes, participants responded to the following question statements by scaling their agreement from 1 to 6 or selecting "no opinion":

- Women should be able to take *paid* time off after having a baby.
- Women should be able to take *unpaid* time off after having a baby.
- Partners of women who recently had a baby should be able to take *paid* time off.
- Partners of women who recently had a baby should be able to take *unpaid* time off.
- The United States government should provide two weeks of paid time off for new parents.
- The United States should implement policy that requires businesses to provide two weeks of paid time off for new parents.

All of the survey participants answered these same questions. However, the participants were randomly selected into one of three experimental conditions. Depending on the experimental condition, the surveys included statements before each question, and these statements present a frame. The statements derived from the frames found in the content analysis.

The survey participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. First, the control group did not receive statements prior to the parental leave questions; they answered the family leave policy questions with no exposure to frames. Second, the positive treatment group first read about family leave policies through statements that frame family leave policies in the most frequent positive way; then they answered the family leave policy questions. Third, the negative treatment group first read about family leave policies through statements that frame these policies in the most frequent negative way; then they answered the same family leave policy questions.

The two treatment groups received the two most prominent positive and negative frames, based on their frequency in the articles. These two categories framed the lead-in questions for the positive and negative treatment group, as shown in Appendix 2.

This survey will demonstrate a framing effect if the treatment groups' responses reflect the frames presented to them. If the positive treatment group has a mean view of parental leave that is more positive than the control group and the negative treatment group has a mean view that is more negative than the control group, then the frames affected participants' answers.

The survey participants were undergraduate college students of a general education class at Pepperdine University. Because this survey involved human participants, my proposal to the Institutional Review Board at Seaver College demonstrates the integrity and ethics of this study and its survey. I did not collect any personal information, so no identifying information will be disclosed or collected. The questions in the survey are strictly purposed to gather whether the frames influence an individual's attitude toward parental leave policy. A strength with this sample is that many of the participants are young college students who presumably do not have preexisting opinions on paid parental leave. Thus, I expect the frames to have a stronger influence on their attitude toward parental leave.

RESULTS

According to the *New York Times* Article Archive, from January of 2000 to October of 2015, the *New York Times* published approximately 70,000 articles mentioning terrorism, 123,000 mentioning the economy, and 90,000 mentioning oil. In contrast, the *New York Times* published only 920 articles mentioning maternity leave in that same time period, which is less than one percent of the number of articles mentioning the economy. Thus, maternity leave is not as prominent compared to other issues in print media.

Content Analysis

Figure 1 reports the distribution of frames across all the articles. Overall, I coded 171 articles, and 79 had an economic frame, 73 had an individual frame, and 50 were mere mention with no other frame. As shown in Figure 1, the dominant frame in coverage of maternity leave is the economic frame. About 29 percent of all frames coded were an economic frame. The second most frequent frame was the individual frame. The prominence of these two frames, economic and individual, represents the typical dichotomy pointed to in framing studies: thematic versus episodic framing. An economic frame portrays maternity leave in the broader context of corporations, the labor force, the economy, and whether paid maternity leave is fiscally feasible for a business. An individual frame, however, focuses on a specific person or anecdote, such as a mother who fears losing her job if she takes lengthy leave. Thus, in the framing of maternity leave, the prominence of the economic and individual frames shows that the *New York Times* covers maternity leave via episodic and thematic frames about equally.

