

HOW INTEREST GROUPS ATTEMPT TO SHAPE PUBLIC OPINION WITH COMPETING NEWS FRAMES

By Julie L. Andsager

In competing to shape policy, interest groups develop rhetoric to garner media coverage and favorable public opinion, influencing how journalists frame issues because interest groups' positions can become pervasive. This study examined how pro-choice and pro-life groups attempted to frame the late-term abortion debate in 1995-1996. Interest groups' frames were derived from their press releases and direct quotations in news stories. Pro-life rhetoric was more frequent in six major newspapers' coverage and was more closely associated with the issue than pro-choice rhetoric. Findings add to framing knowledge by illustrating how the sources selected and their own words can influence news.



When policy concerning controversial social issues is being developed, policy actors with vital interests in those issues use the news media in an attempt to sway public opinion to support their disparate points of view. One effective means of accomplishing this is to develop rhetoric with strong emotive appeal. Over time, policy actors can create a terminology that not only clearly conveys their stance on an issue, but serves as well to define and categorize them. Perhaps no recent issue better illustrates this process than the ongoing struggle over abortion rights. The terms "pro-choice" and "pro-life" are the most obvious examples of such terminology, not to mention the plethora of subtler uses of language that serves to delineate these polarized groups. Indeed, pro-choice and pro-life designate dozens of interest groups that attempt to shape abortion policy in the United States by framing the constellation of abortion-related issues in a manner that mobilizes public opinion. The purpose of this study is to examine how pro-choice and pro-life groups attempted this during the recent congressional conflict over late-term (or "partial-birth") abortion.

In political debate over social issues, interest groups often play a major role in making the issue salient to both policymakers and the media. Interest groups allow individuals to gain access to important others, such as their congressional representatives, and to engage a broader slice of the public via the news media.¹ Media coverage serves not only to legitimize the interest groups but to "let members of concerned groups know what others are thinking and doing and what, in particular, the opposition is doing and thinking" in an increasingly mediated and pluralistic society.² Moreover, the news media may transmit the symbols that communicate the interest groups' perceptions of the issue's significance, their own vs. their opponent's legiti-

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macy, and the emotional appeals that Elder and Cobb argue will predict the groups' success when effectively manipulated.³

For interest groups such as those involved in the abortion-rights controversy, such symbols may be visual, but are more often verbal—a set of rhetoric developed in part to enhance emotional appeals. A primary function of rhetoric is the manipulation of the public vocabulary to bring about social change.⁴ A persuasive vocabulary intended to influence public opinion is developed to transmit the policy actor's commitments through public discourse. This vocabulary, combined with other elements of rhetoric such as narrative, becomes identified with a specific stance or organization involving social issues. In the abortion-rights battle, exemplars of pro-choice rhetoric include reproductive freedom, right to choice, and woman's control over her body. Pro-life's rhetorical position focuses instead on the fetus, employing words such as the unborn or pre-born and the murder of babies. These rhetorical frames serve to define and to differentiate the interest groups.⁵ Such rhetoric from both sides of the controversy regularly enters the public discourse through the interest groups' speeches, press releases, interviews, and picket signs carried at staged protests.

The news media convey these messages to the public, but they are not merely "common carriers" of information.⁶ Instead, news coverage often plays a substantial role in shaping public opinion via the frames that shape the way journalists report the news.⁷ The framing process—whether journalists are aware of it or not—can easily be influenced by rhetoric because, in ongoing social debates, interest groups' rhetorical positions become pervasive. As Condit notes, "social forces cannot be directly dealt with or even experienced by governments, politicians, bureaucrats, or individuals. *They can be dealt with only through understandings of them, which are predominantly carried through a shared public vocabulary.*"⁸ Although journalists generally strive to be as "objective" as possible in reporting news because objectivity is considered a traditional news value,⁹ rhetoric is virtually impossible to avoid in covering the controversies that continually arise over abortion rights. Pro-choice and pro-life rhetoric clearly emerges through direct quotes from individuals belonging to one side or the other, and it may also creep into the news stories themselves via the traditional public relations practices that interest groups engage in—press releases, news conferences, and dramatic acts.¹⁰

Because news stories can frame abortion-rights issues in ways that shape public opinion and subsequently affect policy, it is important to understand how interest groups use rhetoric in an attempt to influence those news frames. This study examined how six major newspapers framed policy making regarding an abortion procedure known as dilation and extraction during a nineteen-month period in which Congress and President Clinton considered legislation to ban the procedure. This issue is particularly salient for examining rhetorical frames because pro-choice groups referred to it as "late-term abortion," while pro-life groups used the term "partial-birth abortion." This study analyzed the vocabulary emerging from news releases, position statements, and direct quotes in news stories to determine the frames that each interest group attempted to develop in shaping public opinion on the issue, then examined whether the groups were successful in transmitting their frames into news coverage.

