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Framing the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: One Story, Many Crosscultural Tales

Federica Fornaciari

National University, ffornaciari@nu.edu

Laine Goldman

National University, lgoldman@nu.edu

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Framing the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: One Story, Many Crosscultural Tales

Overview

This student-centered learning plan offers macro and micro perspectives on media frames, media literacy, and gender bias in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. The following exploratory and interdisciplinary weeklong assignments can be exponentially structured or used stand-alone for media studies and communication courses (e.g., Media Literacy, Representation in Media, or Intercultural Communication). In “Assignment 1: One Story, Many Crosscultural Tales—A Collaborative Project,” students explore, analyze and compare how news outlets from different countries portray the U.S. election. In “Assignment 2: Does the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Need More Gender Fluidity?” the lens is focused on the “real life” role of gender bias in the media representation of female candidates during the 2016 election. In “Class Activity: The First Gentleman,” students turn their attention to the popular television series *House of Cards* to explore how fictionalized gender roles are portrayed in the political sphere (e.g., imagining the First Gentleman). The assignments, guided by the Universal Design for Learning approach, are designed to meet the needs of a variety of learners.

Rationale

Given that the United States is a major world economic superpower, it may not seem surprising that its Presidential election is in the global spotlight. But is the entire world enjoying our front-page candidate bashing and bravado with the likes of Hillary, Bernie, and Donald? With the sensational headlines at election time clouding the media, it is important for students to critically explore a framework that moves beyond repetitive sound bites into a broader context of how media from different countries frame our issues and election. And how they view us. In this course, students explore media content applying principles learned from frame theory (Goffman, 1974). They also address the role of cultural values (Hofstede, 2001) in influencing media frames.

Frame Theory

Using Goffman’s (1974) approach to framing, we can describe frames as “schemata of interpretation” that allow us “to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms” (Goffman, 1974, p.21). By selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of issues and events, media frames guide our understanding of reality. Frame theory helps us see that journalists often rely upon pre-existing frames of reference to help audiences understand new issues from familiar perspectives.

Cultural Values

Hofstede (2001) describes cultures and cultural values based upon six dimensions that include the following: Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty/Avoidance, Long Term Orientation/Short Term Normative Orientation, and Indulgence/Restraint. After learning how different countries “score” in each dimension, students

have the opportunity to explore whether and how specific cultural values emerge in media narratives.

Recommended Brief Readings for Instructor on Frame Theory

Brewer, Paul R. (2002). Framing, value words, and citizens' explanations of their issue opinions. *Political Communication*, 19:303–16.

Chong, D & Druckman, J. N. (2010). Identifying frames in political news, in Erik P. Bucy and R. Lance Holbert, (eds.), *Sourcebook for political communication research: Methods, measures, and analytical techniques* London: Routledge.

Druckman, J. (2001). The implications of framing effects for citizen competence. *Political Behavior*, 23: 225-56.

Entman, R. M. (1991). Framing U.S. coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran Air incidents. *Journal of Communication*, 41: 6-27.

Gitlin, T. (2003). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. Berkeley: University of California.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay in the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Recommended Brief Readings for Instructor on Cultural Values

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*. Second Edition, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Dines, G. & McMahon H. (2015). *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, 4th Ed. Sage Publications, Inc.

Student Learning Outcomes

Throughout the lesson and assignments, students will learn to:

- Recognize the role that media plays in defining and distorting reality
- Analyze the ways in which the news media are influenced by cultural values, and how social construction influences objectivity
- Articulate an awareness of how different genders are represented in media
- Understand the political importance of media and their role in the election process

Timeline

Each item in the learning plan is intended for one week of class work.

Detailed Learning Plan and Assignment Instructions

Assignment 1: One Story, Many Crosscultural Tales—A Collaborative Project

In this assignment, students will work collaboratively on a group presentation examining a current U.S. hot-button election newspaper story (e.g., Trump’s reaction to the Orlando shootings or Clinton being chastised for wearing an Armani suit while discussing income inequality). This assignment is two-fold. First, each group selects a newsworthy story. Then students compare coverage of the story in news outlets from different regions, chosen from the following: **Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Africa, Asia, Oceania, Middle East, North American, and South American**. From *Al Jazeera* to *Shanghai Times*, there is a wealth of material from which to compare and contrast focus, bias, commentary, and political emphasis.

How Should I Structure My Analysis?