Figure 1: Frequency of Frames in Maternity Leave Coverage

Figure 2: Positive and Negative Framing of Maternity Leave
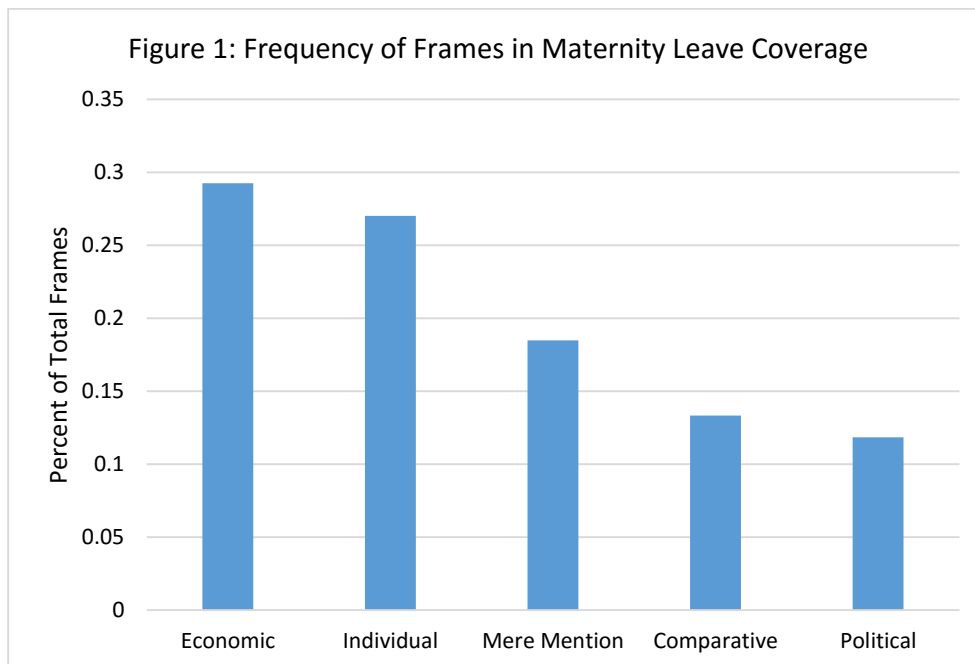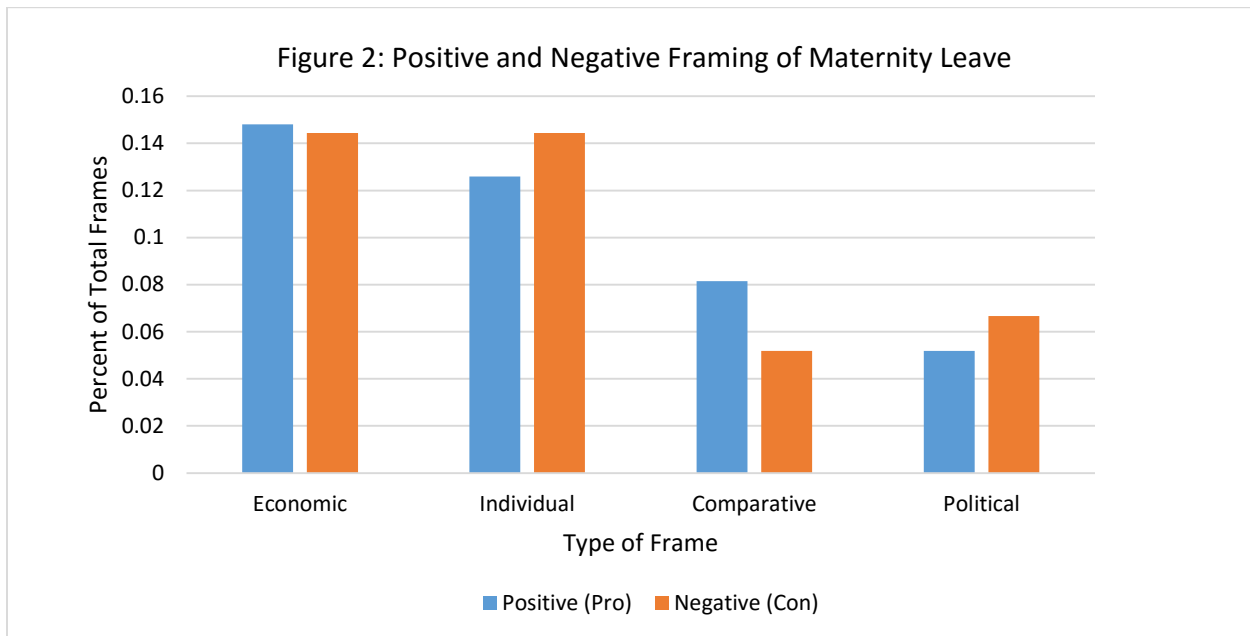
I also coded whether a frame was used favorably or negatively toward maternity leave. Of the 229 frames found that are not mere mention, almost half are positive frames and half are negative frames – 115 and 114, respectively. Figure 2 shows a breakdown of each frame by positive and negative coverage. Economic and comparative frames are more positive than negative, whereas political and individual frames are the opposite. Thus, the frame direction for two of the types of frames is slightly positive, while the frame direction for the other two is slightly negative.

Table 1: News Issues with Frame Direction	
Issue or Event	Frame direction (%)
Maternity leave	*0.42*
Bush v. Gore	2.7
Global warming	-4
Social Security 1	-4.17
Patriot Act	-10.55
Same-sex marriage in Canada	-14.43
Same-sex marriage in U.S.	-18.37
Nazi rally	-41.94
Social Security 2	-43.84
Abu Ghraib controversy	-68.31
California immigration initiative	-86.44
Intelligent design	-87.83
Penn. Ku Klux Klan rally	-95.35
Tenn. Ku Klux Klan rally	-100

The balance of framing of maternity leave is unusual compared to the framing of other issues. Chong and Druckman (2011, 254) define and calculate "frame direction" as the subtraction of "the percentage con from the percentage pro to yield an overall measure of directional bias;" for example, an equal number of positive and negative frames (called "balanced") results in a 0. If negative frames exceed positive frames, then the percentage is negative, and vice versa. Chong and Druckman analyzed 15 issues, and only one had a positive frame direction (see Table 1). All but three had a frame direction more negative than -10 percent. In my study, since the number of positive frames (115) exceeds the number of negative frames (114), maternity leave has a slight positive frame direction. As Table 1 shows,

coverage of maternity leave is considerably more positive than the coverage of other news issues, such as social security, same sex marriage, and the Patriot Act.