Background

Until after the Civil War, abortion in some form was legal in most states, and as many as 30,000 abortions were performed in U.S. hospitals each year until the 1950s, when the medical profession questioned its own stance

on abortion.¹¹ Not until the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision was it clear that women legally possessed the right to freely seek an abortion, however. Recent court decisions, along with congressional and state legislative initiatives, have further clarified the scope of this right.¹² Until recently, the abortion battle lines were clearly defined: Most people either categorized themselves as pro-life or pro-choice. Late-term abortion complicates the issue, however, because it involves aborting a fetus during the final trimester of pregnancy, a procedure that is considered "gruesome" by both pro-choice and pro-life organizations.

The "Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 1995" passed the U.S. House of Representatives in November 1995 and the Senate a month later. This bill represented the first attempt by Congress to ban a specific abortion procedure since the historic *Roe* decision. It was unequivocally written to ban the use of a rare late-term abortion procedure described by the medical community as "intact dilation and evacuation" but referred to as a "partial-birth abortion" by the bill's supporters.¹³ In April 1996, President Clinton vetoed the bill because, according to White House statements, it failed to provide any consideration of the need to preserve the life and health of the mother, consistent with the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*.¹⁴ In September 1996, both congressional bodies failed to override the presidential veto.

Framing

Framing in the news media conceptualizes "news texts as a system of organized signifying elements that both indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of the texts."¹⁵ In general, the notion of framing refers to selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of experience or ideas over others. Framing occurs as journalists "select some aspect of a perceived reality and make [it] more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."¹⁶ As Entman notes, frames in the media emerge as the presence or absence of certain key words, sources of information, and sentences that form thematic clusters.¹⁷ Mass media scholars have long argued that it is important to understand the ways in which journalistic framing of issues occurs because such framing impacts public understanding and, consequently, policy formation.¹⁸

The notion of story frame is taken in part from Tuchman's notion of the social construction of reality accomplished within media accounts.¹⁹ Certain pieces of information are selected and put together within the specific genre constraints of a news story. Gamson and Modigliani have noted, further, that journalists organize news stories in ways that provide meaning to related events.²⁰ These journalistic choices, made on the basis of news values as well as journalists' interpretations of responsibility to society, do have consequences. Through complex processes of interpretation, readers form impressions of the news stories' central theme/issue and attitudes toward the policy actors involved.²¹ Nelkin posits that people assimilate media information about health-related issues, for example, in a variety of ways depending on their previous experiences, so media framing is important to the extent that it makes isolated incidents related in the form of public issues.²² Journalists can be perceived as brokers, "framing social reality and shaping the public consciousness."²³ Through their representation of news stories, journalists suggest attitudes and opinions for the public.

In examining media coverage of the late-term abortion controversy, it is assumed that the public used newspapers as a source of information. The concept of newspapers being involved in telling the public what to think about is well documented in the voluminous agenda-setting research.²⁴ Thus, the media set the agenda for society and create the boundaries within which debate can take place. This does not mean that audiences are passive, but although "people actively construct their pictures of reality ... they are constrained by the information available to them from the mass media and other sources,"²⁵ making news framing's role crucial in constructing public opinion. Framing research suggests that the media go beyond telling the public what is important and newsworthy; rather, they also tell the public what opinions, interpretations, and definitions of a controversial issue are most valid.²⁶ This notion of framing should not imply that the media's frames are monolithic, however. As Gamson and Modigliani point out, frames can encompass "a range of positions, rather than any single one, allowing for a degree of controversy among those who share a common frame."²⁷

Because a variety of devices can serve to operationalize news frames, it is necessary to define how frames will be construed in this study. Rhetoric is vital to the interest groups striving to shape abortion-related issues.²⁸ As mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which pro-choice and pro-life groups were able to impact news coverage of late-term abortion, and given the nature of this topic, verbal rhetoric—rather than visual devices—was particularly salient. Thus, frames will be examined here as rhetorical structures in the news stories about the issue, which Pan and Kosicki note are often "shaped by sources' proactive newsmaking."²⁹ In the case of late-term abortion, rhetorical structures may rely on catchphrases and metaphors,³⁰ and the ideographs of shared public vocabulary that pro-choice and pro-life groups have developed over time to convey values.³¹ The terms "partial-birth abortion" and "unborn" are examples of such structures in pro-life rhetoric, while "Roe" and "right to choose" would exemplify pro-choice ideographs. This terminology will be derived from pro-choice and pro-life groups' statements to form their frames.

