Sterilization and the U.S News

How American Media Outlets Frame Coercive Sterilizations in News Coverage

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Introduction

Research Question: How does United States media present news coverage on cases of reproductive rights violations? Specifically, what media frames are utilized in news coverage by major American news outlets, on stories of sterilization abuse of women?

Hypothesis: Partisan differences will affect how women and the problems are framed in sterilization abuse stories in American news media.

Abstract

This research project evaluated what partisan differences that American news outlets displayed in coverage of cases of coercive/forced sterilizations of women. The methodology for this research was applying a media framing analysis to discern the language and rhetoric applied in the reporting of such stories. This analysis was done on eight news outlets, ranging across the left, center, and right-wing of the American political spectrum. Overall, three cases were investigated. First, allegations of forced sterilizations/birth control against Uyghur Muslims in China, by the Chinese government. Second, the state of California’s passage of a reparations bill for victims of its past sterilization programs. Finally, allegations of medical abuse of detained migrant women within an Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in the state of Georgia. These cases were analyzed with the intention of gauging how affected persons and alleged perpetrators were characterized in news reports, and what major themes or concerns were raised in coverage. Additionally, whether coverage on these cases displayed thematic or episodic styles of reporting, and what accounts and narratives were most featured in coverage. Consequently, the project investigated what were common frames applied in coverage of sterilization abuse. This project hypothesized that there would be noticeable deviations in news coverage, as different outlets would have different political leanings, and styles of reporting that would influence how they presented information on sterilization abuse cases to audiences.

Literature Review

There is no one form of news media. Many news outlets operate television channels, while also producing audio and digital content for audiences across multiple platforms. These platforms and means of communication all formulate the American mass media, a system of disseminating information. In his book *Manufacturing Consent*, historian Noam Chomsky elaborates how mass media is an influential apparatus in culture:

“The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society,”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The phrase ‘amuse, entertain, inform, and inculcate’ conveys that media has multiple roles. Mass media is described as a means of ‘communicating messages’, such as news. Subsequently, this research is concerned with how news outlets disseminate news specifically sterilization abuses of women. But what is sterilization? To be frank, sterilization is considered a permanent form of birth control,[[2]](#footnote-2) effectively ‘ending one’s ability to become pregnant’.[[3]](#footnote-3) For women, sterilization can also be done via surgical methods ranging from laparoscopic, abdominal, and hysteroscopic.[[4]](#footnote-4) Many who seek sterilization undergo an abdominal hysterectomy, which the Mayo Clinic outlines as, “…a surgical procedure that removes your uterus through an incision in your lower abdomen,” (Mayo Clinic, 2021).[[5]](#footnote-5) This is intended to be irreversible,*[[6]](#footnote-6)* and there is ‘no guarantee’ that one can become pregnant after receiving any form of sterilization.

Sterilization abuse is partially characterized by a lack of informed consent between patients and medical care providers. Instances of forced/coerced sterilization and sterilization abuse are incredibly problematic, as it entails taking away one’s choice and autonomy over their own reproductive capacities. It is also medically injurious, lacking the element of informed consent key to patient/doctor relations. The right of a patient to have informed applies to all medicine, as medical providers are expected to gauge and adapt ‘to patient’s ability for and interest in’ their care. [[7]](#footnote-7) In an article published by the Canadian Medical Association, it is further stressed how critical informed consent is to quality health care, mainly in ‘protecting patients rights’ in ‘autonomous decision-making’[[8]](#footnote-8). The point remains the same: informed consent is understood to be a key standard in medicine. Medical providers who perform procedures on patients without their full knowledge, fail to meet standards of quality care. Informed consent should entail, “…full and complete disclosure to a patient of the available choices and alternatives of sterilization, and of the benefits, dangers, and risks of sterilization, both physical and psychological,” (McGarrah, 1979). [[9]](#footnote-9) Informed consent must be stressed, because of how sterilization has life long, and permanent consequences on human bodies.