Over the 2000 to 2015 period of study, coverage of maternity leave increased. The *New York Times* published 66 articles on maternity leave between 2000 and 2008, while the paper printed 105 on maternity leave between 2009 and 2015. In the 2000-2008 period, the articles published used 95 frames on maternity leave, while the issue was merely mentioned 32 times. In contrast, 2009-2015 articles used 201 frames, over twice as many as the nine-year period before.

Figure 3: Percent of Frames by Time Period
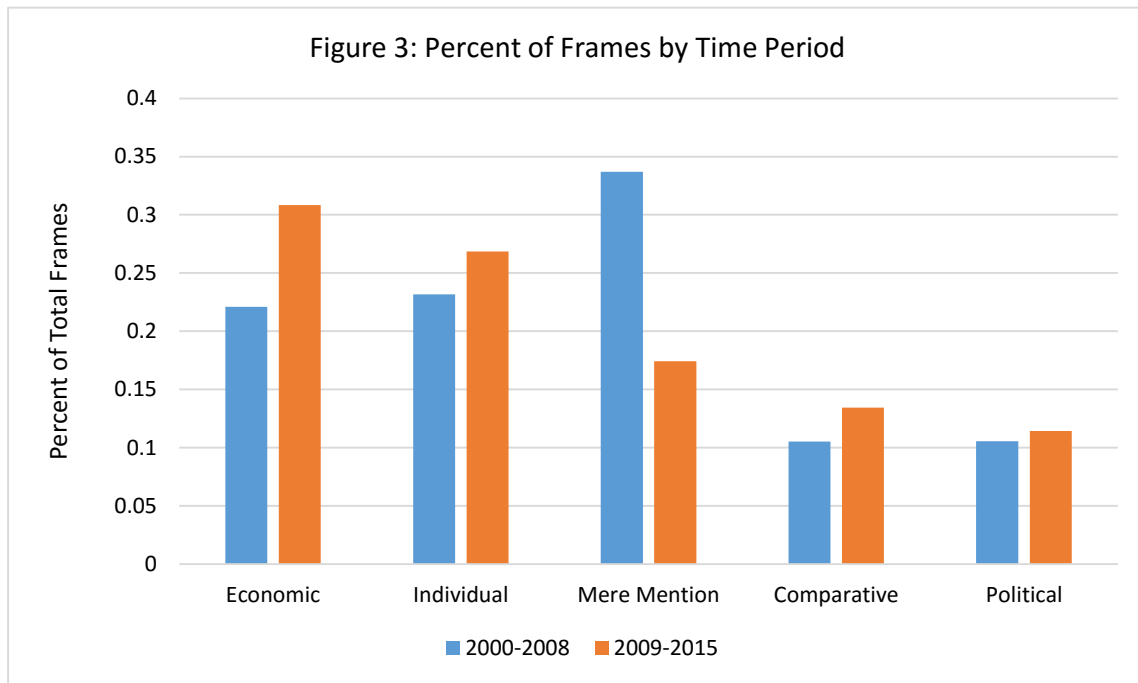
As shown by Figure 3, maternity leave was more frequently framed as an economic issue later in the period. Of the articles published from 2000-2008, 11 percent employed positive economic frames and 12 percent use negative economic frames. Yet of articles later published from 2009-2015, 16 percent are economic pro and 15 percent are economic con. The increase in articles using an economic frame could be explained by the Great Recession of 2008, and its aftermath, a period when concern over the economy remained heightened. With the increase in economic frames also comes greater increases for negative frames rather than positive frames. Because of the economic realities the U.S. faced in the 2008 recession, most journalists and news sources seemed to be framing maternity leave in a more negative light because of the high cost of maternity leave and economic improbability of providing paid maternity leave for American women.

In addition to analyzing the frames by time period, I also examined whether there is a difference by author sex. Of the 171 articles in the content analysis, 91 articles were authored by men and 80 by at least one woman (some were co-authored). I found that men and women tend to cover the issue similarly. Table 2 shows the percentages of all frames in articles by author sex.

Table 2: Comparing Frames by Author Sex (%)		
	Men	Women
Total Pro	52	49
Total Con	48	51
Economic Pro	14	14
Economic Con	14	14
Individual Pro	11	13
Individual Con	12	15
Mere Mention	29	17
Comparative Pro	6	9
Comparative Con	4	6
Political Pro	6	5
Political Con	4	8

Male and female authors used almost exactly equal ratios of economic and individual frames. However, the female authors used more frames when writing about maternity leave: women wrote with more frames than men in every category of prominent frames, except mere mention.