Entman posits that "the frame in the news is really the imprint of power—it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text."³² Moreover, analysis of frames can suggest the extent to which the media imprint their own power on issue coverage. Interest groups that must compete to gain media coverage are most successful when they have media-related resources such as public relations bureaus and/or journalists as contacts³³ and when they understand how news is constructed, positioning their communications in terms of traditional newsworthiness values such as timeliness, conflict, prominence, proximity, and impact. Given that such sources can shape rhetorical structures to frame stories about the issue,³⁴ astute interest groups sometimes attempt to use emotionally bound rhetoric to increase the likelihood of coverage. As Elder and Cobb succinctly suggest, successful groups may achieve media attention largely through the effective manipulation of symbols,³⁵ such as catchphrases or ideographs—special words or phrases that express public values.³⁶ More explicitly, Davis contends: "As important as any other factor, especially in an ideologically polarized ... policy arena, is the quality of a group's message and the cleverness, articulateness, and sheer intensity with which they can deliver it."³⁷

Examining frames based on the rhetorical messages that pro-choice and pro-life interest groups disseminated, then, provides a means of evalu-

ating the success of this one-way communication. Previous work on abortion issues suggests that the primary interest groups involved have developed symbols that serve to check one another's rhetoric: "Given the potency of an opposing symbol which reifies the sanctity of human life, proponents of abortion rights have been hard put to come up with an equally powerful slogan. While 'pro-choice' is not as powerful a symbol, its emphasis on 'freedom' and 'individual choice' undoubtedly helps to neutralize the appeal of 'right to life.'"³⁸ For abstract arguments over abortion rights, this summary may well hold true. The battleground is not nearly so even regarding late-term abortion, however, because pro-choice groups must cede the rhetoric of choice in order to win the argument of necessity and safety.

Combined with the persuasive power of rhetoric discussed above, news media framing can be an influential tool in shaping public opinion and, in turn, public policy. These contentions suggest that rhetoric is important in shaping news coverage of social controversies, in particular late-term abortion, leading to the following research questions: Were the rhetorical positions of pro-choice and pro-life interest groups readily apparent in the news stories about the political debate over this procedure? Which interest group, if any, dominated the coverage of the late-term abortion debate?

This study will examine the occurrence and co-occurrence of pro-choice and pro-life rhetorical structures to determine how successfully the interest groups used catchphrases and ideographs in shaping news frames. Catchphrases and ideographs can be determined by their unique uses in pro-life and pro-choice press releases and other statements. By employing a methodological procedure that mathematically clusters terms based on their co-occurrence in news stories, this study offers a unique method for operationalizing rhetorical structures, which may be particularly useful in the development of framing as a mediated communication theory.

This analysis of the extent to which interest group frames appeared in major newspaper coverage of the late-term abortion controversy consisted of two steps. The first step involved constructing unique frames for each side of the debate, based on rhetorical terms appearing in (a) press releases disseminated by the two major interest groups involved in abortion-rights issues and (b) in the direct quotes attributed to spokespersons from the pro-choice and pro-life caucuses. The terms used to comprise frames in this study are often somewhat synonymous, but they also constitute rhetorical structures due to their use in the public vocabulary as pro-life or pro-choice ideographs. Second, the text of the newspaper articles was coded for both frequently occurring terms and the interest groups' frames, then a computer-assisted concept-mapping program was used to determine the relationship between the frames and other concepts in the news coverage. These steps are derived from Riechert's frame-mapping method.³⁹ This method allows the frames to emerge from the data, rather than the researcher imposing a priori frames on the news coverage as in traditional content analysis.

Because the news release provides a primary means for interest groups to elucidate their issue stances, all available news releases were obtained on late-term and/or partial-birth abortion that were disseminated from 1 June 1995 to 31 December 1996 by the two major abortion-rights interest groups. These news releases, along with policy statements, were obtained from the organizations' websites. On the pro-life side, the National Right to Life Committee produced five news releases in 1996 (1995 releases were not

Method

TABLE 1
*Terms Comprising the Pro-Choice and Pro-Life Frames,
 with Their Standardized Mean Occurrences in News Stories*

Pro-Choice Releases

Alleys, anti-choice, choice, choose, freedom, intrude, intrusion, Planned Parenthood, PPFA, pro-choice, radical right, reproductive, rights, Roe, women, women's	.24*
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Pro-Life Releases

Baby, babies, baby's, cruelty, defenseless, elective, feet, kill, killed, killing, mother, mothers, mother's, pain, painful, partial-birth, pro-abortion	.32
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Pro-Choice Quotes

Personal, privacy, private	.01**
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Pro-Life Quotes

Brutal, infanticide, murder, unborn	.16
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* Indicates release means are significantly different at $p < .05$.