One of the three cases for this research, the China-Uyghur case, is set outside the U.S. One may assume that this would not have any impact on how the case is framed in news coverage. However, this assumption can be challenged, with Chomsky’s analysis of' ‘worthy’, and ‘unworthy victims’. Chomsky and Herman elucidate how media coverage of victimized peoples differs based on political perceptions of other nations, stating:

“Our prediction is that the victims of enemy states will be found “worthy” and will be subject to more intense and indignant coverage than those victimized by the United States or its clients, who are implicitly “unworthy,”” (Chomsky, 21).[[10]](#footnote-10)

Essentially, the label of enemy state can affect depictions of how a case is framed in U.S media. Media outlets may be more sympathetic to certain people, who are deemed ‘worthy victims. That is, those in enemy nations, rather than client nations.

The label of enemy state has a broader impact in framing of news stories. This includes what issues are raised in coverage. Such can be seen with the concept of genocide. Chomsky writes that, “‘Genocide’ is an invidious word those officials apply readily to cases of victimization in enemy states, but rarely if ever to similar or worse cases of victimization by the United States itself or allied regimes,”[[11]](#footnote-11) (Chomsky, 21). Genocide was a common frame with the China-Uyghur case, used in headlines by many outlets. This framing may reflect how China is treated as a rival and/or a threat in parts of American political culture. As of 2021, the U.S Federal Bureau of Investigation took note of ‘The China Threat’, asserting, “…the government of China and the Chinese Communist Party are a grave threat to the economic well-being and democratic values of the United States,” (FBI 2021).[[12]](#footnote-12) This implies that China is classified more as an enemy, rather than a client state of the U.S. Such a classification may affect framing of stories regarding China, like the China-Uighur case.

Chomsky further expands upon how the label of enemy state affects news coverage of some foreign nations. Primarily, it is indicated that enemy states receive more coverage and monitoring than nations deemed as friendly states:

“We would also expect great investigatory zeal in the search for enemy villainy and the responsibility of high officials for abuses in enemy states, but diminished enterprise in examining such matters in connection with one’s own and friendly states,” (Chomsky, 93).[[13]](#footnote-13)

This implies that those enemy states are more likely to receive both a higher amount of coverage, and more negative coverage by U.S news outlets. With the China Uyghur case, it became prudent to keep watch for language such as genocide, and other negative framing towards China.

Frames can be thought of as, "…the way opinions about an issue can be altered by emphasizing or de-emphasizing particular facets of that issue,” (Iyengar, 267). [[14]](#footnote-14) They are part of news presentation, as how news is presented can affect the perception that audiences have towards a story. In this sense, news frames are media-generated, emerging from the outlets reporting on a story. Subsequently, Iyengar states, “…what the media tend to cover and not cover over the long-term amounts to a frame,” (Iyengar, 272).[[15]](#footnote-15) Essentially, absence of information can itself be a frame, as what appears in coverage by one outlet, may not be present in other outlets.

Frames are noted impact individuals, the consumers of media, who may not otherwise have strong opinions on any political topic. Chong elaborates that most people only hold, “ague notions on many political topics and may not have developed overall evaluations that could be called attitudes,” (Chong 105).[[16]](#footnote-16) To return to the example of genocide. Genocide is heavy charge and reported cases of genocide can elicit a strong reaction from audiences. Such can be seen with the China case, where the Chinese government was alleged to engaged in genocide against its Uighur population. The impact of the genocide label partially stems from association with dehumanization. In, *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist it*, Smith elaborates on how genocidal programs can develop and manifest with minorities first being deemed ‘threats’, to eventually being viewed as, “…filthy, subhuman creatures that must be eradicated, ravenous predators that must be hunted down, or animals to be tamed, abused, and exploited,” (Smith 19-20).[[17]](#footnote-17) While one may question the citation of genocide in news coverage, it cannot be denied that genocide remains inherently alarming. The example of genocides demonstrates how dehumanizing ideologies can metamorphosize into harmful, real-world movements and policy. Even when the word genocide is not used, all three cases in some form bring up concerns about the connection between forced sterilization, and dehumanization. Particularly in the ICE case, where numerous victims conveyed their experiences of being sterilized in a carceral setting.