Furthermore, the percentage of articles using each frame was also very similar for male and female authors. About 22 percent of articles written by men included the "economic pro" frame, whereas 28 percent written by women included this frame. Similarly, 22 percent of articles men wrote included the "economic con" frame, and 27 percent of articles by female authors did as well. While there was not a significant discrepancy between male and female authors' coverage of maternity leave, one of the greatest differences in men's and women's coverage was in the use of individual frames. Seventeen percent of articles by male authors presented maternity leave as an issue that is beneficial for the individual ("individual pro"), and 19 percent as detrimental to the individual ("individual con"). On the other hand, 26 percent of articles by female authors included the positive individual frame, and 30 percent the negative individual frame. Although it seems women would perceive maternity leave as beneficial for women and helping the individual flourish, almost twice as many female-authored stories framed maternity leave as negative for the individual, compared to male-authored stories. However, the percent of individual frames in all articles by men and women did not differ significantly, as shown by Table 2. Overall, there was not a significant discrepancy between male and female authors' coverage of maternity leave.

In summary, the content analysis revealed several things about the coverage of maternity leave. First, maternity leave is unique from many news issues. There are approximately equal amounts of thematic and episodic coverage of maternity leave, while most issues are covered with primarily episodic frames (Iyengar 2011). Viewers of episodic news often attribute responsibility to actions of particular individuals or groups (Iyengar 1991). This is significant because the thematic and episodic coverage of maternity leave can influence approaches to maternity leave policy. If there is an even balance of thematic and episodic coverage, then the public may or may not be less favorable to maternity leave policies. Yet if coverage of maternity leave was more similar to other issues, which receive episodic coverage, then the public would not necessarily be more favorable to maternity leave policy itself; its support for policy would remain unclear, but public preference for who pays for leave or how generous leave should be would vary. This is because episodic frames tend to imply individual responsibility, whereas thematic frames tend to ascribe societal and external causes (Lawrence 2004, 62). Maternity leave is also relatively balanced (positive versus negative) compared to most issues, which are framed negatively most of

the time, according to Chong and Druckman (2011). Second, media coverage of maternity leave changed over time; coverage of maternity leave became more substantive over time, with more articles using economic frames and significantly fewer mere mentions. Lastly, I also found that men and women tend to cover maternity leave similarly.

Survey Experiment

Using the most frequent frames identified in the content analysis, the survey experiment had three experimental conditions: a positive treatment group, a negative treatment group, and a control group. The survey yielded 155 responses; all participants were 18 years or older and had grown up primarily in the United States. As mentioned in the research design, each survey question on paid maternity leave was on a scale from 1 to 6 (disagreement to agreement).

Figure 4: Mean Response to Women Paid Leave
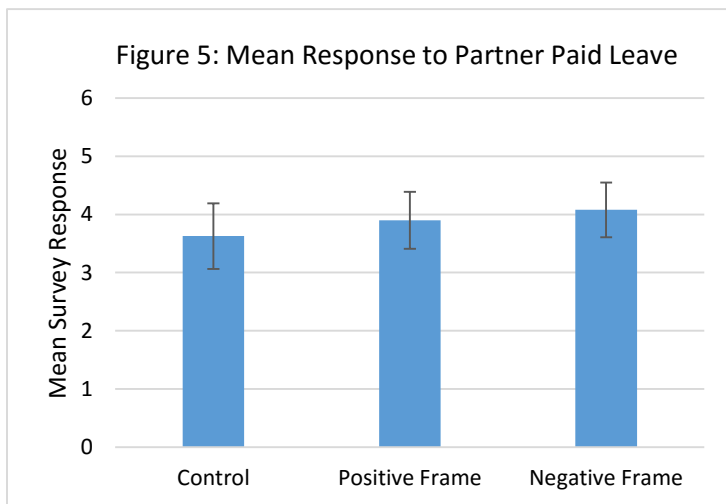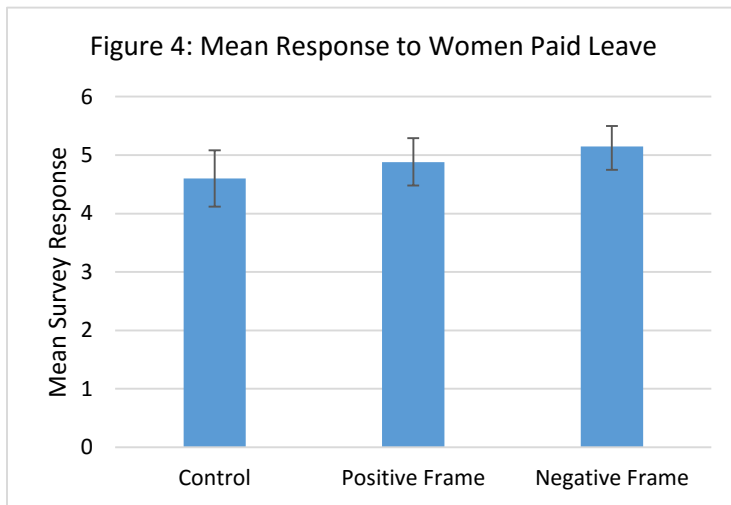
If the positive frame increased support for paid maternity leave, then individuals receiving the positive treatment would have higher mean support for parental leave policies than the control group. Similarly, if the negative frame decreased support for paid maternity leave, then individuals receiving the negative treatment would have lower mean support than the control group. As Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 show, individuals receiving frames did not differ from the control group to a statistically significant degree. The brackets above and below each bar represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. We cannot reject the null hypothesis that the three groups have the same degree of support for leave policies, because the confidence intervals overlap.