** Indicates quote means are significantly different at $p < .001$.

displayed on the NRLC website, but there is no reason to believe the rhetoric would differ from the 1996 releases). The National Right to Life Committee is the largest pro-life organization in the United States, with 3,000 affiliates.⁴⁰ The National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League released fourteen statements and news releases during the period. NARAL, formed in 1969, is the nation's leading pro-choice interest group, with about 500,000 members across the country.⁴¹

The text of the two groups' news releases was submitted separately to a computer-assisted content analysis program called VBPro, which placed all words appearing in the news releases in order of descending frequency.⁴² Terms representative of each group's stance and unique to their rhetoric were then selected to comprise the rhetorical structures of the group's frame. Uniqueness of the terms was important in defining the groups' stance. For example, "abortion" is the most frequently occurring term in both groups' quotes, so it would not be able to differentiate their frames. It should be noted that relatively few terms fit these criteria. Many terms occurred frequently in both groups' releases and thus could not be identified as uniquely pro-life or pro-choice. However, a clear differentiation was apparent between the groups' discussion of the females who might have abortions: Pro-choice discourse referred to them as "women," while the pro-life releases preferred the term "mothers." Thus, these terms were included in the respective frames. Other terms representative of the pro-choice stance reflected its emphasis on *rights*, *choice*, and *freedom* from government intrusion. For the pro-life frame, terms such as *baby*, *kill*, and *defenseless* illustrated the group's

focus on the fetus. The complete frames for both pro-choice and pro-life interest groups are displayed in Table 1.

To examine the rhetoric employed in one area of public discourse during the late-term abortion debate, all news stories published in six major newspapers from 1 June 1995 to 31 December 1996 that included the terms "late-term abortion" or "partial-birth abortion" were obtained from a computer database. Editorials and opinion columns were not included. This time period begins with the Congressional debate over the proposed bill that would ban late-term abortions, and includes President Clinton's veto of the bill and Congress's failure to override his veto. This issue was particularly salient during the 1996 presidential campaign, as Republican candidate Bob Dole supported the ban. Democrats in the House of Representatives accused the GOP of using the Partial-Birth Abortion Bill to harm President Clinton's chances of re-election. Thus, the issue was periodically newsworthy for a period of about nineteen months. The newspapers used in this analysis (*USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Chicago Sun-Times*) were selected on the basis of size and availability; all were included in the top ten of the Audit Bureau of Circulation's list of newspapers with the highest circulations for 1995 and 1996. This search strategy resulted in 100 news stories.

The direct quotations for each group were isolated and then coded as either pro-choice, pro-life, or neither based on their source's affiliation. The direct quotes for the pro-choice and pro-life groups were analyzed separately in the computerized content analysis program in the same way that the news releases were. For both groups, the terms were selected that were most indicative of the rhetoric employed by each group, based on a reading of the news stories and on familiarity with standard pro-choice and pro-life rhetoric as illustrated in the news releases. Very few unique terms appeared in the direct quotes that had not already been included in the frames derived from the news releases. The Pro-Choice Quotes frame comprises the terms *personal*, *privacy*, and *private*. Terms forming the Pro-Life Quotes frame are *brutal*, *infanticide*, *murder*, and *unborn*. These frames are shown in Table 1, along with their frequency of occurrence in the news stories.

The coded news stories, including direct quotations, were formatted for analysis in VBPro, a computer-assisted content analysis program that calculates frequency of all terms in the stories. Of the most frequently occurring terms, 125 were selected that were unambiguous and representative of the content of the news stories, excluding the terms that comprise the Pro-Choice and Pro-Life frames. Synonyms were grouped and coded as one term, such as *doctor*, *doctors*, *physician*, *physicians*.

These substantive terms were then submitted to the VBMap procedure, which generated a matrix of eigenvector or coordinate values derived mathematically from the cosine coefficient similarity measure. The unstandardized eigenvectors for each of the terms are based on their co-occurrence within stories. These eigenvectors were cluster-analyzed in SPSS to group the terms in order to determine frames, using hierarchical clustering with the cosine method. Based on the resulting dendrogram and subsequent cluster-analysis groupings, the researchers then select the cluster solution that best represents the themes that appear to occur in the data, a reflexive process that requires a thorough reading of the articles studied. Thus, the cluster analysis is founded primarily upon content validity, which could be a limitation in the analysis, depending upon the researcher's familiarity with the material under study or the ambiguity of terms involved. It also

TABLE 2

Frames Appearing in the News Stories, with Standardized Mean Occurrences

Late-term Abortion

Abort, aborted, abortion, abortions, abortion rights, debate, fertility, graphic, .94
grisly, gruesome, (Douglas) Johnson, late-term, legal, legalized, lives, photographs,
photos, pictures, right to life, vivid

Democrats & Republicans

Democrat, Democratic, Democrats, GOP, House, Republican, Republicans, vote, .85
voted, votes, voting

Presidential Veto

Ban, banned, banning, bans, Clinton, Clinton's, Congress, congressional, election, .69
elections, outlaw, outlawed, outlawing, override, overturn, political, politically,
politics, poll, polls, president, president's, presidential, pro-life, public, veto, vetoed,
vetoing