Methodology

This project applied a framing analysis on news coverage by American outlets on cases of coercive/forced sterilizations. This pertained to investigating the rhetoric, themes, and other elements utilized in news outlets’ coverage on the cases. According to Chong, framing analysis has been utilized in past studies of news media, including studies of ‘major newspapers, magazines, web sites, and television broadcasts’.[[18]](#footnote-18) Subsequently, this research explored any partisan differences within reporting on sterilization abuse of women, across different outlets. It was hypothesized that general trends such as the issues raised in coverage, identifiable rhetoric, or other ‘master narratives/themes’ would reveal discernable differences among outlets.[[19]](#footnote-19)

This project outlined five categories of frames. First, victim characterization frames. How are victims in a case identified, referred to, or described? Second, was perpetrator characterization frames. Who the alleged perpetrator in a case? Is it necessarily an individual, or a group of people? Next are issue frames. What concerns are raised in coverage? There also are episodic and thematic frames. Are cases framed as societal problems are isolated events? Finally, quote frames. In news coverage, who is shown to speak, and what do they say?

In total, eight outlets were selected for this research. A few were chosen by examining studies of what Americans consider to be 'mainstream news media'. It was also critical to identify which of these outlets did liberals and conservatives audiences tune into. Additionally, which outlets were considered as part of the political ‘center’. A Pew Research report from May 2021 outlined some news sources broadly deemed mainstream by Americans. This includes ABC News, CNN, the New York Times, MSNBC, Fox News, and the New York Post.[[20]](#footnote-20)

[Chart, bar chart

Description automatically generated](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/07/broad-agreement-in-u-s-even-among-partisans-on-which-news-outlets-are-part-of-the-mainstream-media/)

*Figure A 1 provides breakdown of % of US adults of whether they do believe, do not believe, or say they lack enough information to designate major cable tv sources and large newspapers as part of mainstream news.*

*Figure A 2. Taken from Pew Research Center. April 1, 2020. "Americans main sources for political news vary by party and age."*

Another informative provided information on Americans main sources of political news. The most consumed outlets included CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News[[21]](#footnote-21). Pew also recorded which outlets hold a reputation designated as ‘left-wing sources’, such as MSNBC, CNN, and the New York Times. [[22]](#footnote-22) All three of which were selected to be among the eight final sources for research.

[Timeline

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*Figure A 3 provides ideological placement of news sources, based on partisanship of audiences who viewed those programs as a source of news.*

*Figure A 4. Taken from University of Michigan. Accessed July 22, 2021. "Fake News. Lies and Propaganda: How to Sort Fact from Fiction."*

In their article, ‘Fake News’, the University of Michigan utilized data on viewership by Pew to illustrate where news outlets fall on the political spectrum. This further identified ‘center outlets’, such as NPR.[[23]](#footnote-23) The piece also attempted to identify ‘right-wing news’ sources. However, the list included the Rush Limbaugh Show,[[24]](#footnote-24) a piece of media out of production with the titular host now deceased. This implied that portions of the page were outdated. Nevertheless, one source was able to identify popular conservative news sources as of 2020. Three outlets were outlined: Fox News, Newsmax, and One America News Network.[[25]](#footnote-25) All three were selected to represent ‘right wing news’ in this project.

Ultimately, the eight sources selected for this project were: CNN, MSNBC, The New York Times, NPR, the Associated Press, Fox News, Newsmax, and One America News Network. All eight were categorized into three groups: left leaning, center leaning, and right leaning sources. These categories were balanced, three left, two center, three right, to try to minimize any partisan bias. The preliminary task of this project was to discern to what extent did U.S news outlets cover stories of sterilization abuse. Likewise, to determine if sterilization abuse was under covered in media for stories related to abortion, or reproductive rights.

