The Child Care Connection:
Popular Media Representations of Care and Women's Support of Potential Care Policies

A Thesis in Communication and Public Service
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Background

- Audience studies (Zenor, 2014)
- Feminist theory (Himmelweit, 2014)
- Public opinion theory (Rigby, 2007)
- Welfare state theory (Esping-Andersen, 1990)

Biden's proposals shifting child care from familial to government and market care

Ineffective child care policy in the US during the height of the pandemic

Social construction (Rigby, 2007)

Modes of child care provision:
(Taylor-Gooby, 2020)
1. Government
2. Familial
3. Charity/Community
4. Market
5. Employer

Methodology

Content Analysis

Sample:
- 7 most watched seasons of broadcast TV and 6 most watched seasons of streaming TV in 2021
  - 3 episodes from each
- 6 most watched movies in 2021
- 6 most popular Youtube channels
  - 5 most recent videos from each
- 7 most popular Instagram and 7 most popular Facebook accounts
  - 20 most recent posts from each

Measure:
Count representations of child care behavior, categorized by mode of care provision

Survey

Sample:
200 women with at least one child under 18 and household income below $70k in the US

Measures:
- Demographic and personal experience variables
- Time consuming each of the types of popular media from content analysis per week
- Level of support (1-6) for each of 5 potential child care policies at the national level, each written to fund one of the modes of child care provision

Results (RQ3)