Senate Hearings

Alternatives, birth, canal, controversial, exception, exceptions, fines, health, healthy, .54
hearing, hearings, inhumane, life, living, parents, penalties, prison, protect, protection,
rare, Senate, Senate's, senator, senators, woman, woman's

Decision

Decision, decisions, human .37

Doctors

Collapse, collapsed, crime, criminal, criminalize, dilation, dilatation, D&E, doctor, .35
doctors, evacuation, extracted, extracting, extraction, extracts, felony, legislation,
medical, medically, physician, physicians, prosecution, safe, safer, safest, skull,
trimester, uterus, womb

Moral

Moral, religious .30

Conservatives

Campaign, Christian, conservative, conservatives, (Bob) Dole, Dole's, emotional, .28
emotionally, language, marriage, marriages, (Ralph) Reed, rhetoric, voters

Fetus

Abnormalities, abortionist, abortionists, brain, brains, complications, dead, death, .25
defects, deformed, die, disorder, family, families, fetus, fetal, fetuses, fetus's, life-
threatening, obstetricians, obstetrics, pregnancies, pregnancy, pregnant, scissors,
stories, suction, suctioned, suctioning, surgical, surgically, testimony, tragedy, tragic

Catholics

Archbishop, archdiocese, barbaric, (Card. Joseph) Bernardin, bishop, bishops, born, .23
cardinal, cardinal's, cardinals, Catholic, Catholics, church, pray, prayed, prayer, risk,
risks, Vatican

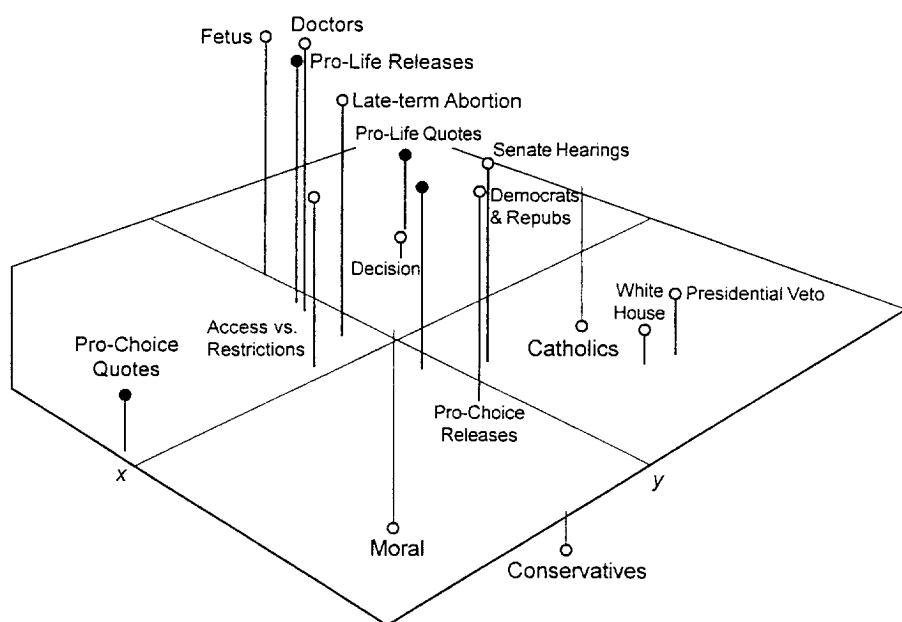
White House

Danger, dangerous, disturbing, God, White House, wrenching .23

Access vs. Restrictions

Access, antiabortion, availability, children, conscience, incest, (Kate) Michelman, .22
NARAL, rape, restrict, restrictions, Supreme Court, Supreme Court's, violence

FIGURE 1
Concept Map of Pro-Choice and Pro-Life Frames in News Coverage



- Indicates frames derived from interest group news releases and direct quotes in news stories.
- Indicates frames derived from news stories.

eliminates hypothesis testing as an option. Terms are then grouped into their clusters in the search list, and the VBPro coding and mapping procedures are repeated for the clustered terms. For this study, twelve themes emerged, as shown in Table 2.

The resulting matrix of values can be used to plot the clusters in three-dimensional space to illustrate the relationships among frames, based on relative proximity of term co-occurrence, as shown in Figure 1. To compare the frequency of occurrence of themes, the frames were standardized by dividing the summed frequencies of each by the number of terms in it. The standardized mean occurrences of each theme are also shown in Table 2. These indicate the prominence of the various themes in newspaper coverage.

