

PLATFORM

Journal of Media
and Communication



PLATFORM

JOURNAL OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Volume 10.2 ANZCA Special Issue

ISSN: 1836-5132 online

Platform: Journal of Media and Communication Volume 10.2 has been edited by graduate students at The University of Melbourne. It is funded and published by the School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne.

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ANZCA Editorial

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We are delighted to welcome you to this special issue of *Platform: Journal of Media and Communication* in collaboration with the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (AANZCA). The special edition showcases a selection of outstanding work by graduate students and early-career researchers presented at the 2024 AANZCA conference and hosted by RMIT University.

This special issue takes its point of departure from the AANZCA 2024 conference on “PAUSE”. Researchers across media, communication, and journalism studies were invited to consider the act of pausing during a period of accelerating global crisis. The conference call identified a world under simultaneous pressure from climate change, eroding public trust, geopolitical instability, far-right resurgences, and the rapid proliferation of generative AI and asked, in that context, whether pausing might itself constitute a form of meaningful action.

Our special issue includes three papers that explore these issues. The papers span quite different fields feminist print culture and archival theory, digital media and gender politics, and political communication and framing theory—yet each slows down to examine how power is embedded and contested within media systems, usages, and histories.

The issue starts with an examination of how a Tradwife influencer, and her followers respond to feminist criticism on TikTok and Instagram. In the article “Negotiating criticism and contradictions: Tradwife discourse as recruitment strategy”, Claudia Young finds that Tradwife influencers and their followers deploy three rhetorical strategies invoking choice feminism, neoliberal individualism, and victimhood narratives to make a reactionary, gender-essentialist ideology appear palatable and broaden its appeal.

Continuing the topic of gender politics, Tessa Maxwell uses archival analysis of the New Zealand feminist magazine *Broadsheet* to trace its response to the restrictive 1977 abortion law. In “‘STOP PRESS—Not abortion again’: Disrupting linear time through archival analysis of *Broadsheet* magazine, Tessa argues that the contrast between the state's use of parliamentary urgency and the Collective's chronic resource scarcity reveals how time itself operates as a mechanism of power and that the archive disrupts linear narratives of feminist progress, showing reproductive rights as always contingent and never secure.

The final article by Boming Li and Wenjing Fei is titled “Framing and Political Communication: A Literature Review of Theoretical Foundations and International Conflict Reporting”. The article offers a review of framing theory and its application to international conflict reporting, showing how media frames in war coverage, humanitarian crises, and economic disputes consistently reflect and reinforce existing power structures by naturalising some definitions of events and some assignments of blame while rendering alternatives invisible.

As editors for this special issue, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, Australia. We thank the Staff Editorial Advisory Committee for their guidance. A special thanks to all contributors

for their insightful engagement with the theme of this issue, and to our peer reviewers, whose generous and thoughtful feedback greatly strengthened the final publication.

Editorial Team

Brittany Craig is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne and the University of Potsdam. Focusing on the work of Lisa Robertson, Annette Messenger, and Rei Kawakubo, her thesis examines how experimental aesthetics across literature, fashion design, and visual art are used to explore and contest feminist issues related to gendered embodiment and subjectivity.

Iván Kirschbaum is a PhD candidate at the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne. His current research focuses on the mediation of cities and the intersection of digital media and urban precarity. His PhD thesis examines how Latin American immigrants living in Melbourne use digital media to navigate everyday challenges in housing, work, and practices of belonging.

Jingxian You is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne. Her thesis investigates the globalisation of mobile applications and their role in the merging of virtual and physical spaces. Her research interests include digital governance, app globalisation, transnational digital policy, and digital city.

Negotiating criticism and contradictions: Tradwife discourse as recruitment strategy

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Abstract

The online ‘tradwife’ movement, which promotes a return to rigid gender roles rooted in biological essentialism, has drawn widespread criticism from feminist commentators and mainstream media. Yet, tradwife influencers like Estee Williams are able to cultivate large, engaged audiences. This article analyses how Williams and her followers respond to criticism through a three-month digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis (CDA) of her TikTok and Instagram content. The analysis identifies three interconnected rhetorical strategies used to deflect critique and present the ideology as palatable to heterogeneous audiences: first, the reframing of traditional gender roles as individual lifestyle choices through the language of choice feminism; second, the use of neoliberal logics to individualise structural economic concerns and reinforce essentialist ideas of masculinity and femininity; and third, the deployment of defensive meta-commentary that casts critics as intolerant and tradwives as unfairly persecuted victims. While on the one hand, these discourses reveal the inherent contradictions and ideological entanglements of the tradwife movement, these strategies also work in tandem to obscure the movement’s reactionary politics, broadening its appeal across ideological lines. These dynamics have broader implications within an increasingly pro-natalist political climate, where traditional family structures and the reproduction of (white) babies are framed as national imperatives.

Keywords

tradwives, reactionary feminism, neoliberalism, pro-natalism, choice feminism, critical discourse analysis

Title:

Negotiating criticism and contradictions: Tradwife discourse as recruitment strategy

Introduction

The term ‘tradwife’, a portmanteau of ‘traditional wife’, first entered mainstream discourse in 2020 following the broadcast of a BBC segment featuring Alena Pettitt, a self-described tradwife who declared her intention to “submit to... and spoil [her husband] like it’s 1959” (BBC, 2020). The online tradwife movement has since received widespread condemnation in

the mainstream media, with many critics highlighting that its retrograde beliefs around gender are harmful to women, not only for its gender essentialist ideology but also for promoting a lifestyle that makes women vulnerable to physical, emotional, and financial abuse (Elmhirst, 2024; Hanawalt, 2024; Norris, 2023). However, despite this criticism, many tradwife content creators continue to build loyal audiences. Far from being ignorant of the controversy they create, tradwives and their audiences leverage negative media exposure to perpetuate their popularity.

While existing studies of tradwives have largely focused on tradwife-produced content, there is currently limited research that examines audience engagement with tradwives. Drawing on a three-month digital ethnography of the prominent online tradwife Estee Williams, this article analyses both Williams's content and audience reception in the form of comments left on her videos. In particular, this article focuses on comments critical of tradwives and their lifestyle and ideology, and how Williams and her supporters respond to these criticisms. In doing so, not only are elements of the tradwife ideology elucidated, but so, too, are their rhetorical strategies for defending the lifestyle and ideology. Through this analysis, three key discourses emerge: choice feminism is invoked as a rhetorical strategy to obscure the gender essentialism at the heart of the tradwife ideology; neoliberal logic defers systemic concerns onto the individual; and metacommentary perpetuates a victimhood narrative, positioning tradwives as unfairly persecuted. Although these discourses reveal contradictions within the tradwife ideology, rather than attempting to reconcile them, defenders strategically employ these inconsistencies to broaden the appeal of the tradwife lifestyle and reinforce the beliefs that the movement is a righteous one.

Background

Housewives and Feminism

The figure of the 'housewife' and stay-at-home mother (SAHM) has long been the subject of many feminist debates. Betty Friedan's book, published in 1963, *The Feminine Mystique*, which observed the widespread dissatisfaction among housewives in the post-war period, is often cited as having sparked the second-wave feminist movement. Conceptualising housewives' malaise as "the problem with no name", Friedan located women's oppression in their confinement to unpaid domestic labour and their exclusion from public, intellectual, and professional life. Other prominent second-wave feminists, such as Germaine Greer (1999) and Susan Faludi (2006), similarly saw the housewife as emblematic of patriarchal constraint and gender inequality, thus establishing 'the domestic' as a key site of feminist struggle.

These perspectives largely saw women's entry into the paid workforce as a site of emancipation through its promise of economic autonomy. As such, within early second-wave feminist debates the housewife was largely painted as antithetical to feminist gains. However, as Hochschild notes in *The Second Shift* (1989), the promises of gainful employment for women to increase gender equality were tempered by the prevailing inequity of domestic labour, contributing to what she terms the 'stalled revolution'. Hakim (1995) additionally controversially suggested that many women prefer homemaking and motherhood over full-

time employment, and that feminism must reckon with these preferences. Black feminists, on the other hand, critiqued white feminists' fixation on the housewife, highlighting that full-time domesticity has been historically inaccessible to Black women whose labour was first forcibly extracted through slavery and then exploited through low-paid service and care work (Davis, 1981; hooks, 2014).

Nonetheless, the housewife has remained implicitly relevant to many contemporary feminist debates. The emergence of 'neoliberal feminism' suggests that women can 'have it all' by emphasising individual female empowerment within a neoliberal capitalist system through hard work and entrepreneurship (Rottenberg, 2018). While sidelining collectivism, neoliberal feminism echoes second-wave feminist perspectives in seeing the workplace as the site of women's liberation. Moreover, the term 'choice feminism', coined by Linda Hirshman (2006), describes the feminist framework that foregrounds women's individual agency and treats all choices made by women as feminist, seeing them as expressions of their individual agency and subjectivity. Hirshman, however, is critical of this notion, urging women to instead 'get to work', seeing homemaking and childrearing as limiting to women and feminism. Ferguson (2010) is similarly critical of choice feminism, arguing that, by focusing on individual choice over collectivism and structural inequality, it depoliticises feminism: "It aims to sidestep the need to make judgments, it aims to avoid making exclusions, and it aims to downplay the radicalism of feminism's challenges to the status quo" (p. 250).

As Genz (2008) identifies, many debates about housewives are "trapped by a dualistic logic" (p. 50). To overcome this dualism, she suggests that the postfeminism framework allows us to "reinterpret the homemaker as a polysemic character caught in a struggle between tradition and modernity" (p. 50). This is because, according to Genz, postfeminism looks both to the past and future, and its many interpretations suggest a movement away from binaries that align men with power and women with victimhood, and the workplace with liberation and the home with oppression. The housewife thus emerges as a figure whose "multifarious significations" result in her meaning being continuously renegotiated (p. 50). As Johnson and Lloyd (2004) observe: "Underlying... popular representations of the housewife is the question of what it means to be a woman in the modern world" (p. 2). Debates surrounding the emergence of the 'tradwife' can thus be partially understood as the latest iteration in a long history of feminist discourses around the figure of the housewife, whose meaning remains contested and unresolved.

Tradwives and the Femosphere

The tradwife movement has emerged from the broader context of the manosphere, an amorphous and interconnected group of online anti-feminist subcultures and influencers that has gained notoriety for promoting a male supremacist worldview (Ging, 2019). While the manosphere was initially widely condemned due to its association with several misogynistic terrorist attacks, it has more recently undergone a process of 'mainstreaming'. Notably, several prominent 'manfluencers' have established direct ties to Donald Trump and the MAGA movement, and have been credited with contributing to his 2024 election victory (Barrett, 2024).