From the regions highlighted in bold above, students can divide up areas of interest. Each student in a group can pick two geographic areas (making sure that areas are not repeated within a group). Students need to showcase and provide one headline story from two different newspapers in each region (e.g., *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*) and respond to the following three prompts to guide their group presentation:

1. What are some differences and some similarities among the sources selected in portraying the story?
 - a. Do all stories provide the same information/level of detail?
 - b. How are the actors portrayed?
 - i. Do your sources use last names or first names to talk about the candidates?
 - ii. What adjectives/labels do they use to describe them?
 - iii. Are there relevant differences?
 - iv. What adjectives are used to describe men? What adjectives are used to describe women? Is there any gender bias?
2. Compare the use/absence of pictures in different stories.
 - a. Are there pictures? If so, what do they portray?
 - b. Do they represent specific values? (For instance a picture of Obama with Michelle and their daughters would emphasize the value of “family.”)
 - c. Why do you think these pictures were chose /what do they add to the story?
3. Reflecting upon your answers to questions 1 and 2, and thinking about Hofstede’s (2001) six dimensions of culture, can you identify any values behind how the stories are described in different countries? Analyze the most prominent dimension that influenced/biased your story. The dimension should be chosen from the following: Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation/Short Term Normative Orientation, and Indulgence/Restraint.

How Can I Find Appropriate News Outlets?

The Newseum site (<http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages>) offers easy access to international newspapers - but students can find others that are suitable. Students are encouraged to explore a variety of countries—the Newseum site will help them to locate publications that are available in English (such as *The Japan Times*, *The Korea Times*, *The Guardian*, *National Post* etc.). Students may have trouble finding the story across all sources. This is an exploration. They can mention going through multiple outlets until finding sources in their region.

How Should We Present Our Work?

- Each group consists of 3 to 5 people.
- Delivery time is 5 to 7 minutes per person (20 to 30 minutes per group).
- Presentations, whether onsite/online, can be done in a variety of modes. Students can collectively share an integrated Prezi or PowerPoint. Alternatively, students can be creative and choose tools they are more comfortable with (such as video, audio, posters, whiteboard, etc.). Creative delivery and engagement are the goal.
- Besides analyzing and comparing the stories, each presentation should showcase the following: headline of the story selected, names of the news outlet, country of publication for each news outlets, and date of publication.
- Each student should present differences and similarities found amongst the sources. The first student is also responsible for introducing the group and the last student is responsible for concluding the presentation with a summary developed by all cohorts.

How is our presentation graded?

Grading is based on two components:

- Collective (50%): content and quality of the presentation
- Individual (50%): delivery, engagement with audience, and ability to explain findings

Assignment 2: Does the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Need More Gender Fluidity?

In this assignment, students will work individually to explore and analyze the role of gender bias in how North American media represent the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. First, students are asked to read the following two articles to further understand the role of bias in how we perceive women's leadership:

Chemaly, S. (2016, April 4th). Take This Test to See How Biased You Are Against Having a Woman as President. *The Huffington Post*.

Available online at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/take-this-test-to-see-how-biased-you-are-against-having-a-woman-as-president_b_9586136.html

Crockett, E. (2016, March 29th). Does Hillary Clinton's Gender Hurt Her Among Male Voters? Political Scientists Weigh In. *Vox, Policy & Politics*.

Available online at: <http://www.vox.com/2016/3/29/11325962/hillary-male-voters-trump-gender>

Second, to provide context, students read an article discussing Gloria Steinem's new show, *Woman*, which explores the links between global instability and violence against women:

Marcotte, A. (2016, June 5th). Gloria Steinem's new show links global instability to violence against women: "For the first time there are fewer females on earth than males" Salon.

Available online at:

http://www.salon.com/2016/06/05/gloria_steinems_new_show_links_global_instability_to_violence_against_women_for_the_first_time_there_are_fewer_females_on_earth_than_males/

Third, students select a new story where there is some in-depth discussion/description of one or more of the candidates in the U.S. Presidential election. The story should present some examples of gender representation or gender bias (e.g., discussion of physical appearance, personality traits, etc.). The story should be one that was published in a major North American news outlet.

Finally, students write a 400-500 words blog post or a private journal entry to explore and analyze the role of gender bias in media representation of different candidates in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election in response to the article. (See guidelines below for details.)

How Should I Structure My Analysis?

