

Frequently Asked Questions

Any brief discussion of framing and moral politics will leave many questions unanswered. Here are some of the most common questions I've been asked.

There is an asymmetry between *strict father* and *nurturant parent*. Why is the first masculine and the second gender-neutral?

In the strict father model, the masculine and feminine roles are very different, and the father is the central figure. The strict father is the moral authority of the family, the person in charge of the family, while mothers are seen as being “mommies”—they may be loving, but they are unable to protect and support the family and aren't strict enough to punish their children when they do wrong. Think of the expression “Wait till Daddy gets home,” which refers to a strict daddy.

In this strict father model, “mommies” are supposed to uphold the authority of the strict father, but they are not able to do the job themselves. In the nurturant parent model, there just isn't a gender distinction of this sort. Both parents are there to nurture their children and to raise them to be nurturers. That doesn't mean there won't be gender-based divisions of labor around the house in real life, but they are not within the nurturant parent model.

These models are, of course, stereotypes—idealized, incomplete, oversimplified mental models. Mental models of this sort necessarily differ from real-world cases: strict mothers, single-parent households, gay parents, and so on.

Conservative commentators like David Brooks have referred to the Republicans as the “daddy party” and the Democrats as the “mommy party.” Would you agree?