However, it is not only men who have been drawn into the manosphere's orbit; increasingly, women have adopted overlapping ideologies resulting in what has been dubbed the 'femosphere', which Kay (2024) defines as "a loose ecology of online groups which mirrors the affects, vocabularies and logics of the manosphere" (p. 2). Andrea Dworkin suggests that women are drawn to right-wing politics because "by committing themselves to male values, women seek to acquire value" (2025, p. 11). This sentiment tends to be particularly pertinent in times of economic instability (Ehrenreich, 1982). Women's participation in right-wing movements is not new, however, though they have historically functioned as auxiliaries rather than leaders (Love, 2020). Within the femosphere, women capitalise on hegemonic gender essentialist beliefs to popularise their ideology by, for example, exploiting "perceptions of authenticity and accessibility" which, Leidig (2023) argues, "serve as the most powerful tools of the modern far right" (p. 4). This is because women are uniquely positioned, both socially and culturally, to mobilise these dynamics to their advantage. Social media has additionally afforded far-right women a platform to cultivate strong personal brands with loyal followings through appropriating pre-existing online practices and cultures, such as 'mommy blog' and lifestyle vlogging communities (Leidig, 2023). Leidig thus observes that far-right women "are adept at merging banal political messages in everyday life" (p. 7) by weaponising their femininity to obscure the extremity of their beliefs. Tradwife influencers follow this precedent, using their curated aesthetics to facilitate online radicalisation (Sykes & Hopner, 2024).

Central to the tradwife ideology is the valorisation of and adherence to 'traditional values'. However, what is meant by 'tradition' can vary widely from tradwife to tradwife, which, Proctor (2022) argues, means that it "functions as a powerful motivating idea, making it fertile ideological ground" (p. 21). Nonetheless, it generally refers to heterosexual marriage in which the woman is subservient to her husband, a commitment to child-rearing and domestic duties, and right-wing ideals (Proctor, 2022). Some tradwife scholarship has additionally noted that tradwife conceptions of 'tradition', when taken to their extreme, are linked to white supremacy, seeing tradwives' primary role as child bearers who will reproduce the white race in the face of the 'Great Replacement' (Mattheis, 2018; Sykes & Hopner, 2024; Tebaldi, 2023). Not all tradwives adhere to these beliefs, however, as Sykes and Hopner (2024) note, tradwives exist on a "continuum of extremity" as well as at the intersection of other identities (p. 465). However, these categories are not stable, and recruitment and radicalisation may occur across this continuum.

The rise of the tradwife movement, which is broadly understood as anti-feminist, is seen by researchers as a response to and rejection of neoliberal feminism (Bower, 2024; Deem, 2023; Proctor, 2022; Tebaldi, 2021). Echoing Hochschild's observations, tradwives view the expectation to have both a career and a family as unrealistic or overly demanding and thus see opting out of the workforce altogether in favour of embracing traditional gender roles as being "the only real path to joy and fulfillment" (Zahay, 2022, p. 173). Nonetheless, as Deem (2023) notes, despite their ostensible repudiation of feminism in favour of being 'feminine', tradwives tend to incorporate 'postfeminist themes' into their worldview based on the belief

that gender equality has already been achieved, thus rendering feminism redundant. As such, much like Genz's (2008) conceptualisation of the housewife as a postfeminist polysemic figure, the tradwife movement has become a site through which feminist and postfeminist debates are played out.

Case Study and Methodology

This article draws on a case study analysis of the tradwife Estee Williams to examine how online tradwives and their audiences negotiate criticism and ideological contradiction on social media. At the time of data collection, Williams was the most popular tradwife on social media who openly embraced the label, with nearly 200,000 followers on TikTok and another 110,000 on Instagram. Although popular 'homemaker' creators such as Ballerina Farm and Nara Smith have much larger audiences than Williams, they have both explicitly rejected the label despite making content that aligns with the tradwife lifestyle and aesthetic. Williams, on the other hand, has built her following by posting tradwife-oriented content explicitly since 2022. She quickly experienced viral success in her first year of creating tradwife content when one of her videos, in which she expressed a desire to "depend on a man financially" accompanied by a montage of 1950s-era housewives and nuclear families, garnered over a million views on TikTok. She has gained further prominence in the mainstream media through a number of print interviews and television appearances, including *Dr Phil*, *Piers Morgan Uncensored*, and *The New Yorker*. Although Williams is explicit about the traditional beliefs that inform her tradwife lifestyle, when compared with other far-right and white supremacist tradwife influencers, her views are relatively moderate. Within Sykes and Hopner's (2024) typology of tradwives, which categorises them as either conservative, alt-lite or alt-right, she can be understood as a conservative tradwife and therefore on what they identify as the 'less extreme' end of the tradwife spectrum. However, given that these categories are not stable, both Williams and her followers may be susceptible to further radicalisation and recruitment.

In choosing Williams as a case study, I was able to gain an "in-depth, multifaceted investigation... of a single social phenomenon" (Orum et al., 1991, p. 2). Additionally, a digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016) of Williams's social media, primarily of her TikTok and Instagram accounts, was conducted ~~in order~~ to gain an emic perspective on her online presence and the community she has cultivated. Conducted between February and May 2024, this involved observing and recording the posts she uploaded to her social media, the comments left by her audience, and taking daily field notes that documented high-level themes, personal reflections and observations, and the broader context that Williams existed within and was responding to. In total, 17 videos and 3,221 comments were collated and analysed. A covert approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) was adopted due to the hostility that the far-right communities often express towards researchers. Given the inherent anti-feminism of tradwife ideology, a covert approach is particularly pertinent when the researcher is a woman and therefore more susceptible to misogynistic harassment (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Although adopting a covert approach precludes the ability to conduct interviews, which are typically conducted during an ethnography, it is nonetheless possible to

gain an emic perspective of online communities because, as Barnes (2018) notes, “While reading the comments but not necessarily leaving a comment of their own, engaged listeners develop an affective relationship with both the website and other commenters” (p. 7). The data collected during this digital ethnography was additionally supplemented by historical content uploaded to her YouTube channel which, while not uploaded ~~to~~ during the data collection period, provided insight into Williams’s beliefs and practices as a tradwife. Informed by poststructuralist feminist theory, particularly Butler’s (2015) conceptualisation of gender as performative, this analysis approaches tradwife femininity not as a fixed or essential identity but as something produced and stabilised through repeated discursive practices.

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. First, an inductive coding process was employed to identify recurring themes across the dataset, including choice, femininity, biological essentialism, neoliberalism, and victimhood. This initial stage focused on identifying dominant nodes of discourse, revealing the key ideological priorities and concerns within tradwife discourse. In the second stage, critical discourse analysis (CDA), which seeks to uncover the ‘naturalised’ ways in which ideology, power, hegemony, and exclusion are created and perpetuated through discourse (Fairclough, 2013), was applied to interpret and analyse how discourse operated within and across these thematic nodes, with particular attention to contested discourses through which Williams and her supporters negotiate criticism and legitimise the tradwife movement and its ideology.

To protect the identity of commenters, users have been anonymised and, while some of their comments have been cleaned for clarity, including typos or grammatical errors, their substance remains the same.

Findings and Analysis

Although this study focuses on how criticism of tradwives is negotiated by Williams and her followers, it should be noted that the majority of comments Williams received across her TikTok and Instagram accounts ~~was~~ were positive. For the most part, comments praised her lifestyle and, in particular, her style and appearance, which aligns with studies (Sykes & Hopner, 2024; Zahay, 2022) that suggest that tradwives’ allure comes from their aesthetic appeal. Additionally, negative or critical comments were more populous on Williams’s TikTok videos. This is likely due to the affordances of the platform as TikTok’s primary feed, or ‘For You’ feed, is algorithmically driven and therefore will often show users creators whom they have not ‘followed’ or even come across before. Although the mechanisms behind TikTok’s algorithms are invisible to the public, studies suggest that videos with higher engagement rates through likes, comments, and shares are more likely to be pushed by the algorithm to audiences’ ‘For You’ pages (Klug et al., 2021). Given that ‘controversial’ and polarising content often farms more engagement (Bazaco et al. 2019), it can be inferred that TikTok’s algorithm may have pushed Williams’s content to audiences who were recognised by the algorithm as having views that were at odds with Williams’s. TikTok’s algorithm thus functions quite differently from Instagram’s, where users’ primary feeds are largely limited to

accounts that they follow. As such, it is less likely that Instagram algorithmic recommended Williams to users who were unfamiliar with her; rather, they likely would have had to specifically seek out her page.

Additionally, data from Google Trends shows that searches for “tradwife” peaked in July 2024 but that its second-highest peak was in April 2024 (Google Trends, 2025). This suggests that interest in the tradwife movement was mounting during the ethnographic period and led to an increased interest in Williams’s content from people outside of the tradwife movement.

Choice Feminism as Rhetorical Cover for Biological Essentialism

One of the key themes that emerged from the comments that were critical of Williams and tradwives more broadly was one that invoked feminist arguments to suggest that she was promoting a lifestyle with potentially dangerous implications for women. These comments highlighted that in ‘submitting’ to one’s husband and surrendering autonomy to him may put women in a position that is vulnerable to physical, emotional, and/or economic abuse. These comments were often some of the most overtly antagonistic in tone. One commenter, for example, wrote:

You are doing extremely sh*t job encouraging women to rely on their husbands financially. This is a base for financial and psychological abuse. You are so young, please look at experience of others. Deaths, illness and divorces happen. Please stop promoting this nonsense!

However, most comments urging Williams to consider the potentially negative consequences of the lifestyle she was promoting appeared to be made in good faith with several, for example, drawing on their personal experiences to demonstrate why relying solely on one’s husband can be harmful. One user shared that their “good Catholic” father was physically abusive to both his wife and children and that, because he didn’t let his wife work, she had “nowhere to go”. Similarly, another user recounted that both of their grandmothers and mother, who were all traditional housewives, were physically abused by their husbands, and suggested that, “The traditional housewife era is romanticised by people with historical amnesia”. Yet another documented her personal experience of how leading a traditional lifestyle resulted in her own abuse, writing:

I, naively, did everything you are recommending. Once my child was born, I became a SAHM, gave up my independence and let him lead. The man I chose to believe and trust did not see my value after years of being a SAHM. Twenty years later, I have nothing. Due to him having full control it turned into financial abuse. Being a SAHM is rewarding but please, plan with your spouse in case of the inevitable.

This user, though not necessarily condemnatory of Williams’s lifestyle, insisted upon her having a ‘backup plan’ should her marriage go awry. This kind of concern characterised many of the comments that cautioned Williams against her chosen lifestyle, with several comments warning her against giving up her financial freedom. Some of these comments were generic, telling her, for example, to “make sure you are protected in case your marriage does not work

out”, while others specifically suggested precautionary measures for those who are or want to be traditional wives, such as prenuptial agreements and life insurance.

The most common defence provided by Williams and her supporters against these kinds of comments was that being a tradwife is a ‘choice’ that should be respected. In one of her videos explaining what tradwives are, Williams states: “Women should have the choice to be homemakers or not without being judged... and not be shunned for wanting to be more traditional”. Similarly, many comments in defence of Williams and the tradwife lifestyle invoke the notion of personal choice as a means of shutting down criticism. In particular, the notion that women’s ability to choose is a legacy of earlier feminist movements was a popular one. For example, one commenter wrote:

It’s sad how feminism’s main objective is to call for equality and the right of women to choose the way they live their lives; at the same time, they critique a woman who chose to be traditional! Feminism took the wrong turn... being a traditional housewife is a choice and should be respected.