Figure 5: Mean Response to Partner Paid Leave

According to Figures 4, 5, and 7, the negative treatment group had the highest support for paid leave of all the treatment groups, but not to a statistically significant extent. The question about government paid leave is the only survey item where the positive treatment group showed the greatest support for paid leave, although not to a statistically significant extent. There is no simply no evidence that these frames make people more positive or more negative toward parental leave policies. In summary, there is no evidence that these frames are affecting views on paid parental leave.

I analyzed the survey responses by sex. For example, across all conditions, women are more favorable to maternity leave (a 5.3 mean survey response for women and 4.5 for women, $p<0.1$, two-tailed test). However, women were no more or less favorable to parental leave policies when they encountered the positive or negative frame than when they were in the control condition (see Figures i, ii, and iii in Appendix 3). The same is true for men. The positive and negative frames did not affect either men or women significantly.

Figure 6: Mean Response to Government Paid Leave

Figure 7: Mean Response to Business Paid Leave
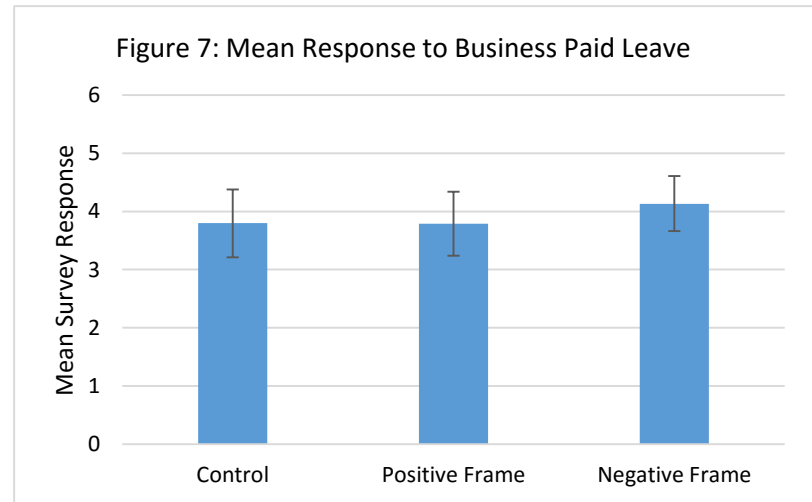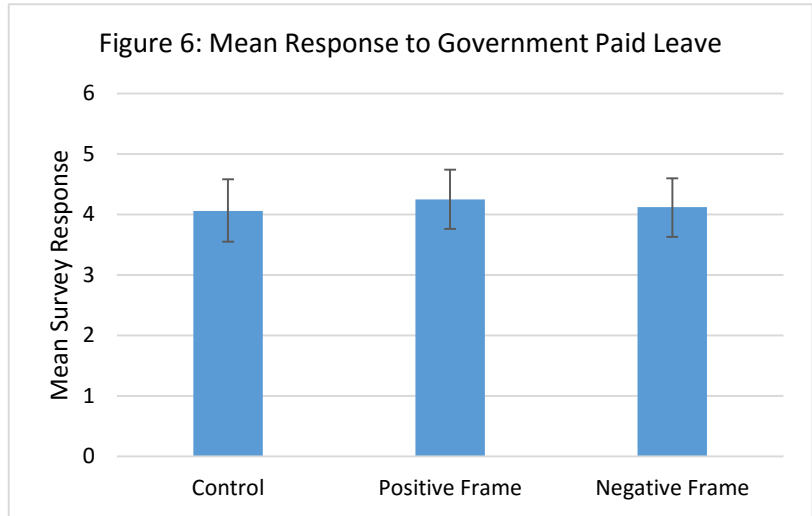
CONCLUSION

From this study, we learned that news coverage of maternity leave differs from coverage of other news issues. Because maternity leave is a relevant policy issue that sets the United States apart from its global counterparts, aspects of maternity leave are important for political scientists to understand. In the content analysis, I found that maternity leave is covered via episodic and thematic frames with roughly equal frequency, has a more positive balance of coverage than most news issues, and evolved from a merely mentioned issue to an economic issue in the last couple of decades. The articles on maternity leave in the *New York Times* also showed us that female and male authors do not frame maternity leave differently. In the survey experiment, I found that

women were more favorable to parental leave than men, but it appears that the frames in the survey did not have a large effect on attitudes toward parental leave policies, either for women or men.

Prior to my research, I intended to show that the public's opinion of unpaid maternity leave in the U.S. is driven, in part, by the media's framing of the issue. However, the results demonstrate that there is no evidence of framing effects of maternity leave. My results are different than what most framing theory has shown (such as Iyengar 2011, Chong and Druckman 2007), but it is unclear why parental leave is such an anomaly. I have found that parental leave is one of the news issues with the most positive coverage, even though it barely had a positive frame direction. Since the *New York Times* is often considered a more liberal news outlet, does that mean that other news outlets present maternity leave less favorably? Perhaps media outlets that employ fewer female journalists and commentators also would have more coverage of maternity leave that merely mentions the issue rather than employing substantive frames. The stark contrasts between how maternity leave and are other issues are covered is an avenue for future research in political science.