Table 1.0 Quantity of News Sources



Table 1.0 displays the amount of news stories by outlets. This data was found by searching terms on the source’s websites to gauge how visible sterilization, and sterilization abuse is in U.S news, to discern the scope of sterilization related stories. One possible discrepancy came from a lack of a search engine feature. Specifically, from the Associated Press. This ensured that only a limited number of stories could be identified on that website, making it difficult to gauge the full amount of coverage that the source provided. Another issue stemmed from differences in definitions of the keywords. For instance, while ‘sterilization’ accounted for about 6.1% of news stories,[[26]](#footnote-26) some results brought up stories related to sterilization as the decontamination of objects, not reproductive sterilization. Nevertheless, table 1.0 displays that news coverage on abortion drastically outnumber coverage of sterilization. This suggests that sterilization stories remain a niche topic within news outlets, or at least, are not particularly periodized by new media.

*Table 2.0 Case Selection*

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Table 2.0 indicates the three most common sterilization stories amongst outlets. On the websites of the eight selected news outlets, the term forced sterilization was inputted in the search engines, with search results were filtered to ‘most recent’ to access cases from the last five years, or the late 2000s at the latest. When going through the search results, the objective was to select four distinct stories from each site. Altogether, nine stories were selected, including cases pertaining to Canada & Indigenous women, mandates for sterilization made by a Virginia doctor, cases which occurred in North Carolina, and California hospitals. There were additional reports of cases in Peru, and Japan. This list was filtered down to three cases which amounted to 25%, 25%, and 21.4% of coverage by outlets, respectively.[[27]](#footnote-27) Sterilizations which occurred in an Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE) Detention Center, a case of California Reparations for sterilization survivors, and a case of alleged mass sterilization occurring in the Xinjiang province in China.

Altogether The three cases for this research can be referred to as the California Reparations case, the ICE Detention case, and the China-Uighur case. The California case revolved around a bill passed to compensate survivors of sterilizations in California with a Victim Compensation's Fund. The legislation also approved new memorials in recognition of the state’s role in the sterilizations in the 20th century. During that time, California adopted policies reflecting eugenics ideology, leading to sterilizations of the ‘unfit’ in mental institutions, hospitals, prisons, and other facilities in the state. Subsequently, news reports featured Californians detailing their experiences in these institutions. Unfortunately, many victims already passed by the time these reports were published.

The ICE case pertains to allegations that coercive hysterectomies were performed on undocumented women detained by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE). The allegations specify a detention center in Georgia, the Irwin County Detention Center. Coverage notes that a specific doctor has been named in the allegations, a man known to detainees as 'the uterus collector'[[28]](#footnote-28). There were also other complaints regarding medical care at the facility, specifically concerns for safety measures for the COVID-19 pandemic.[[29]](#footnote-29) As of 2021, numerous members of the United States Congress have signed on calling for an investigation into ICE. Additionally, the Irwin facility was shut down by the Biden administration,[[30]](#footnote-30) and the Mexican government reportedly begun their own investigation into the allegations.[[31]](#footnote-31)

The last case revolves around allegations that many Muslim Uighurs in China have been detained, sterilized, or forced to take contraceptives in a systematic program aiming to slow down the growth of the Uighur population. There are also allegations of other systematic abuses of Uighur people, and other minorities. As of 2021 numerous nations and governments, and American political figures have also given statements on the case.

It was deemed prudent to examine the full extent of coverage these cases received by news outlets. How much coverage was dedicated to each story? Are there partisan differences in the amount of coverage?