The treatment of pro-choice and pro-life rhetoric in news coverage of late-term abortion was analyzed by examining key terms for both frequency and co-occurrence. To answer the first research question, regarding the rhetorical positions of the two interest groups and their coverage in the news

Results and Discussion

stories, co-occurrence of the frames was analyzed. Discussion will first focus on the co-occurrence of terms within stories, as illustrated in the concept map in Figure 1. The map shows the relationship among frames appearing in the news coverage. The axes in the center of the map, which can be read as standard x and y axes, serve to facilitate interpretation because (for example) concepts appearing to the right of the axis y have positively valenced second eigenvectors, indicating that they are somewhat related in terms of co-occurrence. It should be noted that the words "positive" and "negative" merely help to describe the relationships among clusters in the three-dimensional space—they should not be interpreted as conferring value on the clusters. The clusters look something like pins, and they should be envisioned as such to convey the three-dimensional nature of their interpretation. Black pins indicate the frames developed from news releases and direct quotes.

In examining Figure 1, it is apparent that the three dimensions indicated in the concept map each represent a continuum of topics of concern in the news stories. The x axis ranges from the least restrictive positions on the lower left side of the map to more restrictions on the upper right side. The y axis appears to represent a continuum from individual decisions on the upper left side to political decisions on the lower right, and the vertical dimension ranges from physical to philosophical (from top to bottom). In this case, the concept map indicates a delineation between Pro-Choice and Pro-Life news release frames on the dimension indicated by the y axis, with associated themes clustering near each. The frames derived from the groups' direct quotes are further removed from each other on the dimension indicated by the x axis (note that Pro-Life Quotes is above the y axis, and Pro-Choice Quotes is below it). Finally, the closer the clusters on the concept map, the more closely associated those frames were in the news stories.

The tightest set of clusters appears around the Pro-Life Releases frame, in the upper left corner of the concept map. The frames Fetus, Late-term Abortion, and Doctors are closely related to the Pro-Life frame in all three dimensions. Fetus includes terms used to describe the late-term abortion procedure in detail—*brain, suction, scissors, fetus*—as well as reasons for the procedure, such as *defects, complications, dead, pregnancy, and life-threatening*. These descriptors appeared somewhat frequently in the news stories; as in the following quote from a *New York Times* story, medical terms are often mixed together: "The doctor then inserts scissors into the fetus's skull to make an opening for a suction catheter so that the brain can be removed and the skull can collapse. The fetus is then removed."⁴³ One reason Fetus clustered near Pro-Life Releases may be its inclusion of the terms *abortionist, tragedy, and family*, which are related to the testimony pro-life sources gave in congressional hearings on the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Bill. The Late-term Abortion frame similarly discussed the procedure, but in a more emotional way, including the terms *gruesome, grisly, and vivid*. It incorporated all terms denoting abortion, as well as *abortion rights* and *right to life*. Douglas Johnson, a leader of the National Right to Life Committee, also clustered in this frame, which explains its proximity to Pro-Life Releases.

Finally, the Doctors frame comprised another set of terms describing the late-term procedure, this time with medical terminology such as *dilation, extraction, medical, and safe*. This frame focused on the bill itself and the penalties doctors would incur should it pass, with terms such as *felony, prosecution, and criminalize*. Again, it was located near Pro-Life Releases in the map of the discourse. This proximity can be explained by journalists'

explanation of the varying terminology used regarding the issue. The conflict evident over the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Bill is exemplified by this *Los Angeles Times* news story: "Abortion doctors call it a 'dilation and extraction,' or 'D & E.' House Republicans call it 'a partial-birth abortion.' Either way, this rarely used method of ending a pregnancy has become the latest battle in the long war over abortion policy in the United States."⁴⁴

Although the cluster Access vs. Restrictions contains NARAL and its president, Kate Michelman, as well as much of the pro-choice rhetoric (*Supreme Court, restrictions, availability*), it is fairly close to the Pro-Life Releases frame. This likely occurred because some of the terms from the Late-term Abortion cluster tended to co-occur with Access terms, such as *abortion rights* and *legal*. Also, the Access vs. Restrictions cluster is the closest to Pro-Choice Quotes, which may have pulled it away from the clusters surrounding the Pro-Life frame. It is interesting to note that Pro-Choice Quotes frame is marginal to the discourse surrounding this issue, given its prominence in pro-choice rhetoric (as discussed above); this suggests that the notion of privacy was not salient because it was a losing argument against the more emotionally loaded terminology of the pro-life group regarding late-term abortion.