Government policy support by media consumption group
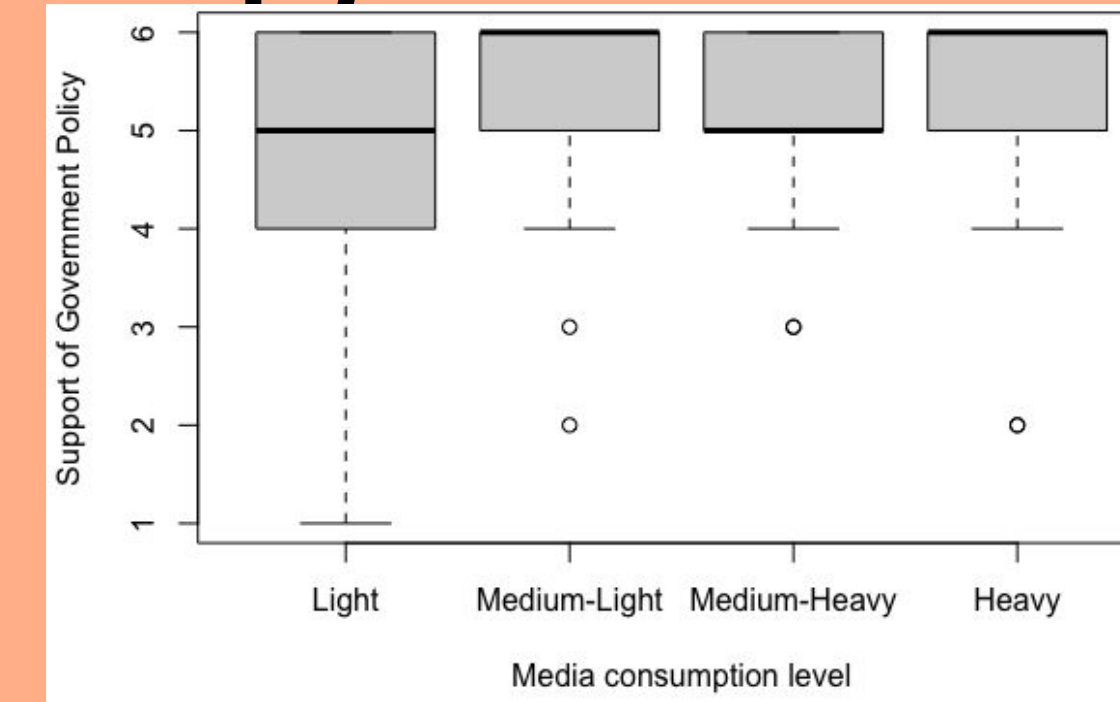
Employer policy support by media consumption group
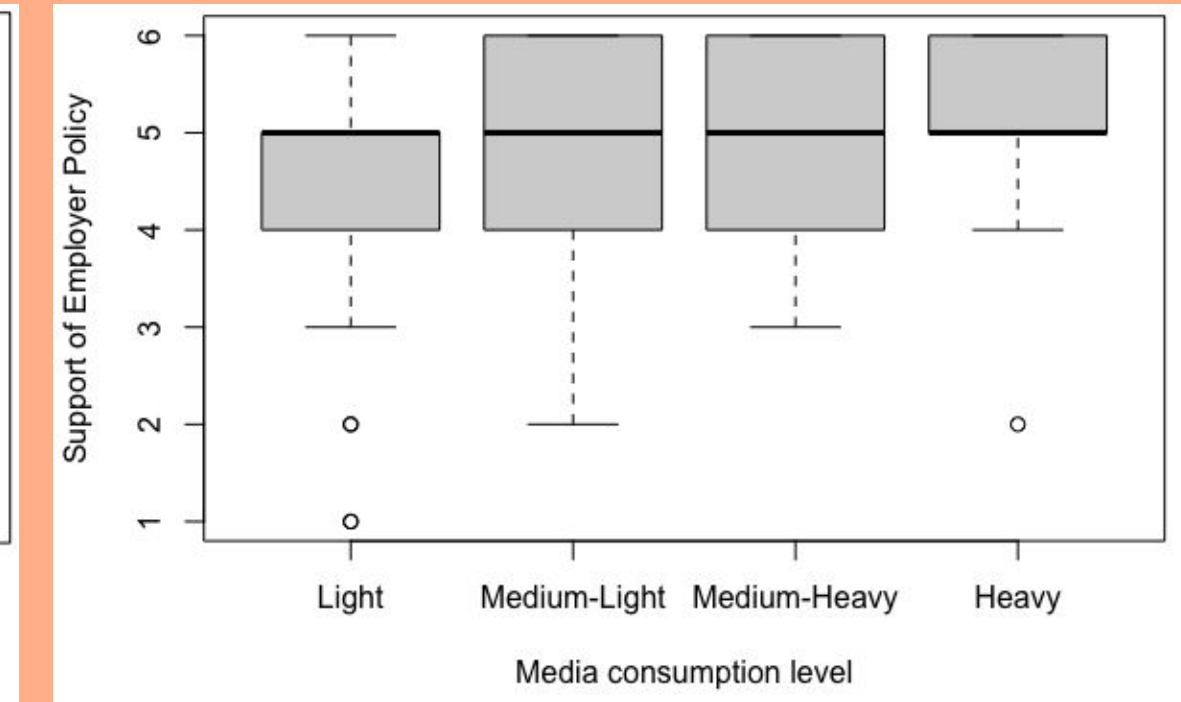
More frequent popular media consumption *does not* indicate that one holds child care policy preferences more aligned with the representations in the popular media environment.

Instead, significantly, the more time respondents spend consuming popular media, the more they support policies funding the *least represented* modes of care (government and employer).