Table 3.0 Quantity of Coverage



Some outlets provided no coverage to certain cases. MSNBC, and Fox News published nothing on the California Reparations case, and One America News Network had no coverage on the ICE cases. Across cases, it appears that the largest amount of coverage came from 'leftwing sources', which produced 42.3% of pieces utilized in this research.[[32]](#footnote-32) The least amount of coverage came from 'right-wing sources, which provided a 25% contribution, in comparison to center sources 32.7% contribution.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Table 3.1 California Coverage Dispersal

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **AP** | **NPR** | **MSNBC** | **CNN** | **NYTs** | **FOX** | **NM** | **OAN** | **Total** |
| **California Reparations Case** | **Article** | 1 |  |  | 1 | 1 |  | 1 |  | 4 |
|  | **Audio** |  | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |
|  | **Video** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |
|  | **Opinion** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0 |
| **Total** |  | 1 | 1 |  | 1 | 1 |  | 1 | 1 | **6** |

Different outlets also utilized different types of reporting: written articles, audio, video, or a written opinion piece. Only six out of eight outlets reported on the California Reparations case, each publishing about one piece of content each. A majority was dedicated to news articles (66.7%).[[34]](#footnote-34) NPR and OAN also published video and audio coverage.

Table 3.2 ICE Coverage Dispersal

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **AP** | **NPR** | **MSNBC** | **CNN** | **NYTs** | **FOX** | **NM** | **OAN** | **Total** |
| **ICE Case** | **Article** | 4 | 5 |  | 7 | 2 | 3 | 1 |  | 22 |
|  | **Audio** |  | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |
|  | **Video** |  |  | 4 |  |  |  |  |  | 4 |
|  | **Opinion** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0 |
| **Total** |  | 4 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 1 |  | **27** |

The ICE case received a mixture of different types of coverage. Once again, most of the coverage comes in the form of news articles, which amounts to 81.5% of coverage.[[35]](#footnote-35) NPR was the sole source of audio, providing one piece (3.7% of coverage).[[36]](#footnote-36) MSNBC was the sole source of video coverage (14.8% of coverage),[[37]](#footnote-37) and the only outlet without written articles.

Table 3.3 China Coverage Dispersal

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **AP** | **NPR** | **MSNBC** | **CNN** | **NYTs** | **FOX** | **NM** | **OAN** | **Total** |
| **China Case** | **Article** | 3 | 1 |  | 4 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
|  | **Audio** |  | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |
|  | **Video** |  |  | 1 |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |
|  | **Opinion** |  |  |  |  | 1 |  |  |  | 1 |
| **Total** |  | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 | **19** |

Table 3.3 demonstrates types of coverage utilized in the China case. Here, all sources produced coverage, via articles, audio, videos, and opinion pieces, which amounted to 84.2%, 5.3%, 5.3%, and 5.3% of coverage respectively.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Findings

One question of this research was how were affected persons and perpetrators framed in news coverage, and what concerns were raised by outlets covering the cases? To address these inquiries, this research focused on three items: victim frames, culpability frames, and issues frames.

Table 4.0 Victim Frames

Affected persons in the China case, Uighur Muslims, were continuously referred to by their ethnicity and their religious identity. Outlets also highlighted their status as an ethnic and religious minority in China. For example, Fox News conveys, "The unspeakable oppression that Uighurs and other ethnic minorities have suffered...," (Fox News, 2020).[[39]](#footnote-39) Another example, is, ‘crimes against humanity against Uyghur Muslims'.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Reports on the California case often utilized the terms such as 'sterilization victims' or 'eugenics victims ', emphasizing victimhood. Since the case occurred in California, affected persons are also specified as 'victims in California', or those ‘subjected to forced or coerced sterilizations.[[41]](#footnote-41) 'Women' was also utilized, a term notably emphasizing gender. Though coverage also included narratives of men, who were also sterilized under California eugenics laws.