By invoking choice feminism in their argumentation, tradwife defenders flipped the script on their critics, who also tended to appeal to feminist lines of inquiry. As a result, those who question tradwives’ lifestyle choices are often accused of “shaming” women who have made different choices than they have. For example:

Women should have the choice to work or stay at home without being shamed. Especially by other women.

Feminism went off the tracks by shaming women for being a tradwife. Women should be able to choose and supported in their choice either way.

I believe if a woman wants to be traditional wife/homemaker that’s beautiful and if they want to work full time that’s fine as well. Why the media/society shames either lifestyle that a woman chooses is absurd and makes no sense.

These comments, in framing criticism as “shaming”, are additionally insightful for their characterisation of tradwives as women who simply wish to be stay-at-home mothers but downplay a key component of being a tradwife: submitting to one’s husband. In doing so, historical feminist debates about the role of the housewife were rearticulated through the figure of the tradwife, obscuring important distinctions between the two.

Moreover, this rhetoric of choice is fundamentally at odds with the biological essentialist beliefs around gender that are foundational to the tradwife ideology. For Williams, this gender essentialism was often expressed implicitly by, for example, suggesting that men should embrace masculinity and women femininity, that women’s inclination for homemaking is “natural”, and that tradwives have existed “since the beginning of time”. This sentiment is echoed and made more explicit by her supporters who made statements such as: “Women and men naturally want to be traditional for the most part”; “it’s a woman’s deep hidden biological dream”; “Quality men despise being with woke lost women working

against their biological instincts”; and “It’s the natural order of things”. The belief that women are biologically pre-determined to be tradwives undermines the suggestion that women are merely ‘choosing’ a traditional lifestyle.

The reconciliation of these two seemingly opposing concepts is revealed in one video in which Williams reiterates that being a tradwife “is a personal choice” before stating, “I appreciate working mothers and wives; I do not bash any woman who wants a career.” This dichotomy, between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers, suggests that women’s choices are nonetheless constrained to the biological imperative to have children, thus revealing a gender essentialist and pro-natalist worldview.

Neoliberalism and the Negotiation of Viability

Another prominent category of criticism directed at Williams was not overtly critical of the ideology underpinning tradwives, but instead questioned its feasibility. In particular, inquiries, both critical and curious, were made by commenters into how Williams is able to afford her lifestyle in the current economy. In response to her video titled “Why is Tradwife Content Blowing up Suddenly?”, in which Williams notes that it is more common nowadays to have two rather than one income-earners in a marriage, one hostile comment read:

"It is more POPULAR having 2 providers." Girl, you're not in society at all. People cannot afford single income households. In Toronto many people need 3-4 incomes to afford homes. Inflation is insane. You're PRIVILEGED to have a partner and to live in an area that allows one provider. Stop being delusional it's so cringe.

Similar sentiments were expressed in milder terms as well, with one user stating, “The financial reality for so many folks is that a single income home is nearly impossible :/”, while another observed that with the “disappearance of the middle class,” Williams’s lifestyle “is basically unattainable and unrealistic”. Several others speculated that it was only because Williams had not yet had children that she could afford, financially and logistically, the aestheticised lifestyle she posts online: “Wait until you have kids” was an oft-repeated sentiment. Others suggested that she could afford her lifestyle because of her income she earned as an influencer.

However, there was a smaller proportion of comments that suggested it was *because* of the economic crisis that women were drawn to the tradwife lifestyle, citing that the burden placed on working women to additionally bear the brunt of domestic duties has resulted in women wanting to retreat into the home:

Women are sick of working full-time AND carrying a disproportionate share of parenting responsibilities and the mental load for the household. Meanwhile, husbands have hobbies and things they get to do to relax on the weekends, while she does the house cleaning, laundry and grocery shopping. It’s absolutely bull****.

Another comment similarly laments:

That is what has led to increasing divorce rates. Most women cannot work, take care of the children and the home, and keep a relationship going. Even with your partner contributing, the relationship suffers.

This sentiment aligns with prior findings from studies on tradwives which see it as a response to the failures of neoliberal feminism (Bower, 2024; Deem, 2023; Proctor, 2022; Zahay, 2022). However, while these comments seem to repudiate the demands of neoliberal capitalism, Williams's answers to questions about how she afford her lifestyle reinforced both a neoliberal and gender-essentialist logic. In one TikTok video offering advice to women who wish to pursue the tradwife lifestyle, she advised:

Ladies, if you are dating a man and your ultimate dream is to be a homemaker, and you have expressed this to that man, and that man says that living off one income is 1) impossible 2) outdated and that it is more realistic to live off of 50-50—meaning you both split the bills and the responsibilities around the house—just know that is that man's way of telling you he does not want to be a provider. He does not have what it takes to do what is needed to provide for you and your family and you don't need to ask any more questions, you shouldn't have to convince a man to be a provider. Some men just aren't providers and that's okay... There are plenty of men out there who make this lifestyle realistic, and they do what needs to be done. They might work more than one job, they might put you in a smaller home, they might change states to a state that is more realistic to live off one income.

This framing places the onus on the individual to make ends meet while overlooking broader structural economic forces that may impede that ability. In other videos, she highlighted the importance of budgeting, similarly reinforcing an individualistic neoliberal logic that implies it is a personal failure, and not a systemic one, if you are unable to live on a single income. However, Williams simultaneously invokes gender essentialism by suggesting that it is men's 'natural' duty to be a 'provider' and thus the personal imperative to provide is masculinised. This sentiment was also found amongst commenters. For example:

Many men do not have a provider mentality, unfortunately, and women have fallen for the lies of the modern feminism movement. You can live on one salary, it may require certain sacrifices (downsizing home, one car only, not shopping organic, moving to a different state, etc.). But I think ultimately it begins with choosing the right man first who has the right mindset in providing for his family and wanting a stable household.

This comment, which suggests that it is a problem of 'mindset' if a man is unable to provide for his family, additionally invokes a sentiment found across the manosphere more broadly; Andrew Tate, for example, exemplifies the ways in which Red Pill ideology connects masculinity with entrepreneurialism, suggesting that failure is the result of 'not working hard enough' (Bujdei-Tebeica, 2023).

Defensive Meta-Commentary to Promote Narratives of Victimhood

The final key discourse that emerged in relation to the ways in which Williams and her supporters negotiated criticism was not direct responses to criticism but, instead, meta-commentary that pre-emptively defended the tradwife lifestyle. These comments were often gushing in tone, encouraging Williams to pay no mind to her critics. Additionally, many referenced having discovered her profile through other media criticising her. One comment, for example, recounted:

I found you on a feminist page, they were shitstorming you, but I was so happy that I found a young girl who thinks exactly like I do and who is an inspiration in this world of confusion. Being feminine, a housewife and a devoted wife should not be satanised.

Another stated:

Saw a video saying you were getting some female hate for being what many men are looking for in a woman. Had to seek your page and show you some male support.



This kind of commentary, contrary to the comments that invoke choice feminism in defence of Williams, positioned her and, by extension the broader tradwife community, as being, not only in opposition to feminism, but vilified by it. It additionally framed her as being the unfair victim of “shitstorming” and “hate”, with other women being the primary attackers. Williams herself perpetuated this narrative through referencing the widespread criticism she received on multiple occasions. In one TikTok, a clip from what appears to be a news outlet is incorporated, claiming that Williams is “becoming the most hated TikTok influencer”. Williams’s caption, addressed to her followers, read: “Thank you for all the support no matter what the media critics show”. However, a closer look at the apparent news outlet referenced by Williams revealed it to be a TikTok account that exclusively uploaded ‘drama’ videos apparently in an effort to farm engagement. Considering that several legacy media outlets also provided critical coverage of the tradwife movement, by strategically selecting which criticism she engaged with, Williams was able to portray herself as an unfairly maligned victim. Nonetheless, commenters engaged with her video sincerely, offering their support and telling her to ignore the ‘haters’:

That’s what they are saying about her in the media 🤖 they’re liars. They hate her because she’s everything they’re not. They want to destroy society and the family. It’s obvious.

This framing is reminiscent of Bujalka et al.’s (2022) findings that, within the manosphere, “influential content producers construct a perception of threat in their audience while simultaneously positioning themselves to provide a solution to this same threat” (p. 1). In the tradwife imaginary, specifically, the ‘threat’ is one of a ‘woke’ and ‘satanized’ media and liberal elite who are intent on ‘destroying’ traditional family values and structures. This additionally aligns with Tebaldi’s (2023) understanding that, for the far-right, “Traditional womanhood is both something to be protected and an important element in the fight against modernity, homosexuality, globalism and cultural Marxism” (pp. 15-16). This demonstrates

how tradwives are able to weaponise their femininity and gender essentialist beliefs, which frame women as being in need of protection, to mobilise their audiences. Moreover, by engaging in defensive meta-commentary, Williams and her supporters align themselves with the broader manosphere and online far-right.

Discussion

Analysing the defensive discourses mobilised by Williams and her supporters in the face of criticism reveals that they are less concerned with resolving the inherent contradictions of the tradwife worldview than they are with ‘softening’ the most extreme aspects of the ideology and making it more palatable to a broader, heterogeneous audience while simultaneously attempting to draw clear ideological boundaries. They repudiate feminism while simultaneously invoking it to defend traditional lifestyles as a ‘choice’; they reject the hustle culture characteristic of neoliberal feminism while invoking market logics of individual entrepreneurialism; and they perpetuate narratives of victimhood while vilifying those they deem as ideologically opposed to their worldview.

The operationalisation of a rhetoric of ‘choice’ by those defensive of tradwives invokes decades-long feminist debates regarding the role of the housewife and her relationship to patriarchy. Within these defensive discourses, much like previous debates, the question lies in whether it is possible to be a liberated woman when you sacrifice financial independence in favour of domesticity. The displacement of these debates from the housewife to the tradwife additionally suggests the success of the far-right in shifting the ‘Overton window’ (Nagle, 2017). By invoking notions of ‘choice’, tradwives suggest that it is actually a marker of women’s liberation and autonomy, rather than a mechanism of oppression, to be able to ‘choose’ to be a tradwife. In this way, even though tradwives and their defenders largely reject the label of ‘feminism’, they nonetheless engage with a postfeminist sensibility that treats the tradwife, much like Genz’s (2008) postfeminist understanding of the housewife, as a ‘polysemic figure’ who at once embodies the ideals of feminism through her agency and autonomy while simultaneously ‘submitting’ to her husband and adhering to ‘traditional’ gender roles. That the bio-essentialist beliefs of tradwives, which inherently see women’s ‘natural’ place as in the home and men’s role as being providers, undermine these notions of choice is not reckoned with; rather, the ‘multifarious significations’ of the tradwife allow these contradictory perspectives to coexist. This polysemy additionally allows choice feminism to be invoked as a rhetorical strategy that presents an inherently anti-feminist ideology in postfeminist terms, as evidenced by the line of argumentation suggesting that past feminists fought for the right for women to ‘choose’, therefore implying that it is critics of tradwives and not tradwives themselves who are anti-feminist. This affirms Ferguson’s (2010) contention that choice feminism is “radically depoliticizing” in that it allows individual decision-making to be framed as empowering, thereby shutting down critical discussions regarding the social conditions that structure and constrain the choices women make. In the tradwife discourse, this depoliticisation becomes a political strategy in itself: it enables the promotion of a far-right, patriarchal worldview under the guise of individual empowerment. Moreover, in the context of a US government with an explicitly pro-natalist

agenda, the obfuscation of systemic factors that contribute to women's decision-making abilities may serve to naturalise the politically-motivated imperative that women's primary societal role is as domestic and reproductive labourers.