The absence of framing effects is another aspect that makes maternity leave a unique issue. The hope of this study was that analyzing articles related to parental leave would demonstrate how the media frame the issue and whether those frames influence public opinion of parental leave. Yet the responses of the experimental groups did not coincide with the frame the survey presented to them. It is possible that the sample I examined was unusually young for a typical sample group. Perhaps framing on this issue is less strong for young people, such as those under the age of 21. Framing effects were not as present as anticipated in this study; it is unclear why framing effects sometimes occur and sometimes do not. Prior to my research, I anticipated that framing effects would have been stronger for young people than mothers and working parents, because the mothers and working parents may have formed predispositions towards unpaid maternity leave. If framing effects do not shape the opinions of young people, then it is unclear who framing effects would affect this issue.

If framing effects cannot change people's opinion on maternity leave, then those advocating for policy changes in maternity leave will struggle to shift opinion based on the way they present paid maternity leave to citizens and voters. For example, interest groups will have to find people that agree with their stance on paid maternity leave, because individuals are unlikely to change their opinions on maternity leave based on the way the issue is framed. Based on the results detailed above, it appears changing news framing of parental leave would not make a significant difference in changing people's minds. Instead of trying to frame maternity leave in a particular way, it appears that politicians and political organizations will have to mobilize people who already agree with their position on paid maternity leave.

While this paper demonstrates a lack of framing effects for maternity leave, it is possible that this finding is specific to these data, and not maternity leave in general. Not only was the sample group for my survey experiment a particularly young group (mostly 18 to 21 year olds), but it is possible that other frames would greater influence people's views on paid parental leave than the ones I examined. Regardless of statistical insignificance, findings in this study still provide

unique contributions to studies of maternity leave and framing theory. I anticipated that analyzing media framing of parental leave would show how the media frame the issue, and whether those frames influence public opinion of parental leave. I found that, at least in the context of this study, the media frame maternity leave using both episodic and thematic issue in a balanced way. Furthermore, those frames do not influence the public opinion of maternity leave, but it is possible that frames the media are not employing may have stronger effects on public opinion. Thus, further studies on the media framing of maternity leave can shed light on the uniqueness of this issue and how it can best be presented for future policy changes.

Appendix 1: Definition of Frames for Coding Analysis
Economic PRO
- Family leave boosts labor force participation by women
- Short to moderate leaves are beneficial for the economy and labor force
- Parental leave is like social security – a long-established entitlement program that benefits everyone in society and helps any or all Americans
- Many workers can't afford taking time off to care for family or pay for it through lose wages
- Paid family leave is out of reach for many people → people quit → bad for economy
- The U.S. has left the work-family balance to the market forces, and family is losing
- Businesses are caught in a competitive trap: the need to keep costs down pulls the business standard down with it
- Corporations who provide parental leave value the family and have their workers' interests in mind
- Big businesses' "competitive" low prices hurt our pockets because we pick up the tab for taxes and insurance and emergency rooms, etc, and employers don't
- Corporations that do not offer parental leave are inferior to their competitors and their policies will not translate into fiscal success

Economic CON
- Family leave can have negative effects on job opportunities
- Financing parental leave can be costly for business, especially small businesses
- Employees and taxpayers who do not have children will not have the same economic benefits and paid leave as new parents
- Gender norms may obstruct equal opportunity for fathers and mothers to take paid leave
- Sometimes it's a vicious cycle: women continue to take parental leave because their normal pay is lower

Comparative PRO
- U.S. women are falling behind women in other developed countries
- U.S. is the only developed country without mandatory paid maternity leave
- Family leave programs are successful in Europe and thus can succeed in the U.S. as well

Comparative CON
- European-style paid leave seems unlikely in the U.S.
- Europe's lengthy leaves can have negative effects on mothers and their employment
- U.S. condemned by global counterparts for not providing parental leave as a human rights violation

Political PRO
- Policy is effective and politicians are productive and interested in supporting parental leave
- Legislation can be a game-changer; assuming it's implemented, it will be successful and effective
- All Democratic candidates have come out and supported paid parental leave

- Supporting parental leave is popular among working families and will rally support for a politician
- If members of Congress don't support family leave legislation, then they must not care about family or do not have familial values

Political CON
- Challenge for policymakers: minimize the penalty women pay
- Bills stalled in Congress (frames government as ineffective) but also mentions 4 states that have passed paid family leave laws
- Frames private sector as filling the void for lack of family leave programs from governments
- Republican presidential candidates have not discussed paid maternity leave
- It is not the government's job to mandate the private sector or provide paid leave