In the ICE case, outlets referred to affected persons as women, showing further emphasis on gender. However, coverage also references the legal status of victims in this case, who were undocumented migrants. Some outlets utilized descriptors such as ‘detained immigrants’, [[42]](#footnote-42) or ‘vulnerable minority women'[[43]](#footnote-43), though Fox News specifically utilized terms such as 'illegal immigrants' and 'Spanish- speaking detained women'.

Overall, victim frames show how descriptors are interconnected, and can emphasize different parts of identity. Whether it be religion, race, gender, citizenship status, or some other aspect of a person’s background. Focusing on certain aspects of a victim’s identity, over others, has larger implications for the framing in news coverage. How those aspects of identity are conveyed is also meaningful. Fox News usage of ‘illegal immigrants’, over say, CNN’s simple usage of women imparts different messages about who victims are, or what parts of their identities should matter to audiences.

Table 5.0 Culpability Frames

News coverage displayed significant amount of culpability towards China. There was much emphasis put on China’s, Communist government’. These descriptions framed China’s government as communist, authoritarian, and fascist across all outlets. This includes calls against the ‘actions by the Chinese Communist Party'[[44]](#footnote-44). While Chinese President Xi Jinping was also accredited blame, the government of China as an entity was overwhelmingly framed as culpable.

Across the board, culpability was directed towards the State of California in the California case. In this case, sterilizations were reported to have been done 'under California’s program’, [[45]](#footnote-45) suggesting that the state perpetrated, oversaw, and perpetuated numerous sterilization procedures. The passage of new legislation for reparations was described as 'California's small step of atoning'.[[46]](#footnote-46) This case entailed minimal coverage implicating individual persons. At most, Newsmax identified a doctor who reportedly led many of the prison sterilizations. Outlets also directed blame towards eugenicists, as many sterilizations occurred under eugenics laws pushed by the ‘so-called eugenics movement' popular in the 20th century.[[47]](#footnote-47)

There were two recurring entities that received blame in reporting on the ICE case: the ICE detention center, and the specific doctor/gynecologist who was alleged to have mistreated the women at the facility. Blame on the detention center was emphasized through statements including, “It was the Irwin County center’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic...," (New York Times, 2020). [[48]](#footnote-48) Similarly, outlets wrote lines including, 'the Georgia gynecologist accused'.[[49]](#footnote-49) These frames show how culpability was directed at both an individual and societal level, on both the doctor, and detention center. This is distinct from the other two cases, which maintained a single level of framing.

Table 6.0 Issue Frames

The issue main frame in the China case was genocide, as it was asserted that the situation with the Uighurs amounts to, “…the largest incarceration of an ethnoreligious minority since the Holocaust,” (NPR, 2021). [[50]](#footnote-50) Some outlets elaborated why they used the term, genocide. The AP highlighted one commentator, who stated that the case, “…(had) not immediate, shocking, mass-killing on the spot type genocide, but…slow, painful, creeping genocide,” (AP, 2020). [[51]](#footnote-51)  It appears that the China case was the only one explicitly framed as genocide. This was not partisan, as nearly all outlets cited genocide in coverage.

A key frame in the California case was eugenics. California’s was noted to have a history of eugenics practices that at one point, inspired Nazi Germany.[[52]](#footnote-52) There was also a frame of consent, mainly a reported lack of consent by women who underwent the sterilization procedures. The sterilizations themselves were also described as a ‘cold hearted and cruel practice’.[[53]](#footnote-53) The words ‘cold-hearted’ and ‘cruel’, imparting negative connotations. There was also a frame of discrimination, as outlets noted how coercive sterilizations significantly impacted minorities, including people of color and the disabled. [[54]](#footnote-54) One former imprisoned woman reportedly stated, "...do they think they're animals, and they don't want them to breed anymore?”," (Newsmax, 2013).[[55]](#footnote-55) The words ‘animals’, ‘breed’, conveys to readers the dehumanizing nature of sterilization abuse, reinforced with the perspective of this victim.