In their refutation of neoliberal feminism as being 'unrealistic' for most women while simultaneously invoking market logics to defend the material viability of abiding by 'traditional' gender roles in a precarious economic environment, tradwife discourses share significant overlap with what Kay (2024) identifies as 'reactionary feminism', which she conceptualises as an emergent strain of feminism that marks a departure from, or mutation of, neoliberal postfeminisms. Like tradwives, reactionary feminists share bio-essentialist understandings of gender; however, their worldviews also diverge in key ways. For example, while reactionary feminists have a deeply fatalistic perspective regarding capitalism and gender hierarchies, tradwives purport to offer a solution by embracing gender roles and retreating into the domestic sphere. Nonetheless, Blee, Futrell and Simi (2024) suggest that attempting to categorise and demarcate the boundaries of extremist and reactionary ideologies may be less useful than understanding them through a "constellation framework" which recognises the dynamism of the "large and spiraling network configuration that facilitates the circulation of key practices, ideas, and emotions" (p. 436). Identifying the interconnectedness between tradwives and reactionary feminists through a constellation framework, therefore, suggests that these should not be understood as discrete positions, but as overlapping perspectives that converge in their reassertion of bio-essentialist conceptions of gender. This additionally suggests that recruitment and radicalisation may occur across these movements and ideologies. In particular, their shared rejection of neoliberal feminism, which would see women's inability to balance a career and family as an individual failure, suggests that women who are increasingly disillusioned with the current socio-economic system may be particularly susceptible to ideologies that affirm this dissatisfaction. Yet, both tradwives and reactionary feminists are unable to fully eschew neoliberal logics altogether, invoking hyper-individualism as a means of overcoming, for example, financial challenges or abusive relationships. This additionally mirrors the logics of the manosphere, which similarly invokes notions of individualism as the solution to systemic failings (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019; Van Valkenburgh, 2018), further exemplifying the ideological entanglement between ostensibly distinct movements.

Yet, in characterising criticism of tradwives as unjust, Williams and her defenders attempt to discursively draw stark ideological lines between 'us' and 'them' (Van Dijk, 2011). By creating this binary, which frames tradwives as morally righteous victims and feminist critics as intolerant, oppressive, and even dangerous, tradwife discourse perpetuates division in an already polarised social media environment. Moreover, in doing so, they simplify both tradwives' and feminists' worldviews, placing them diametrically at odds with one another despite their complex entanglements, as demonstrated through their implicit engagement with historical feminist debates on the subject of the housewife and choice. In particular, tradwives' criticism of neoliberal feminism in some ways aligns with other feminist perspectives that are similarly skeptical of the possibility of 'have it all'. By disavowing feminists altogether and construing them as their enemy, tradwives inoculate themselves

against alternative political imaginaries that may otherwise respond to their anxieties and grievances. On the one hand, these divisive discourses align with tradwife scholarship which understands tradwives to be symbolic of a nation under threat; as Tebaldi (2023) writes, tradwives “are stars in a gendered narrative of the nation that positions them as both incarnating and defending national purity” (p. 15). On the other hand, they function to perpetuate the ideological polarity characteristic of the broader ‘culture wars’.

Conclusion

This article has examined how tradwife influencers and their audiences negotiate criticism, revealing the rhetorical strategies that are mobilised to legitimise and defend the tradwife lifestyle. Through a digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis, three key discursive patterns emerged: the deployment of choice feminism to obscure the movement’s bio-essentialist underpinnings; the use of neoliberal logics to individualise structural economic issues; and the circulation of defensive meta-commentary that reframes critique as persecution and perpetuates broader ideological division.

While these findings gesture towards the inherent contradictions of the tradwife ideology, Williams and her supporters do not attempt to resolve inconsistencies. While Deem (2023) sees this entanglement of apparently conflicting beliefs and goals as an affective form of ‘trad truth-making’ through which women attempt to achieve security in a volatile world, this analysis demonstrates that it simultaneously functions as a discursive strategy which obfuscates the inherently gender essentialist and patriarchal worldview at the heart of tradwife ideology. For casual viewers who are less likely to identify these incongruences, these discourses may function to make what is ultimately a regressive ideology appear more palatable to contemporary audiences.

Although Google Trends data (2025) suggest that public interest in tradwives is waning, their enduring impact is evident through the adoption of their gendered and pro-natalist logics by prominent politicians (Brady, 2025). As such, further research should continue to explore the evolution of the tradwife movement and audience engagement with it. Additionally, tradwives’ ideological entanglements with reactionary feminism and other adjacent worldviews would benefit from further analysis to elucidate the pathways through which women are recruited to, and radicalised within, anti-feminist gender ideologies.

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“STOP PRESS—Not abortion again”: Disrupting linear time through archival analysis of *Broadsheet* magazine

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Abstract

This article draws from the published and archival material of the New Zealand feminist magazine *Broadsheet* (1972-1997) to explore its response to the Contraceptive, Sterilisation and Abortion Act 1977 (CSA), which was passed under urgency and described as “one of the most repressive abortion laws in the world” (Coney, 1982b, p. 16). The January 1978 issue of *Broadsheet* had just gone to print when the Act passed into law, and its next issue was not due to be published until March. Acutely aware of how critical a delay of three months is to an unintended pregnancy, *Broadsheet* volunteers painstakingly added additional information about alternative options to each copy of the printed magazines. This intervention was no small feat, and offers a compelling account of feminist resistance; however, as later issues of *Broadsheet* illustrate, such efforts were not sustainable. Taking up the theme of ‘pause’, this article draws on the work of Elizabeth Freeman (2010, 2019) to explore the temporality of relations of power, here visible in the contrast between ‘urgency’ and ‘delay’. It further draws on the work of Kate Eichhorn (2013) to explore how ‘pause’ within the archive itself works to interrupt understandings of time as linear, and therefore also offers opportunities to contest narratives of linear ‘progress’. As the recent retraction of reproductive rights in the United States illustrates, ‘progress’ is neither inevitable nor secure. This article therefore uses an archival analysis of *Broadsheet*’s response to the CSA Act as an opportunity for pause and reflection on the continuing struggle for reproductive rights in the present, and the constant need for resistance.

Key words: *Broadsheet*, feminism, Aotearoa New Zealand, archives, print culture, abortion

Introduction

Feminist periodicals such as the New Zealand magazine *Broadsheet* (1972-1997) were a prominent feature of ‘second wave’ feminism, providing alternative representations of feminism to those within the mainstream media, in which feminists’ “concerns and actions, and the movement itself, were consistently ignored, trivialised, and distorted” (Coney, 1982, p. 11, cited in Daly 1993, p. 100). *Broadsheet* comprised a range of feminist art, activism and analysis, and also played a key role in connecting the diverse feminist groups operating throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, providing a forum through which feminists could share concerns beyond their local communities. In addition, the Broadsheet Collective established a feminist bookstore in Tāmaki Makaurau and compiled an extensive archive of research on women (University of Auckland, n.d.). *Broadsheet* therefore became largely synonymous with feminism in Aotearoa—as Sue Kedgley recently wrote, “when *Broadsheet* closed down in 1997, it seemed to symbolise the end of the second wave of women’s activism” (2021, p. 182). This reputation has been further cemented through the archiving of the magazine and the Collective’s other records in the Sir George Grey Special Collections, as well as through its recent digitization by the University of Auckland.

This article draws from the published and archival material of *Broadsheet* (1972-1997) to explore its response to the Contraceptive, Sterilisation and Abortion Act (CSA), which significantly limited existing access to abortion and was described as “one of the most repressive abortion laws in the world” (Coney, 1982b, p. 16). When the Act passed into law in December 1977, the January 1978 issue of *Broadsheet* had just gone to print, which meant that the magazine would be unable to address the change in law until the next issue. While this is not uncommon for periodicals, in this case the delay was further compounded by an extended break in *Broadsheet*’s production, which meant that the next issue would not appear until March. Acutely aware of how critical three months can be for an unintended pregnancy, *Broadsheet* volunteers painstakingly added a flyer containing advice and information about alternative options to each copy of the printed magazines, and glued labels that read “Where to get an abortion: see inside” to each cover (Coney, 1982b, p.

16). This striking intervention occurred alongside several other feminist responses, including setting up the Sisters Overseas Service (SOS), which assisted women to access abortions in Australia, to offer a compelling example of feminist resistance to the change in law. As the struggle for reproductive rights continued, however, later issues of *Broadsheet* instead evoke a sense of weary inevitability, as captured by the comment “not abortion again” (Coney, 1983, p. 40). The highly restrictive laws based on the Crimes Act 1961 and the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act 1977 remained in place in Aotearoa New Zealand until the passing of the Abortion Legislation Act 2020 (Goodyear-Smith, 2023). Despite the decriminalisation of abortion in Aotearoa New Zealand, the concerns expressed within *Broadsheet* continue to resonate. Reproductive rights remain under threat, as has been acutely demonstrated by the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States (US) in 2022.

Taking up the theme of ‘pause’, this analysis takes as its starting point Elizabeth Freeman’s (2010, 2019) explorations of the temporal dimensions of social power and, following Foucault, her claim that linear understandings of time work to “organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (2010, p. 3). It further draws on the work of Kate Eichhorn (2013) to specifically consider how feminists’ archival activities, which proliferated during an apparent abeyance or ‘pause’ of feminist activism, offer opportunities to disrupt linear time, and with it the teleological narratives of ‘progress’ as described by Clare Hemmings (2011). For Eichhorn (2013), these disruptions offer new opportunities for feminist politics. As she asks, “what could be more hopeful than the realization that time is not simply marching forward and that we might imagine a way outside our oppressive present through a radical repudiation of ‘progress’?” (Eichhorn, 2013, p. 7). This article explores the temporality of relations of power by first considering how the CSA Act, and *Broadsheet*’s response to it, were structured and shaped by ‘urgency’ and ‘delay’. Then, taking a broader perspective, it moves to consider how the mediation of these events through *Broadsheet*’s archives works to disrupt contemporary understandings of linear progress within feminism. Throughout each level of analysis, this article maintains that ‘progress’ is neither inevitable nor secure and calls for continuing vigilance in the struggle for reproductive rights in the present.