Individual PRO
- Parental leave is beneficial for the parents and helps facilitate them raising their children
- Anecdotal or episodic examples of how parental leave works for one individual, and thus, can work for others
- Parental leave is framed as familial; will provide specific individuals' names and touch upon their family life
- An example is provided of an individual experiencing gender discrimination with family leave that they deem necessary

Individual CON
- Consequences of parental leave do not allow the individual to flourish (i.e. breast feeding, time off, etc.)
- Parental leave is framed as burdensome or not fulfilling the promises one would expect
- Examples of working parents finding that parental leave hinders their profession or work ethic

Mere Mention
- None of the above frames are employed
- "Parental leave," "family leave," or "maternity leave" is mentioned in the article, in the appropriate context, but not in great depth or in a specific frame
- Perhaps an article on breast-feeding or the story of a working parent, and parental leave is casually included

Other
- A prominent frame, not listed above, is employed

Appendix 2: Surveying the Effect of Frames
Opening Questions (All Groups)

1. In the 2012 presidential election, 45 percent of voters were over 50 years old while only 20 percent of voters were under 30.

    More young people should vote so that their opinions are heard.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   No Opinion
        Disagree   Agree

2. The filibuster is a long-time Senate tradition that allows a minority to hold up legislation. Over 70 filibusters took place in the last session of Congress.

    The Senate should ban filibusters so that legislation can pass with fewer obstacles.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   No Opinion
        Disagree   Agree

3. Fracking – a drilling technology to extract natural gas from the ground – is known to cause air pollution and water contamination from the chemicals it disposes while drilling.

    Fracking is a reasonable way for the United States to obtain natural gas and energy.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   No Opinion
        Disagree   Agree

4. The current frontrunner for the GOP presidential nominees is Donald Trump, a businessman and billionaire. He currently leads his party with 35 percent in the polls.

    There should be a requirement that each presidential candidate have held public office.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   No Opinion
        Disagree   Agree

Parental Leave Questions (All Groups)
    Q: How about you? We are interested in your thoughts about parental leave. Please note how strongly you agree or disagree with the following:
    A:
    Women should be able to take paid time off after having a baby.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   No Opinion
        Disagree   Agree

    Women should be able to take unpaid time off after having a baby.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   No Opinion
        Disagree   Agree

Partners of women who recently had a baby should be able to take paid time off.
        1   2   3   4   5   6   No Opinion
        Disagree   Agree

Partners of women who recently had a baby should be able to take unpaid time off.
        1   2   3   4   5   6   No Opinion
        Disagree   Agree

Lead-In Statements
- Control Group:
  We are interested in your thoughts about parental leave, the opportunity for new parents to take time off from their work.

- Positive Treatment Group (Economic PRO):
  We are interested in your thoughts about parental leave, the opportunity for new parents to take time off from their work. Some economists have found that parental leave benefits the economy by enabling more parents to keep their jobs. They have found that employees without paid family leave often have to quit their jobs in order to care for their newborn, which increases unemployment and hurts the economy.
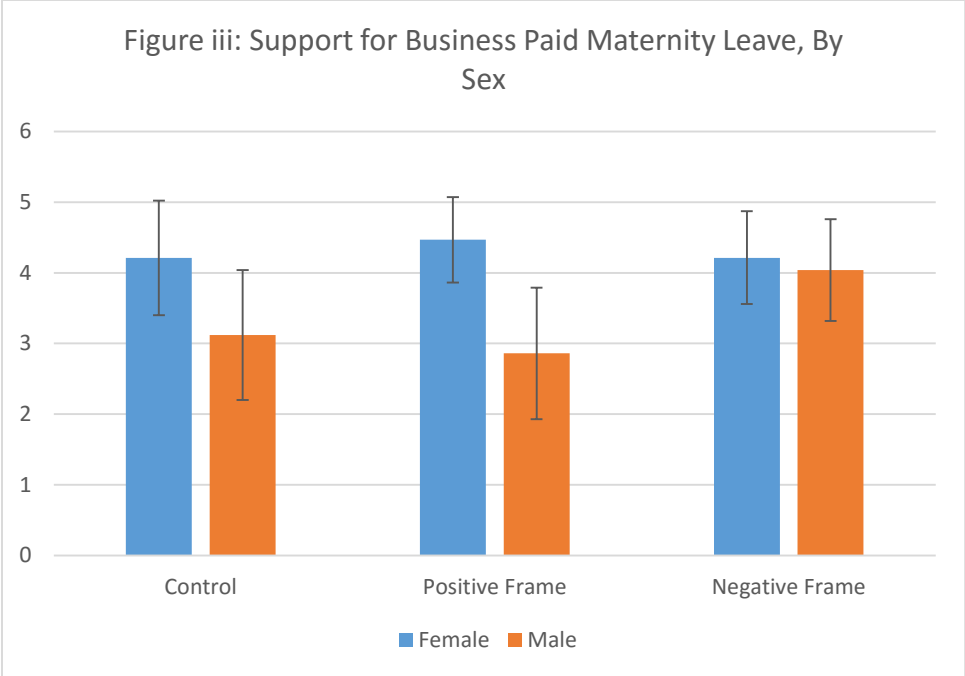
- Negative Treatment Group (Individual CON):
  We are interested in your thoughts about parental leave, the opportunity for new parents to take time off from their work. Some economists have found that parental leave is burdensome for new parents. Lengthy (6 weeks) maternity leave makes it difficult for women to return to the workplace and men fear being judged for taking time off after a baby is born.