Coverage on the ICE case raises concerns with the quality of medical care for migrant women. Outlets across the spectrum reported a, "…a lack of proper medical care, and unsafe work practices help spread the Coronavirus in the facility,” (MSNBC, 2020).[[56]](#footnote-56) Concerns were also raised about accessibility of medical care. Fox News reported “…raised questions about proper informed consent for Spanish- speaking detained women,” (FOX, 2020).[[57]](#footnote-57) Likewise, coverage pointed out 'a systemic lack of truly informed and legally valid consent' in the sterilizations at ICE.[[58]](#footnote-58) There appeared to be a consensus that inadequacies were in reproductive health care and conditions for women in the facility.

Analysis

Media framing theory outlines two levels of frames: thematic, and episodic. Thematic framing is more in depth, ‘sedate’ forms of reporting, focusing more on government and larger society, while episodic framing, encapsulates a ‘dramatic visual’ form of news presentation. With the China case, left-wing sources were more thematic in of alleged perpetrators: the government of China, Chinese localities, and Chinese state officials. News outlets placed culpability on a governmental level, rather than on individual people in reporting. Thematic frames were also present in Center and Right-wing sources. Center sources focused on China as an entity, reporting the case as abuses of Uighurs by the hands of the Chinese government. Right-wing sources displayed similar frames, though they raised concerns about China as a 'communist' and 'authoritarian government'. These outlets also framed President. Joe Biden, American officials, and Democrats, as culpable, criticizing the Biden administration for perceived silence against China’s alleged human rights abuses.

With the ICE case, all outlets displayed both thematic, and episodic reporting. Left-wing outlets seemed to direct culpability at the ICE facility, but also the specific doctor accused of performing the hysterectomies. There was additional criticism of the Trump administration, displaying partisanship in coverage. Politically center outlets also had a similar form of framing, focusing on both the ICE facility, and the individual doctor. However, both right wing and center outlets focused on both the staff and facility, a dual level of analysis.

On the California case, left wing outlets had a more thematic lens to coverage, framing the state of California, California eugenicists, and eugenic related programs as culpable. This thematic lens of collective persons rather than single individuals was also used by center sources. Like outlets on the left, sources on the center focused more on the state of California, eugenicists, and eugenics related programs. Such as can be seen again in right-wing sources which focused on California. However, in its article dating back to 2013, the publication Newsmax focuses on sterilization specifically related to the California prison system. The piece addressed California prisons, but also refers to the culpability of a specific doctor. Due to this, it is prudent to say that right-wing outlets applied both thematic and episodic framing.

Another angle of analysis was quote frames. Who gets a platform, or is shown to speak in coverage? Quote frames consisted of five identifiable categories of statements: victim narratives, political statements, advocacy statements, expert opinions, and rebuttals by alleged perpetrators. Victim statements were shown to hold a strong presence in news coverage. This pertains to affected persons such as sterilized women, or other loved ones who provided insight in the cases, though specific parties vary by case. In the China case, victim statements pertained to Uighur and Kazakh women, and their families who were detained by or have fled from China. Likewise, the ICE case held some statements by sterilized women, and other detained women who have witnessed the sterilization abuses. On the California case, there was an interview with 'sterilization survivor',[[59]](#footnote-59) and statements of affected persons in other articles.

Outlets included many quotes, interviews, and other statements by government officials and political figures. The China case saw comments by American officials such as former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo,[[60]](#footnote-60) and the 2020 Presidential campaign of Joe Biden. [[61]](#footnote-61) Members U.S Congress also commented on the ICE, with Representative Pramila Jayapal, and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi being the most vocal.[[62]](#footnote-62) The Mexican government also, via spokesperson.[[63]](#footnote-63) In the California case, multiple statements were made by Los Angeles Assemblywoman Wendy Carrillo[[64]](#footnote-64). The strong presence of political statements across all three cases, displays the significance that political figures have in framing news.