Literature review

Feminist print culture is often considered a defining feature of second-wave feminism (Godard, 2002; Jordan, 2010; Travis, 2008). Feminist periodicals and other publications were considered a crucial source of feminist knowledge (see, e.g., Bazin & Waters, 2016; Beins, 2017, 2021; Sedgwick, 2020). The production of alternative media has been a regular feature of feminism and other social movements (Whyte, 2022), however the 1960s saw the emergence of an entirely separate feminist press, “a complete but parallel system of diffusion” in which feminist writing was supported by feminist printers, publishers, distributors and other actors (Godard, 2002, p. 215). At the heart of feminist print culture was the belief that women-only institutions were necessary to overcome structural patriarchy (Travis, 2008). Feminist print culture coincided with a proliferation of women-only centres and services, from cultural and art cooperatives to health clinics and legal services. Each of these organisations sought to redress different permutations of sexism, however, the power to represent and shape the meaning of feminism itself was considered particularly significant. As Travis (2008) writes:

Women would never be truly free unless they first seized ownership of the means of cultural production and then restructured and de-hierarchicalized that production, liberating the written word from the material regime that had grown up to enforce the oppressive epistemological and moral structures of capitalist patriarchy. (p. 282).

Feminist print culture aimed to incorporate feminist values into every stage of the “communications circuit” described by Robert Darnton (1982), which has become a cornerstone of analyses of print culture. In response to growing fragmentation of scholarship exploring the “social and cultural history of communication by print”, Darnton (1982, p. 65) aimed to provide a holistic overview of the communication process, and further to highlight the synergistic interdependence of each of its components. He describes how a book moves through several stages during its “life-cycle”: First the author, then the publisher and printer, through shippers and booksellers, to finally the reader. Darnton’s (1982) model also acknowledges the broader forces that bear upon each of these stages, including intellectual influences and publicity, economic and

social conjuncture, and political and legal sanctions. *Broadsheet* and other feminist periodicals resisted the influences of patriarchal capitalism in both their content and their production. However, they remained constrained by dominant modes of production, negotiating these and adapting them to fit with feminist values.

The nuances of feminist print culture have also prompted scholars to revisit the “communications circuit” itself. Simone Murray (2004) argues that Darnton’s (1982) model—which does not account for gender—is structured around “successful communication” that advances through each stage of production, distribution and consumption (pp. 16-17). It therefore cannot account for the contingency surrounding feminist publishing, or for “what founders in the system, for what remains unwritten, for that which is rejected for publication, or for books refused retail space or denied distribution outlets” (Murray, 2004, p. 16). Murray (2004) maintains that “the ghosts of these silences and hiatuses haunt feminist publishing endeavours” in particular (p. 17). Other scholars point to the different translations between social, economic and cultural capital in feminist publishing. As Travis (2008) makes evident, many—though certainly not all—feminists viewed patriarchy as deeply intertwined with capitalism, and profit-making was often viewed with suspicion (Beins, 2017; Godard, 2002; Travis, 2008). Many feminist periodicals also aimed to keep the cost to the reader as minimal as possible in order to expand the movement, further limiting their resources (Flannery, 2005, p. 25). Barbara Godard (2002) explores feminist periodicals’ disavowal of profit through Luce Irigaray’s understanding of the ‘labour of love’ to argue that women contribute to periodicals “on a volunteer basis, reproducing the traditional characteristics of women’s work as a ‘labour of love’ outside the public sphere and, consequently, without the prestige of symbolic recognition” (p. 212).

In short, feminist publishing was precarious. This meant that feminist periodicals were particularly vulnerable to the effects of neoliberalism and its “repressive effect” on democratic dissent (Brown, 2001; Godard, 2002). Wendy Brown (2015) describes neoliberalism as a “governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life”, such that “citizens” are transformed into “consumers” (p. 30). Increasing costs of production brought about by privatisation and deregulation and the unsustainability of volunteer labour forced the closure of groups throughout all aspects of feminist print culture. At the same

time, the increasing accommodation of feminist writing within mainstream publishing meant there was increasingly perceived to be no longer any need for distinctively feminist publishing—or indeed feminism itself (Flannery, 2005; McRobbie, 2008). The arrest and apparent abeyance of feminist activism under neoliberalism prompted the ‘archival turn’ within feminism, as I return to shortly.

Through its focus on ‘pause’, this article situates analyses of feminist print culture within broader discussions of temporality and power. Elizabeth Freeman (2019) draws specific attention to the temporality of the disciplinary power articulated by Foucault, arguing that its “method and modality temporalized the human body more completely, more thoroughly, and more minutely than ever before” (p. 2). She therefore introduces the concept of ‘chrononormativity’ to describe how time works normatively, as “naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation” (Freeman, 2010, p. 3). Beyond the individual, as Dana Luciano (2007) has explored, ‘chronobiopolitics’ describes how entire populations are managed so that personal histories of birth, marriage, and reproduction are aligned with the economic interests of the nation, that the “sequence of socioeconomically ‘productive’ moments” recognised and legitimised by the state coincides with individuals’ perceptions of “what it means to have a life at all” (Freeman, 2010, p. 5). Here, women’s reproductive labour becomes a crucial point of tension, unvalued within capitalist discourse yet simultaneously essential to the continued availability of human capital. In her elucidation of ‘neoliberal feminism’, Catherine Rottenberg (2017) highlights how temporality works to manage these contradictions: New technologies such as egg freezing enable women to engage in “careful sequencing of career and maternity and smart (self-)investments in the present to ensure enhanced returns in the future”, thus mobilising the future as a key technique of power (Rottenberg, 2017, p. 332). As it is made complicit with the productivity of capitalism, therefore, neoliberal feminism is contained and controlled within strict parameters that disavow any need for dissent.

Crucial to our regulation through temporality is the construction of time as linear. Freeman (2010) argues that linear understandings of time work to “organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (p. 3). If we are regulated and made productive through linearity, then the discontinuities within these sequences may offer potential for resistance. Drawing on Eli Zaretsky,

Freeman (2010) observes that, despite being culturally constructed, “emotional, domestic, and biological tempos” cannot easily be aligned with and absorbed into “the mechanized tempo of industrial capitalism” (p. 7), as demonstrated in Rottenberg’s (2017) analysis of reproductive labour cited above. For Freeman (2010), therefore, disruptions to sequential time, such as “synchrony, anachronism, anastrophe, belatedness, compression, delay, ellipsis, flashback, hysteron-proteron, pause, prolepsis, repetition, reversal, surprise” (xxii), may provide opportunities to rethink and resist our subjectification as primarily productive. Here, the modalities of the archive itself generate such discontinuities. Archives facilitate encounters or ‘proximities’ between agents who otherwise occupied different periods of time and space (Eichhorn, 2013). Because matrices of knowledge and power intersect within archives—Foucault (1972) writes that the archive is a “system that establishes statements as events and things” (cited in Stoler, 2002, p. 94)—these encounters across temporalities generate new opportunities for politics. Kate Eichhorn (2013) elaborates on the political potential of archives through Wendy Brown’s (2001) understanding of ‘genealogy’. Brown (2001) outlines how genealogical analysis interrupts understandings of history as a linear and determining force, in which the present is understood as a necessary or inevitable outcome of the past, by emphasising the contingency of historical events. Instead, a genealogical approach posits “continual yet discontinuous histories, histories without direction yet also without end, histories of varied and protean orders of subjection” (Brown, 2001, p. 104). Accordingly, the archive becomes a site in which relations of power can be contested.

Eichhorn (2013) primarily focuses on the ‘archival turn’ within feminism. For Eichhorn (2010), the decline of feminist publishing has meant that feminist archives have now become the “primary apparatus through which we have continued to authorize new forms of feminist knowledge and cultural production” (p. 627). Following Brown’s (2001) discussion of genealogy, Eichhorn (2013) suggests that feminist archives are a rich site in which the contingencies of both past and present are revealed: Feminism’s “scrap heap” manifests as “a complex site where the past accumulates in the present as a resource to be embraced and rejected, mined and recycled, discarded and redeployed” (p. 29). This reconfiguration of past and present opens up new possibilities for feminist futures, which are no longer bound by sequential and ‘progressive’ narratives. Clare Hemmings (2011) has highlighted how the linear narratives that underpin feminist histories, such as the ‘wave’ metaphor, reinscribe discourses of ‘progress’ and ‘loss’ within feminism that work

to position feminists of different generations in opposition to each other. These narratives compress differences within each generation into what Joan W. Scott (1990) describes as an “illusory unity” that takes “as representative of feminism whatever discourse seems dominant at a particular moment” (p. 83). At the same time, differences between generations are amplified, such that the potential for solidarity between feminists of different generations is eclipsed by the exaggeration of their differences. This emphasis on generation appears to be a product of broader neoliberal discourse—the highly dramatised conflict between “millennials” and “baby boomers” offers another example—and itself can be understood as a means by which we are regulated through temporality (Winch, Littler & Keller, 2016).

By interrupting these understandings of sequential time and progress—for example, by revealing how issues such as abortion are repeatedly reasserted and reanimated—archives offer opportunities to resist our regulation through temporality within dominant relations of power. However, archival practices are necessarily political. Stuart Hall (2001) argues that “the activity of ‘archiving’ is... always a critical one, always a historically located one, always a contestatory one, since archives are in part constituted within the lines of force of cultural power and authority” (2001, pp. 89–92). While the aim of genealogy is to deconstruct ‘essential’ identities—including that of the researcher—this can never be fully realised because genealogical analysis itself remains animated by forces of the present. As Brown (2001) explains, “there is no illusion that we stand apart from ourselves” (p. 108). Therefore, while genealogy creates new possibilities for politics, it does not prescribe what these will be (Brown, 2001). Feminists’ engagement with archives therefore remain shaped by the neoliberal rationality of the present.

Methodology

This article uses qualitative research methods to critically examine the ‘scrap heap’ of published and archival material from the magazine *Broadsheet*. The entire collection of over 200 issues of *Broadsheet* has been digitised and made available by the University of Auckland (n.d.). In addition, its administrative records and other material are held within the Sir George Grey Special Collections in Tāmaki Makaurau. Following Anne Begg (2012, pp. 2-3), this article uses an “eclectic mix” of material to highlight “exemplary moments” and draw out the relations between

these. It primarily draws its material from several reflections on *Broadsheet*'s own history published within the magazine itself, as well as regular sections including "Fronting up: The workers' report to the readers" in which the Collective published notices, requests for volunteers or donations, future feature topics and deadlines, and details of its financial situation. These sections offer contemporary researchers insight into both the practicalities and sentiments of the magazine's production. In focusing on *Broadsheet*'s production rather than the histories of abortion in Aotearoa New Zealand, this article leaves largely unexplored the wider context of the struggle for reproductive rights, in which confrontations between pro-choice and pro-life groups occurred in media texts, physical protests and attacks, and in legislation and policy. Nor does it examine the range of differing 'feminist' perspectives on abortion—particularly in relation to intersections of race and colonialism—comprised within *Broadsheet* itself, despite these being an invaluable area for future research.