Pro-Life Quotes, on the other hand, fell about halfway between the Pro-Life Releases and the Catholics cluster on the concept map. It should be noted here that, with the exception of Pro-Choice Quotes, all of the clusters that had negative vertical dimensions were related to the pro-life constituency, if not the National Right to Life Committee itself. This study's operationalization of the Pro-Life Quotes frame (as well as the Pro-Choice Quotes) suggested that constituents other than the primary interest group may have influenced this frame, which removed it from close proximity to the NRLC's releases. The Catholics cluster includes terms related to the Catholic church, such as *prayer, Vatican, and archdiocese*. Catholics strongly condemned President Clinton's veto of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Bill, as illustrated in this quote from a *Washington Post* story: "The cardinals and bishops who lead the American Catholic church flocked to the Capitol yesterday in an unprecedented campaign to bring pressure on Congress to ban a controversial abortion procedure that the church likens to 'infanticide.'"⁴⁵ Catholics, however, were only marginally related to the central discourse on late-term abortion, as illustrated on the concept map.

The Decision cluster was very near Pro-Life Quotes, perhaps because the term *human* was so closely associated with decision. Another related cluster was the grouping of the terms *moral* and *religious*, which also fell near the edge of the discourse, though its negative vertical dimension suggests it relates to pro-life rhetoric. The notions of religion, morality, and decision reflected the conflict between certain religious groups and the Catholic church; not all religions supported the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Bill. For example, one religious group wrote an open letter in response to the Catholic condemnation: "'We are convinced,' the letter says, 'that each woman who is faced with such difficult moral decisions must be free to decide how to respond, in consultation with her doctor, her family, and God.'"⁴⁶ These marginal clusters reflect the media's concentration on conflict among religious groups, thus explaining their separation from each other and from either the pro-choice or pro-life frames.

The Pro-Choice Releases frame was associated with several political themes. Closest to Pro-Choice Releases was Democrats & Republicans, which described the debate in the House of Representatives between the two

parties. It was formed of the parties' names and variations on the word vote. Senate Hearings was, not surprisingly, located in the same area. These two clusters were separate because the Senate was less supportive of the bill than the House, and Senate Hearings reflects its leaning toward the pro-choice side. This theme may have been associated with Pro-Choice Releases because it contained words such as *woman* (women appeared in the pro-choice frame), *rare*, *health*, and *protect*, which seem to refer to some of the arguments against the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Bill. Representative of this frame is this quote from a story: "Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) told reporters he intended to try to work out a 'consensus position' to ban the procedure for elective abortions but allow it under narrowly defined conditions to protect a woman's health."⁴⁷ Senate Hearings also described some of the debate with terms such as *finis*, *exceptions*, *prison*, and *birth canal*. The pro-choice frame likely was related to the political themes because NARAL's press releases and policy statements focused on the ramifications of the bill—especially the possibility of imprisoning physicians who perform late-term abortions—rather than on the emotional aspects of the controversy, as the pro-life groups appeared to do.

Three frames emerged from the newspaper coverage that were distant from both pro-choice and pro-life rhetoric. These centered around another aspect of the political nature of the late-term abortion controversy, that of the 1996 presidential election. Presidential Veto discussed the effect of Clinton's veto of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Bill on the polls and the election, including the terms *politics* and *political*. For example, a typical article on the veto explained: "But the vote's political significance is much larger, as it allows Republicans to portray Clinton as an extremist on the question of the abortion procedure, which polls show is opposed by a large majority of Americans."⁴⁸ The White House theme described the president's reasoning and feelings on the veto. Clinton sought to counter the opposition to the veto by using emotional testimony to support his reasoning: "In the Roosevelt Room, Mr. Clinton was accompanied by families, including self-described abortion opponents and Republicans, who told wrenching stories of dangerous pregnancies."⁴⁹ Thus, these frames reflect presidential politics' co-optation of the abortion issue, which did not relate closely to either pro-choice or pro-life groups in order to reduce alienation of either side.

On the other side of the presidential race, the frame Conservatives reflected the Republican stance on the partial-birth bill. It included Bob Dole (the Republican candidate), Ralph Reed (former head of the Christian Coalition), and the words *emotional*, *Christian*, and *rhetoric*, as well as terms related to the election itself—*campaign*, *voters*. News stories containing elements of this frame often quoted Dole or Reed on the benefits of the presidential veto for the Republicans: "'It's a winning issue' for Bob Dole, insisted Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed, who renewed calls for the Republican nominee to confront Clinton over his April veto of the bill banning the procedure."⁵⁰ The finding that Conservatives contained the words *emotional* and *emotionally* supports the notion that pro-life interest groups attempted to sway public opinion on late-term abortion through emotionally charged rhetoric.