Appendix 3: Survey Respondents on Paid Parental Leave, by Sex

Figure i: Support for Paid Maternity Leave, by Sex

Figure ii: Support for Paid Partner Leave, by Sex

Figure iii: Support for Business Paid Maternity Leave, By Sex
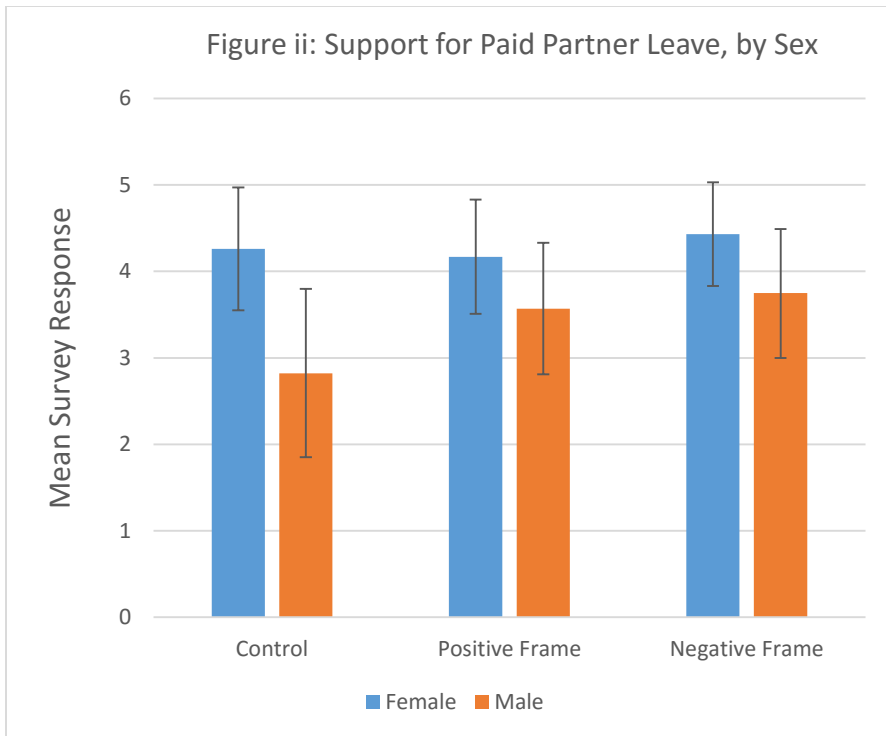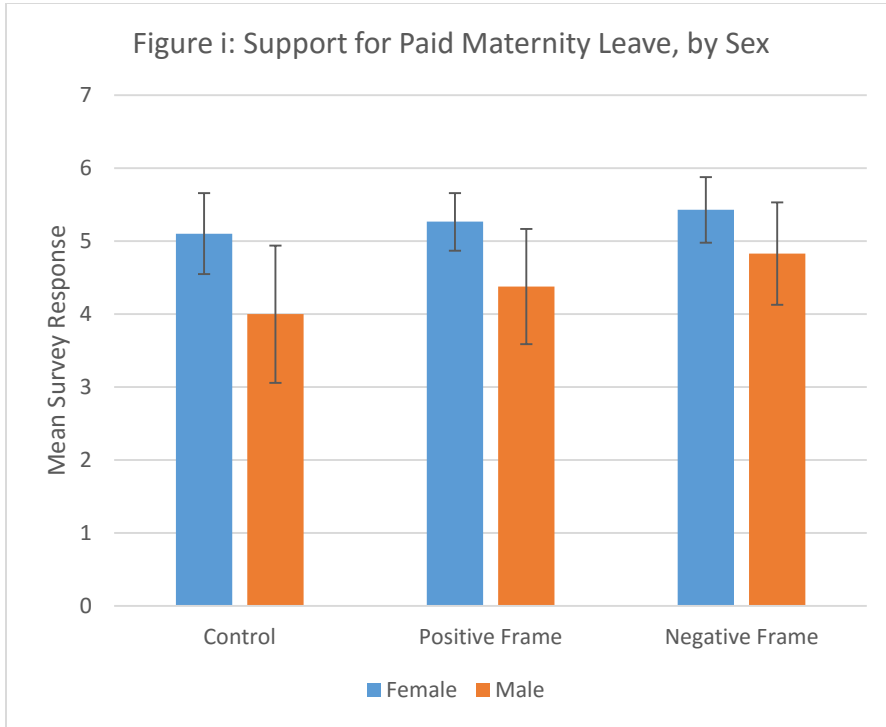
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