Research Questions

RQ1

Which modes of child care provision are reflected in popular media representations, and to what extent?
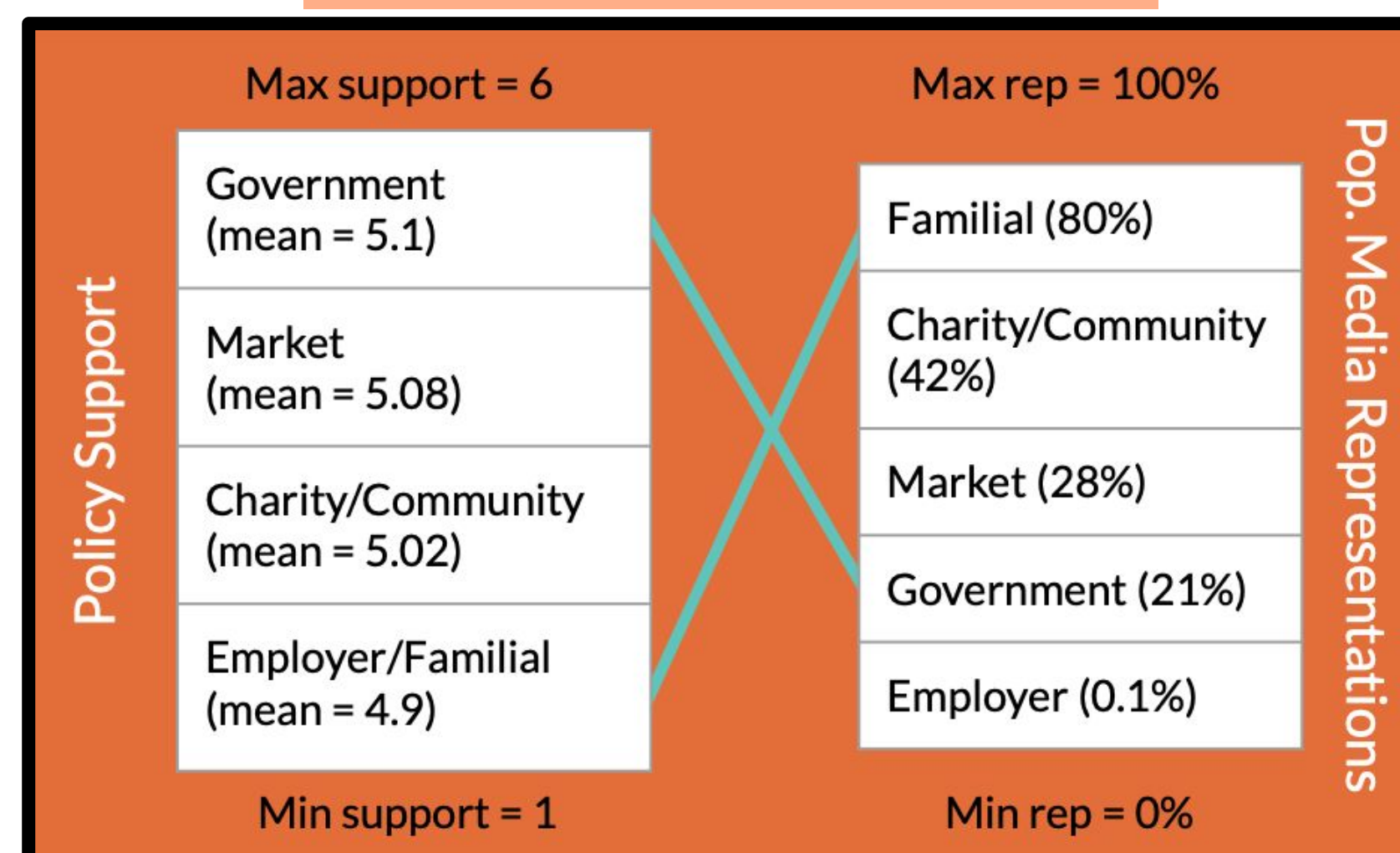
RQ2

To what extent are women's child care policy preferences reflected in the popular media environment?

RQ3

Does more frequent popular media consumption indicate that one holds child care policy preferences more aligned with the representations prevalent in the popular media environment?

Results (RQ1 + RQ2)

Policy Support — Max support = 6
- Government (mean = 5.1)
- Market (mean = 5.08)
- Charity/Community (mean = 5.02)
- Employer/Familial (mean = 4.9)
- Min support = 1

Pop. Media Representations — Max rep = 100%
- Familial (80%)
- Charity/Community (42%)
- Market (28%)
- Government (21%)
- Employer (0.1%)
- Min rep = 0%

RQ1

80% of the time any child care is represented in pop. media, it is familial care

Employer and government care are least represented in popular media

RQ2

Familial care is least supported by the survey respondents, but it is the most represented

Government care is most supported by the survey respondents, but it is only represented 21% of the time

Implications

For policy-makers

Biden's proposed policies (shifting child care toward government and market) are supported by low- and middle-income mothers in the US

- A good sign for democracy

If results are confirmed with higher sample sizes

For popular media creators

The many representations of familial care across all 6 popular media types may not be reflective of many mothers' ideal care behaviors

- Consider reflecting government or market care in new content

References

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