News outlets also published statements by advocates, and advocacy groups/organizations. On the China case, advocacy statements included various groups including the Uyghur Human Rights Project and the Campaign for Uyghurs.[[65]](#footnote-65) Likewise on the ICE case, outlets took note of organizations such as Georgia Detention Watch, and the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights.[[66]](#footnote-66) A similar key organization in the California case was California Latinas for Reproductive Justice.[[67]](#footnote-67) NPR made an audio interview with a survivor turned advocate,[[68]](#footnote-68) and other outlets published other statements by reproductive justice organizations.

There was also a variety of expert opinions within reporting. In the China case, experts mostly consisted of professors of studies related to the nation, and academics who specialize on the Uighur people,[[69]](#footnote-69) etc. Additionally, outlets consistently referred to one researcher who investigated China’s supposed harms against the Uighurs and has spoken out about his findings.[[70]](#footnote-70) In the ICE case, and the California case a variety of experts of eugenics, law, and history were also featured in news pieces.

Outlets disseminated many rebuttals, or testimony made by alleged perpetrators. The China case saw many statements by the Chinese government, ministries, and localities.[[71]](#footnote-71) In the ICE case, outlets reported on statements made by ICE, Irwin County, and the doctor who allegedly led the hysterectomy procedures.[[72]](#footnote-72) The California case had one rebuttal rebuttals by a prison doctor in 2013,[[73]](#footnote-73) but no denials as of 2021. One can interpret this absence to stem from how the case centered on reparations. The case is in a reconciliation phase, rather than active conflict.

Conclusion

News outlets were consistently shown to share similar frames in coverage of cases of sterilization abuse. There were minimal deviations regarding coverage on issues, affected persons, and alleged perpetrators in cases, implying that generally, mainstream American news sources remain consistent with one another on the determined facts of cases, on interpretations of cases. That said, partisan distinctions were still discernable in news coverage. In the China case, there more critique against President Joe Biden by right-wing outlets. Alternatively, left-wing outlets more visibly critiqued then-President Trump in the ICE case. On the California case, right wing sources were indicated to frame affected persons more as victims, or inmates (on an article specifically focusing on prison sterilizations). This contrasts from left-wing, or even center sources, who provide more of a spotlight on various elements of affected persons identities, including race, class, disability, etc. Across outlets, the only common descriptor of affected persons in the California case was gender (i.e., female/women).

In coverage, left-wing outlets frequently used thematic framing. When episodic frames were present, they blended with thematic frames in coverage. Mixed framing was more so present with right wing outlets, which had the most focus on individual people in reporting. Mixed framing also appeared in the ICE case more than the other cases, as all outlets appeared to take time to focus both on ICE the agency, and the specific doctor/alleged perpetrator. Quote frames were also significant as they show that all outlets had a common thread of obtaining comments from activists and professionals, in addition to victims/affected persons/survivors. While news outlets included numerous commentators, coverage gave ample room for affected persons to make their experiences public.

Altogether, there never no one form of framing in news coverage on sterilization abuse. In regard to issue frames, coverage of the China case brought up concerns over China’s possible guilt in seeking genocide, human rights violations, amongst other ethical concerns. In the ICE case, there were visible worries about the spread of COVID, in addition to discourse regarding the treatment of immigrants and undocumented peoples. The California case brought forth dehumanization eugenics, and a larger dialogue on justice. What should redress for sterilization victims look like? Can those who suffered from sterilization abuse ever be compensated for those experiences? Altogether, media coverage of sterilization abuse ranges across different outlets throughout the political spectrum. Each outlet applies distinct, yet similar frames with each case. As a result, the American news media cannot be deemed as uniform in coverage of sterilization abuse. Instead, it should be recognized that there are real and visible differences in coverage across the political spectrum and across outlets.

Appendix

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35. See Table 3.2. ICE case received 22 articles across all outlets [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
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