The second research question asked which interest group dominated the coverage of the late-term abortion debate. To determine which frames occurred most often, each was standardized by dividing the total occurrence of all terms in the summed frame by the number of terms in it. The mean frequency that the frames appeared in the news stories is shown in tables 1

and 2. A paired samples t-test indicated that, for the frames derived from interest group press releases, Pro-Life Release terms ($M = .32$) were significantly more likely to occur in news stories than Pro-Choice Release terms ($M = .24$), $t = 2.59$; $p < .05$. For the frames developed from direct quotes in news stories, Pro-Life Quotes ($M = .16$) were significantly more likely to occur than Pro-Choice Quote terms ($M = .01$), $t = 3.85$; $p < .001$. In fact, terms from Pro-Life Releases and Quotes appeared almost twice as frequently overall as those from the pro-choice frames, despite the greater number of press releases available from the pro-choice side (though perhaps not all press releases were posted on the organizations' websites). This finding indicates that the emotional rhetoric employed by pro-life groups may have been more appealing to journalists because it fit in with journalists' attitudes toward late-term abortion, which most people found grisly, as well as the traditional newsworthiness value of conflict. The usual rhetoric of the pro-choice side, on the other hand, may not have been effective in the late-term abortion controversy due to the nature of the procedure. Further, the descriptions of the process the pro-life groups promulgated are compatible with the conflict element of newsworthiness.

Reinforcing this notion is the finding that the Late-term Abortion frame, which contained the NRLC director's name and the term right to life, was the most frequently occurring frame in the news stories ($M = .94$). The least frequent frame was Access & Restrictions ($M = .22$), which included NARAL and its president's name. Again, the pro-life interest group appears to have had greater success in influencing news frames, in part because it was able to frame the discourse surrounding the late-term abortion debate. The catchphrase "partial-birth" seems to have been an important component in their ability to do so.

The other most frequent frames were, not surprisingly, those associated with political coverage of the controversy. After all, the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Bill served as the impetus for this discussion. Democrats & Republicans was often mentioned ($M = .85$), along with the Presidential Veto ($M = .69$) and Senate Hearings ($M = .54$). By focusing on the politics involved and analyzing the impact of the bill on political aspirations, newspapers framed late-term abortion in terms of controversy. It is likely that the rhetoric pro-choice and pro-life interest groups used in this debate heightened that controversy, especially when journalists could pit polarized sources and terminology against each other. However, the more emotionally appealing rhetoric of pro-life groups seemed to increase their likelihood of coverage—and thus, perhaps, of swaying public opinion to their point of view.

As shown in Table 2, the remaining frames occurred at about the same frequency.

Conclusions

This study's findings suggest that abortion rhetoric has a strong influence on the ways in which journalists frame abortion issues. In the case of late-term abortion, the rhetorical positions of the pro-life and pro-choice interest groups clearly delineated their frames in newspaper coverage. Pro-life groups were more likely to influence newspaper frames, however, with more frequent incorporation of their rhetoric in the news stories and a closer association of their rhetoric with the late-term abortion issue itself. Their success in shaping coverage of this abortion issue may mean that they were more likely to garner public opinion than the pro-choice interest groups were, despite pro-choice's eventual victory in the late-term battle with

President Clinton's veto. Indeed, polls conducted during the debate indicated that among the public that was aware of the late-term abortion procedure, support for it was low compared to other abortion-rights issues. It appears that the emotional value of the pro-life rhetoric neutralized the traditional pro-choice rhetoric in this case and served to give pro-life groups the advantage in framing the news, as the pro-choice group seemed to have produced more news releases. One limitation to this study, however, is that interpersonal lobbying in the legislature cannot be incorporated and its effect measured in shaping public opinion or policy.

Further, the key terms that each interest group has employed over the years served as well to identify other policy actors involved in this issue, such as politicians and religious leaders. This supports the contention that rhetoric is insinuated into the public discourse. Because abortion-rights rhetoric is engrained in the public's understanding of the issue, journalists are able to incorporate it into the text of their news stories to identify policy actors and to frame various aspects of controversy. The result—at least in the case of the political debate over a potential ban on late-term abortion—tends to focus on conflict, with the competing rhetorical positions of the most highly involved interest groups vying for media coverage. Despite the fact that one of the major limitations of this study was the fact that pro-choice and pro-life groups were not wholly in disagreement about the late-term abortion procedure, conflict over political aspects of the issue was still readily apparent in and central to news reports about it.

This study suggests the power of rhetoric in shaping news media frames. It adds to the body of framing knowledge by illustrating how the sources selected and their own words can influence the terminology that appears in news text. Further research should examine the impact of rhetorical positions as evidenced in other information subsidies provided to the news media by interest groups, in addition to gleaning rhetorical terms from press releases; the newsletters interest groups publish, which serve to create a shared purpose among their constituents, would be an excellent source of rhetorical frames. Other means of examining the framing value of direct quotes might be explored, as the quotes incorporated into news stories reflect journalists' subjectivity in creating an interesting account. More studies on a broader variety of issues in which the rhetorical positions of interest groups and other policy actors are not as well known to the public would also be beneficial in expanding this body of knowledge. However, this study's use of concept mapping and clustering key terms seems to offer a useful method for deriving and analyzing rhetorical structures in news media framing.

NOTES

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