For the analysis, students should address the following questions:

1. How does your article describe the physical appearance of the female and male candidates? Are the descriptions of both candidates equally weighted?
2. Does your article provide commentary and analysis about the candidate's personality traits (such as character, behavior, temperament, and emotions)? Does it spend the same amount of time talking about female and male candidates' personality traits? Are these traits presented as positive or negative?
3. Does your article emphasize feminine or masculine characteristics for either candidate?
4. Reflecting on your answers to the above questions, and informed by the three articles assigned, do you see any gender bias in your article?

What are the requirements for my blog post/private journal entry?

At the beginning of their blog post/journal entry, students provide title, news outlet, date of publication, and URL for the article selected for analysis.

Each blog post should be about 400 to 500 words and reflect upon the questions listed above. The blog post should be well written. It should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

Even though this is not a formal paper, students should polish their writing and keep it journalistic. Students are encouraged to use the first person in their blog post/journal entry, but they should avoid being too conversational. There is no need for citations (other than the URL for the article analyzed).

How is my blog post/private journal entry graded?

The grade is based on three components:

- The analysis is well structured within the 400- to 500-word framework (35%)
- Students incorporate information learned from the three articles provided (35%)
- Overall quality of writing (30%)

Class Activity: The First Gentleman (ungraded)

Students watch—in class or offsite—an episode of *House of Cards Season 2*, showcasing Claire Underwood after she becomes First Lady of the United States (available through Amazon Prime or Netflix). Divided into groups of 3 to 4, students imagine writing an episode for the new season of *House of Cards*, when Claire is elected President of the United States. Students are asked to envision what kind of duties Claire would expect from the First Gentleman. Students are encouraged to have fun with this assignment. After working in groups for 20 to 30 minutes, groups present their ideas to the class within a timeframe of 5 to 7 minutes. For reference, prior to class time, students can be assigned the following article:

Friedersdorf, C. (2014, February 20th). Feminism, Depravity, and Power in House of Card. The Atlantic. Available online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/feminism-depravity-and-power-in-em-house-of-cards-em/283960/>

After the presentations, in class discussion, students reflect upon the role of gender bias and media representation in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. The entire class, both students and teacher, are encouraged to share what they have learned throughout the process.

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Chemaly, S. (2016, April 4th). Take This Test to See How Biased You Are Against Having a Woman as President. *The Huffington Post*.

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Crockett, E. (2016, March 29th). Does Hillary Clinton's Gender Hurt Her Among Male Voters? Political Scientists Weigh In. *Vox, Policy & Politics*.

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Biographies

Federica Fornaciari, Ph.D.
National University
ffornaciari@nu.edu

Dr. Federica Fornaciari is an Assistant Professor and MA Strategic Communications Lead Faculty in the Department of Arts and Humanities at National University in La Jolla, California. She received a Master's of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication from Marshall University and a doctorate in Communication from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her dissertation develops longitudinal discourse and content analyses of North American mainstream media framing of privacy in the last century. Federica received an IGERT fellowship from the National Science Foundation. She also worked as visiting scholar at the University of Copenhagen and at the ITU Copenhagen (Denmark).

Federica teaches a variety of classes including *Intercultural Communication*, *Interpersonal Communication*, *Communication Theory*, *Interactive Storytelling*, *Communication Technologies*, and *Social Media Studies*. Combining creative work and scholarship in media studies, social media, rhetoric, privacy, security, and interpersonal communication, she provides students with the theoretical and practical toolkits necessary to unpack the complexity of a multifaceted communication environment.

Laine Goldman, Ph. D.
National University
lgoldman@nu.edu

Dr. Laine Goldman is an Associate Professor and GE Communication Lead Faculty in the Department of Arts and Humanities at National University in La Jolla, California. She received a dual Master's Degree in Film and Telecommunications from Ohio University, and a doctorate from Tilburg University, Netherlands. She teaches eclectic courses including *Media Literacy*, *Interpersonal Communication*, *Intercultural Communication*, *Democracy in the Information Age*, and *Communication in the Global Age*.

Laine is an award-winning writer, researcher, media practitioner, educator, and inquisitive social scientist developing targeted multicultural, strategic communication for business and education. She approaches organizational transformation appreciatively, encouraging high-level collaboration and improvisation. Her voice echoes the 21st-century shift toward intergenerational creative work teams, innovative entrepreneurship, and freelance practices. Laine's doctoral dissertation explores new media and entrepreneurial work through conversations with eleven multimedia freelancers (Wake Forest Digital Publishing, 2014). Her research interests include media, the workforce, organizational change, creativity, multimedia storytelling, Appreciative Inquiry, and Social Construction.