***Broadsheet*'s response to the Contraceptive, Sterilisation and Abortion Act 1977**

The CSA Act was passed into law in December 1977 under urgency (Goodyear-Smith, 2023). Prior to the Act, while abortion was a crime under the Crimes Act 1908, a 1961 amendment provided for lawful abortion up to 20 weeks gestation if "the person doing the act believed that the continuance of the pregnancy would result in serious danger... to the life, or to the physical or mental health, of the woman or girl" (New Zealand Parliament, 1961 cited in Goodyear-Smith, 2023, p. 73). This allowed for the establishment of the first abortion clinic in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Auckland Medical Aid Centre (AMAC), in 1974 (Goodyear-Smith, 2023). The increasing accessibility of abortion prompted increasing opposition. The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) led a series of anti-abortion campaigns that prompted a Royal Commission on Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion which investigated "whether current law on abortion met the needs of society, and whether any law changes should be made" (Goodyear-Smith, 2023, p. 74). As Goodyear-Smith (2023) explains:

The Commission was clearly anti-abortion... They recommended changes to the Crimes Act, including the setting up of a statutory committee to oversee the working of abortion law, and the establishment of panels to decide whether an

abortion being sought was justified under the law... The aim was a reduction in the number of abortions taking place. (p. 74).

It was on these recommendations that the CSA Act was introduced, and, despite feminist opposition, women's reproductive rights were abruptly restricted. In practice, this meant that:

Getting an abortion was now much more difficult. Women seeking consideration for abortion must be referred by their GP to two certifying consultants, one of whom must be an O&G specialist, and neither to be the operating doctor. An Abortion Supervisory Committee was established to appoint and regulate the certifying consultants and decide which institutions would be licenced to provide abortions. Neither socio-economic hardship, rape, incest, the health of the mother nor carrying a grossly abnormal baby that would be born with serious handicaps were grounds for an abortion. (Goodyear-Smith, 2023, p. 74).

The CSA Act emerged in a broader context of struggle for reproductive rights in Aotearoa New Zealand, of which *Broadsheet* had “followed every twist and turn... providing the kind of reportage the dailies are loathe to give” (Coney, 1982b, p. 16). This included, for example, a police raid and subsequent prosecution of Dr James Woolnough, who had been performing abortions at the AMAC (Broadsheet Collective, 1974) and the Hospital Amendment Act 1975, which appeared to specifically target the AMAC by restricting abortions to public hospitals. These formal interventions dovetailed with the protest and activism of anti-abortion groups. When the AMAC relocated to the former Aotea Hospital in order to circumnavigate the restrictions imposed by the 1975 Act, pro-life demonstrators set up outside the new premises “within hours” of the Centre's reopening, armed with “with a New Zealand flag at half-mast and a small white coffin, decorated with daffodils and a cross” (Coney, 1975, p. 11). Recounting these “frightening... fanatical and aggressive” activities, Coney (1975) predicted that pro-life activists may “resort to arson or assault, so reckless is their disregard for human life - when it's adult and female” (p. 12). This prediction was realised the following year, when the AMAC was attacked by arsonists in 1976, *Broadsheet* featured a photograph of a “charred and twisted hospital bed” in the burnt-out clinic on its cover (Coney, 1982b, p. 16). Similarly, the June 1977 cover of *Broadsheet* featured the names of three

women who had lost their lives to “backstreet abortions”, in protest of the Royal Commission’s controversial report (Coney, 1982b, p. 16).

When the CSA Act passed into law, therefore, *Broadsheet* was central to the rapid response from feminists. Coney (1982b) recalled that:

Even before workers picked up their morning papers, to read of the passing of the Act, posters had appeared in towns and cities all over New Zealand condemning the new Act. Initiated by Broadsheet workers the poster printing and paste up had been orchestrated from the Broadsheet office in Victoria Street. (p. 16).

In addition to this censure of the Act itself, feminists also worked quickly to provide support to women who sought abortions: “within hours of the passing of the Bill, Joss Shawyer in Auckland had formed the Sisters Overseas Service to get desperate women to Australia and within days similar groups sprang up throughout New Zealand” (Coney, 1982b, p. 16).

For *Broadsheet* magazine itself, however, the passing of the Act coincided with two forms of routine ‘pause’ in its production. The first of these was that its next issue, January 1978, had just gone to print. Here, a full-page comic strip published in 1980 provides useful insight into the processes of *Broadsheet*’s production. In contrast to the potential immediacy of contemporary digital communication, the production of *Broadsheet* spanned weeks. Having finalised the content for an issue (for copy was received and then reviewed or edited via mail), typesetting and layout took multiple days each, and a Collective member then had to catch a train from Tāmaki Makaurau to Whanganui to get the finalised pages to the printer—which itself took a week (Broadsheet Collective, 1980, p. 14). The point at which an issue went to print, then, was the point at which new content would be delayed for the longest before its publication. In several issues, the inclusion of the phrase “stop press!” indicates last-minute additions to an issue just ahead of this point, so that urgent news would not be delayed. Further, as these delays were inherent to these modes of production, they were not uncommon—as Beins (2017) writes, “delays in publication occasionally meant that announcements for events appeared after they had already occurred” (pp. 22-23). While the January 1978 issue addressed abortion extensively—its editorial even began “the abortion

struggle - why haven't we won it yet?" (Guy, 1978, p. 6)—the issue does not mention the Act at all. In the present example, however, this potential delay was compounded by a second form of 'pause', because the Broadsheet Collective did not publish a February issue of the magazine, instead taking an extended break in publishing over the holiday period. This standard publishing schedule therefore meant that, without intervention, *Broadsheet* would not have addressed the passing of the Act in print until March 1978.

My primary interest in this article is in how the Broadsheet Collective interrupted these rhythms of production by appending material to the printed magazines before they were distributed, in order to minimise delay in addressing the change in law. This intervention allowed the Collective to quickly provide women with basic and necessary information, before analysing the change in law more comprehensively in the following issue. As Coney (1982b) later recounts:

A flyer was hurriedly produced telling where women could go for help... *Broadsheet's* flyer, stuffed inside each January issue of the magazine, carried information on how to contact SOS and urging women to fight the new law. Volunteer workers patiently glued a label on the front of each magazine with the message: 'Where to get an abortion: see inside'. (p. 16).

The flyer itself has not been digitised as part of the January 1978 issue, illustrating the complexities and contention surrounding the digitisation of archival material, as I return to in the discussion. However, it can be viewed in *Broadsheet's* archives at the Auckland Central Library. A single page of black text on white paper, its title reads "How to get an abortion". The flyer refers primarily to the SOS, providing information about the service and contact details for Tāmaki Makaurau and Ōtautahi branches of the organisation, so that women "are not forced to resort to backstreet butchery" (Broadsheet Collective, 1978). It promises that the March issue will contain "more information on how to get an abortion, and what women can do to get the law repealed". Large text at the bottom reads "Make sure you get involved in fighting anti-abortion laws now!" (Broadsheet Collective, 1978).

Broadsheet's appending of additional material to the January 1978 issue was no small feat. The magazine perpetually lacked labour and resources, and the cost of materials required to produce the flyers and cover labels would not have been negligible. In an early editorial, Coney (1973) writes that the addition of a single extra page to the then twelve-page magazine meant they needed “to sell 100 extra Broadsheets to cover the cost... so bang goes our profit (meagre as it is)” (p. 2). Additional forms of precarity affected other stages of the communications circuit—the distribution of the January 1978, for example, was impeded by many shops’ refusal to carry the labelled copies of the magazine. A comment in the following issue, titled “We are offensive?” noted that the magazine had been withdrawn from a bookstore following a reported complaint, and was eventually replaced with non-labelled versions (Broadsheet Collective, 1978b, p. 11). This refusal reflects an additional form of ‘interruption’, illustrating interruptions to the communications circuit and “what founders in the system” described by Murray (2004, p. 16).

The following issue critiqued and condemned the change in law from several different angles. Feature articles included discussions of “tactics” to resist the change in law and reports on protests that have already taken place (Sinclair et al., 1978); and a discussion of the risks of hormonal contraception in anticipation of increased numbers of women considering using them in response to the new restrictions on abortion (Coney, 1978). Another article comprised a biographical account of the life of a solo mother (Tarver, 1978, p. 13). A “pull out” insert on abortion provided more instructive guidance to readers, including contact details for twelve different SOS groups around the country (Broadsheet Collective, 1978c). The insert outlined that the safest option for an abortion—to fly to Australia for a medical procedure—is also the most expensive: “An Australian abortion will cost you approximately \$500, inclusive of the return air fare, the operation, taxi fares, overnight accommodation and medication” (Broadsheet Collective, 1978c, p. 19). On the following two pages are descriptions of “the unpleasant alternatives” to abortion (Broadsheet Collective, 1978c, pp. 20-21). These were, emphatically, not suggestions or recommendations, but instead an attempt to provide information about the efficacy and side effects of alternative options to women who may be considering them. Anecdotal evidence highlighted the need to provide such information—under the heading “Desperate women take desperate measures”, the issue also included reports of books about herbal remedies being out of stock at libraries, Vitamin C tablets being sold for \$10 each, and pharmacies being nearly sold out of eucalyptus oil, in which people

had been soaking tampons (Broadsheet Collective, 1978c, p. 19). As Coney (1982b) later wrote, the magazine's "cover summed up the feeling of feminists: a woman held a baby under one arm, a placard with the other saying "NZ Women Crucified" under the caption "A giant step backward — abortion outlawed"" (p. 16).

Together, these issues of *Broadsheet* point to a fierce, coordinated response by *Broadsheet* and other feminists to the change in law. Later issues, however, offer insight into some of the dispiriting and demoralising effects of the law on and among feminists. An editorial in the May 1978 of *Broadsheet*, which reported on a Women's Abortion Rights Conference held in Tāmaki Makaurau in March, described the women's movement as "depressed; split and scattered, directionless and powerless" (Ranstead, 1978, p. 12). Recalling this period, Coney (1982b) described the Act as "a bitter defeat for the feminist movement", explaining that:

Despite polls which showed a majority of New Zealanders supported a woman's right to choose, despite the focusing of much feminist energy on this one issue, despite years of lobbying, protests and submissions, New Zealand women were now saddled with the heavy yoke of one of the most repressive abortion laws in the world. (p. 16).

As she continues, "If we couldn't win such a basic right for women, what could we hope to achieve?" (Coney, 1982b, p. 17). In addition to these feelings of defeat, feminist energy was preoccupied by reactive rather than proactive work. Coney (1982b) writes that the "feminist energy that then went into the practical work of getting women to Australia for abortion took a lot of the stuffing out of the women's movement" (p. 17).

The struggle for reproductive rights wore on. In May 1978, only a few months later, *Broadsheet* reported that an arson attack that had targeted the SOS offices over Easter (Coney, 1978b). The same issue included a last-minute addition headed "stop press" noting an additional arson attack at a clinic in Sydney (Coney, 1978b, p. 9). Five years later, in 1983, a note titled "STOP PRESS—Not abortion again" evoked both urgency and fatigue as The Status of the Unborn Child Bill was introduced by National MP Doug Kidd (Coney, 1983, p. 40). According to Coney (1983), Kidd

“frankly states [the bill] was drafted by SPUC”, the same group who had prompted the Royal Commission (p. 40). In contrast to the swift, coordinated response to the CSA Act, Coney (1983) appears uncertain that a similar effort could be activated, asking “Can we do it again?” (p. 40). Coney (1983) observes that “while there are plenty of feminists, there are few feminist organisations... The response of many feminists has been an anguished ‘Not again!’ Yes, we do have to fight the same battles over and over again” (p. 40). Later, Coney provides further insight into this perceived lack of feminist organisation when she writes:

When Kidd introduced his anti-abortion bill into parliament, Auckland, for instance, had no feminist abortion group. Only Wellington and Christchurch appear to have active fertility rights groups. It was left up to the solitary feminist in government — Marilyn Waring — to outmanoeuvre the anti-abortionists and save the day. (1985, p. 14).

Another significant battle occurred in 1984, when the subject of abortion was central to the highly organised protests by conservative women that targeted a series of women’s forums organised throughout the country ahead of the new Ministry of Women’s Affairs (Broadsheet Collective, 1985). With links to both Christian and ‘far right’ groups, including the League of Rights, these women instead advocated for “the Family, motherhood, and traditional Christian values” (Rankine, 1985, p. 14). During the forums, large groups of conservative women carried “sheets of instructions about their protest and information on policy ideas” (Calvert, 1985, p. 14), and, in blocks, voted solidly against Labour’s women’s policies, including “contraceptive advice, abortion, sterilization and sex education in schools” (Rankine, 1985, p. 17); its entire health policy (Coney, 1985, p. 13); and in one case even passed a resolution against abortion in China (Bush, 1985, p. 17). In Ōtautahi, the new Minister Ann Hercus was assaulted following a statement in support of abortion (Rankine, 1985, p. 18), and in Tāmaki Makaurau, an abortion clinic was set on fire on the night of the forum (Coney, 1985, p. 15). Here, too, Coney (1985) describes feelings of fatigue among feminists, who were frequently outnumbered. She writes that “there were no feminist planning meetings before the day — we went as individuals and we did battle as individuals” (p. 14).

Over a decade later, in the final issue of *Broadsheet*, Coney (1997) diagnoses a similar issue. As several writers reflect on the ‘progress’ made for women’s rights in Aotearoa New Zealand throughout the magazine’s publication, Coney (1997) remains vigilant, writing that while reproductive rights have certainly advanced since *Broadsheet*’s first issue, they continue to be vulnerable:

The current Minister of Health is conservative on abortion and the chair of the Health Parliamentary Select Committee is an anti-abortionist activist. Already some CHEs are not bothering to provide abortion services. Who is going to hold them to account? Should this issue come up in the coalition government caucus, there will only be one woman present. (p. 61).

These final reflections illustrate how the struggle over reproductive rights persisted throughout *Broadsheet*’s 25 years of publication.

Disrupting linear time: ‘Urgency’ and ‘delay’

The CSA Act, and *Broadsheet*’s response to it, represent “exemplary moments” that highlight the temporality and playing out of relations of power. As described earlier, the Act was passed under ‘urgency’, which allows the House to proceed with “business until it is completed... while under normal circumstances a bill cannot be taken through more than one stage each sitting day” (New Zealand Parliament, 2017). The use of urgency illustrates the power of the state to manipulate time and, in doing so, to further intensify its power by limiting or precluding opportunities for scrutiny. MPs have less time to become familiar with legislation before it is debated, and public consultation, including the select committee process, may be bypassed altogether (Geiringer et al., 2011). The use of urgency therefore represents an expansion of state power intended to be used in ‘exceptional’ circumstances. What can or should be considered ‘exceptional’, however, is inevitably contested. Geiringer et al. (2011) observe that a frequent, yet inadequate, reason for a government to use urgency is as a tool to “make progress” on their agenda (p. 153). The passing of the CSA Act in December also appears to reflect a pattern “of pre-Christmas urgency, when there is a particular desire to clear the order paper before the long summer recess” (Geiringer et

al., 2011, p. 56). As described above, the extended summer break was a further cause of delay for *Broadsheet's* response, as the Collective did not produce an issue in February.

The use of urgency also appears to be increasing. Reflecting Giorgio Agamben's (2005) argument that the state of exception has become "the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics" (2005, p. 2), former Green Party coleader James Shaw observed in 2024 that "by my count, the Government has put 16 bills through urgency and one item of Government business not through urgency" (Shaw, 2024, cited in Smith, 2024). In a highly controversial example, the New Zealand Parliament recently used urgency to pass the Pay Equity Amendment Bill, which both raised the threshold for making a pay equity claim and scrapped all 33 current claims, requiring that these be reinitiated under the new conditions (Moir, 2025b). A striking example of neoliberal rationality, the Bill was announced on 6 May as a measure that could lower the Government's costs by "billions of dollars", and had passed through all stages by the 8 May (Moir, 2025). It hardly seems a coincidence that former MP Marilyn Waring, described in *Broadsheet* as "the solitary feminist in government" (Coney, 1985, p. 14), has now set up a "people's select committee on pay equity" made up of several former women MPs to address the recent Bill (Waring, 2025). In this case, the Government's use of urgency to "make progress" (Geiringer et al., 2011, p.153) on its agenda has directly resulted in a stifling of 'progress' for Aotearoa New Zealand's lowest paid workers.

In contrast, time appears to be another resource that the *Broadsheet* Collective perpetually lacked, alongside and related to its limited labour and economic resources. Throughout *Broadsheet's* publication, the Collective frequently characterized its production in terms of urgency and crisis—in 1987, one collective member described how production moved "from one crisis to the next" (Singh, 1987, p. 38). In contrast to the 'urgency' of the Parliament, however, for *Broadsheet* this urgency appeared to constrain, rather than intensify, the Collective's power, stretching its already minimal resources to their limits. While the January 1978 issue of *Broadsheet* represents an example in which the 'pause' or delays inherent to its production processes could be utilised to striking effect, as the gravity felt by the Collective was embedded into the physical magazines. As described, however, subsequent efforts appeared to erode feminists' energy, and future occasions

illustrated that this effort could not be easily sustained or reproduced. Instead, feminists appeared to long for a moment of ‘pause’, or relief, from the relentless struggle over reproductive rights.

A second form of pause within this analysis is that of the archive, which fosters interaction and exchange between the CSA Act and the contemporary context, nearly 50 years later, in which abortion has been decriminalised by the Abortion Legislation Act 2020. Following Eichhorn (2013), I argue that the insight offered by archival analysis is crucial not as a means of illustrating or celebrating this ‘progress’, but rather as a means of exposing its contingency. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the narratives of linear progress described by Hemmings (2011) coalesce with national mythology that constructs the country as especially and even innately progressive (Blackett, 2016). Romanticised histories celebrate, for example, the early enfranchisement of women in 1893 as characteristic of Aotearoa New Zealand itself, rather than the result of struggle and resistance. In obscuring past histories of struggle, these narratives also work to negate any need for resistance in the future. This article therefore aims to contest these narratives in relation to reproductive rights by highlighting the contingency of contemporary ‘progress’. *Broadsheet*’s archives illustrate forceful opposition to abortion from both the Government and conservative groups such as SPUC. As Lowe (2022) explains in the context of the US, this opposition has continued through a “decades-long strategy of seeking power and influence in the US political and legal system” and is further extended in connection with global groups.

As Eichhorn (2013) explains, however, the opportunities fostered by genealogical analysis within archives are themselves constrained by the neoliberal forces of the present. Marika Cifor (2016) has examined how increasing emphasis on cost efficiency and even profitability has worked to commercialise archives. Digitised records may now be hosted within “privately owned, managed and for-profit subscription databases”, with users interpellated as “customers” (Cifor, 2016, p. 25). The prohibitive costs of digitisation mean that archival material must be selected and prioritised according to its ‘value’—an inevitably subjective parameter. Further, digital technologies may be more than simply tools that make “research easier and more convenient” (Hamilton & Sponberg, 2016, p. 671). Eichhorn (2014) maintains that the separation of digital records from their original contexts and formats may affect the knowledge to which they contribute. As noted earlier, the additional flyer was not included in the University of Auckland’s digitised version of *Broadsheet*’s

January 1978 issue, which does still show the label on the front. Whether or not the flyer remains in that copy of the magazine (which is unclear, although unlikely), the processes of digitisation amplify and entrench the initial marginality of *Broadsheet's* urgent response to the CSA Act by introducing an additional dimension of contingency to the intersections of knowledge and power.

“The abortion struggle - why haven't we won it yet?”

Broadsheet's response to the repressive effects of the CSA Act invites several different approaches to the theme of ‘pause’, including the interruptions to and delays within the magazine’s production, the disrupted temporality of the archive, and, although less explored within this article, the affective longing for pause or relief from the relentless struggle for reproductive rights. This article has focused primarily on how temporality operates as a mechanism of power through the juxtaposition of Parliamentary use of urgency, which represents both a manifestation and intensification of state power, and the *Broadsheet Collective's* negotiation of intrinsic delays within their production practices through last-minute modifications and additions. It has further explored how linear narratives of ‘progress’ are disrupted within archives, which instead underscore feminist histories as circuitous and contingent.

The subject of abortion recurred frequently throughout *Broadsheet's* 25 years of publication, from its first issue to its last, and has remained a constant concern in the over 25 years since *Broadsheet* ceased publishing. While my reflections in this article are situated in a context in which abortion was recently decriminalised, this is juxtaposed against the removal of protections in the US, where 27 states have since removed or restricted access to abortion (Guttmacher Institute, 2024). As Goodyear-Smith (2023) insists, then, “we cannot be complacent” (p. 76). This article has used *Broadsheet* magazine to demonstrate how archival analysis can be used to interrogate the notion of linear progress and to argue that reproductive rights are neither inevitable nor secure and always remain fragile.

Acknowledgements

My sincerest thanks to the kaimahi at the Sir George Grey Special Collections for their assistance with *Broadsheet's* archival material, and to my supervisor Dr. Anne Begg for her invaluable support. I am also deeply grateful to the reviewers for their generous and constructive engagement.

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Framing and Political Communication: A Literature Review of Theoretical Foundations and International Conflict Reporting

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Abstract

Framing theory has become a foundational concept across social sciences and political communication, providing insights into how information is structured and interpreted. This paper explores key concepts of framing, including its diverse definitions, the distinction between frames in communication and frames in thought, and framing effects. It discusses how political communication strategically constructs frames to shape public perceptions, guide media narratives, and consolidate political power. The study also reviews framing practices in international conflict reporting, focusing on war, humanitarian crises, and economic conflicts. In war reporting, frames often create moral dichotomies, justify violence, and reflect national interests, with significant variation across countries and over time. Humanitarian crises tend to be framed through victimisation and emotional appeal, which can foster empathy but may also reinforce stereotypes and obscure structural causes. Economic conflicts, such as trade wars and financial crises, are framed to legitimise policy positions, reflect geopolitical alignments, and shape perceptions of blame and responsibility. By integrating theoretical foundations with cross-national applications, this study argues that framing theory remains a foundational concept in political communication studies to evaluate the media's role in international conflicts. Understanding these framing dynamics is essential to critically assess media's role in shaping public perception, political agendas, and international relations in an increasingly volatile global landscape.

Keywords: Framing, Framing Theory, Literature Review, Communication, Political Framing, International Conflict

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of framing has gained growing popularity in media research and has been adopted across various fields such as communication, sociology, and political science. Framing theory is a central analytical tool to understand how information is constructed, presented, and interpreted in political and international contexts. In an era marked by rising populism, political polarisation, disinformation campaigns, and escalating global conflict, framing theory offers a vital lens for examining how media narratives shape public perception, mobilise emotions, and legitimate power (Sarwar and Aziz, 2024). By shaping the portrayal of issues, events, and actors, frames influence public perception, opinion formation, and decision-making (Chong and Druckman, 2007b; Olmastroni, 2014). This influence is powerful because framing draws attention to certain aspects of reality while simultaneously omitting others, thereby shaping how individuals perceive and interpret events (Borah, 2011).

A key distinction within framing theory is between “frames in communication”, the structures embedded in messages and “frames in thought” the mental frameworks that guide individual interpretation (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). This distinction helps clarify the dynamic interaction between message construction and audience interpretation. Moreover, understanding framing effects how media frames affect attitudes, judgments, and decisions is central to the theory (Druckman, 2001b; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Nelson et al, 1997). This paper examines framing effects through two commonly discussed dimensions, providing a nuanced interpretation of this process.

Building on this theoretical foundation, a distinction is drawn between non-strategic framing in news media and strategic framing in political communication. News framing is generally non-strategic, shaped by professional routines, sourcing practices, and institutional norms rather than deliberate persuasion (Shoemaker and Reese, 2013). In contrast, political actors (e.g., governments and parties) engage in strategic framing to define issues, assign blame, and shape public and media agendas (Hallahan, 2011). Although both involve selection and salience, this paper treats them separately: news frames are outcomes of news production, while political frames are instruments of influence, often attempting to dominate media narratives. This distinction is essential for understanding power dynamics in international conflict reporting.

Framing theory has been widely employed to analyse media coverage of complex political phenomena such as war, humanitarian crises, and economic conflicts. In these contexts, media narratives are constructed not only to inform but also to influence and persuade audiences by shaping perceptions of causes, moral responsibility, and potential solutions (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2010). These frames often reflect broader ideological, political, and institutional interests (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Pan, 2008). In international conflict reporting, for example, strategic selection and salience are used to construct national identity, justify violence, or advocate policy agendas (Entman, 2009; Manor and Crilley, 2018). Similarly, in economic disputes such as the U.S.–China trade war and the Eurozone debt crisis, framing determines not only what is considered newsworthy but also how accountability and legitimacy are assigned (Busby et al, 2019; Yang and Van Gorp, 2023).

Despite its widespread adoption, framing theory remains a “fractured paradigm” as Entman (1993) described, characterised by inconsistent definitions, fragmented application across subfields, and limited interdisciplinary synthesis (Borah, 2011; Cacciatore et al, 2016). This fragmentation obscures theoretical coherence and hinders practical applications, particularly in political communication, where frames influence global understanding of conflicts (Walter and Ophir, 2019). To address this gap, this paper employs a systematic literature review, synthesising core theoretical concepts with examples from prior studies on war, humanitarian crises, and economic conflicts. By integrating these dimensions, it contributes a unified theoretical framework that bridges siloed perspectives, clarifies the cognitive and strategic roles of framing, and supports future empirical and comparative research in evolving media landscapes.

Definition of Framing

Research on frames and framing is widely used across the social and cognitive sciences, along with numerous subfields of political science. Scholars across various fields including social movements, negotiation tactics, foreign policy, jury decisions, media influence, political psychology, public opinion, voting behavior, and political campaigns widely apply the concept of framing in their research (Druckman, 2001a). As it is applied broadly, the terms “frame” or “framing” often lack a clear and consistent definition.

Originally from sociologist Goffman (1974), he suggested frames are deeply rooted in cultural belief systems and guide how people interpret everyday experience. Frames not only simplify complex information but also shape and reshape individuals’ views of reality. Morley

(1976, p. 246) emphasised the significance of analysing the “basic conceptual and ideological framework” that shapes how events are portrayed, leading to one dominant interpretation over others. Gitlin (1980) described framing as a consistent way of thinking, interpreting, and presenting information by choosing what to highlight or omit. Communicators adopt these frames to organise large amounts of information and share it effectively and regularly with audiences. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) defined a frame as a central organising idea within media discourse that shapes how relevant events or issues are interpreted and understood. The frame functions as the core meaning structure that defines what is at stake in a given topic. Rather than prescribing a single viewpoint, a frame encompasses a range of positions within its interpretive boundaries, allowing debate among those who share it.

One of the most widely cited and influential definitions of framing comes from Entman (1993, p. 51), who defined framing as a “fractured paradigm” involving selection and salience. To frame is to highlight specific aspects in communication to influence how people define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. Frames have four locations in communication: “the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Communicators, either deliberately or unconsciously, make framing choices when deciding what to convey, guided by underlying frameworks that structure their beliefs. The text contains frames, revealed through the inclusion or omission of specific keywords, common phrases, typical images, information sources, and clusters of facts or judgments that reinforce particular themes. Receivers interpret the text through their own frames, which may align with or differ from those embedded in the text and the communicator’s original intent. Culture represents the shared collection of commonly used frames, which can be seen as the set of widely recognised frames reflected in public discourse and thought within a society. Across all four locations, framing serves similar functions: selecting and emphasising certain elements to build an argument about problems, their causes, evaluation, and solutions. Altheide and Schneider (2013) expanded the definition, describing frames as the central focus or boundaries for examining a particular issue, often serving as a main theme. In this sense, framing becomes a way of highlighting certain aspects over others. Pan (2008) explained that definition explores the cognitive basis of salience by detailing how different levels of salience are created through selection, where a frame is located within a text, and how these texts produce concrete political effects by reinforcing particular problem definitions and policy suggestions. This emphasis approach demonstrates how focusing on certain elements of information directs individuals’ attention to those specific aspects (Druckman, 2001a).

Hertog and McLeod (1995) argued framing sets the context for understanding an event the way an event is framed determines which information is relevant or irrelevant. For example, if a protest march is framed as a clash between police and demonstrators, the protesters' social criticism may be excluded not due to lack of space, but because it is not considered pertinent within that frame. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) described framing as the particular way a story is shaped or presented through headlines, word choices, rhetorical tools, narrative structure, and more. They argue frames can activate existing knowledge, draw on cultural values, and establish meaningful context.

Framing theory is based on the idea that an issue can be seen from different angles and be interpreted in relation to various values or concerns (Chong and Druckman, 2007a). Framing is how individuals shape their understanding of an issue or shift their perspective on the issue. According to Reese (2001, p. 11), "frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world." Framing differs in how effectively and thoroughly it organises information, offering identifiable patterns or structures that range in complexity. These frames are grounded in abstract principles, distinct from the specific texts through which they are expressed. For a frame to be meaningful and communicable, it must be shared at some level among individuals. Additionally, the enduring significance of frames comes from their persistence and routine use over time, often revealed through symbolic forms of expression.

Despite its origins over five decades ago, framing theory remains highly adaptable to contemporary media environments (Roslyng and Dindler, 2023; Walsh and Schunn, 2025), particularly through its core mechanisms of frames in communication, frames in thought, and framing effects the focus of the following sections. While foundational definitions emphasise selection, salience, and cultural resonance, recent scholarship has extended these concepts to digital and social media contexts (López-Rabadán, 2021; Wilk et al, 2024). For instance, platforms like Tik Tok and Facebook allow political actors and users to frame messages quickly with multiple modes, blurring traditional boundaries between message construction and interpretation (Klinger et al, 2024). This evolution underscores the enduring significance of framing in examining international conflict coverage, especially as digital narrative increasingly shapes global public opinion.

Frames in Communication and Frames in Thought

These definitions reveal two different interpretations: frames in communication and frames in thought. First, frames refer to words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that a communicator chooses when sharing information, known as frames in communication (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Gitlin, 1980). The specific frame selected by the communicators reflects what they consider relevant to the topic (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). For example, a politician who focuses on security issues during a campaign discussion is employing a security frame, indicating that security matters are significant in that context. This approach is common in elite discourse (Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Simon, 2001). For instance, Gamson and Modigliani (1987) demonstrated that critics of affirmative action gradually moved from framing it as an undeserved advantage to framing it as reverse discrimination. In other words, the discourse shifted from asking whether African Americans deserved special rights to questioning whether it was fair to limit the rights of whites to help African Americans.

Second, frames describe an individual's cognitive interpretation of a situation, known as frames in thought (Goffman, 1974; Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). In this context, a frame is not a feature of communication but rather reflects how a person perceives and makes sense of a situation (Druckman, 2001a). It highlights what the individual considers important for understanding that situation. For instance, a person who evaluates political candidates based on their security policies is considered to have a security frame of mind.

Frames in communication and frames in thought are similar, both focused on differences in emphasis or salience. The key difference is that frames in communication pertain to what a speaker says such as key points emphasised in elite discourse while frames in thought focus on what an individual thinks such as the aspects of an event a citizen thinks are most significant (Druckman, 2001a).

Framing Effects

Frames in communication often significantly influence frames in thought a process known as a framing effect. Framing effects, introduced by Tversky and Kahneman (1981), show that how choices are presented can shape an individual's judgments and decisions. People's preferences are strongly by the way options are worded or framed. Research on framing effects has developed into two main areas: valence framing effects and emphasis framing effects, each exploring distinct effects. One type, known as valence framing or equivalency framing, explores how using different but logically similar words or phrases like "5 percent

unemployment” versus “95 percent employment” (Quattrone and Tversky, 1988) can change people’s opinions (Druckman, 2001a). This effect happens when the same essential information is framed in either a positive or negative way, leading people to respond differently.

According to Levin et al. (1998), there are three types of valence framing effects: risky choice framing, attribute framing, and goal framing. First, risky choice framing presents possible outcomes of a decision with varying levels of risk in different ways. People’s preferences between risky and riskless options both having the same expected outcome—varied depending on whether options were framed positively or negatively (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). When outcomes were framed positively (highlighting gains), people tended to choose safer and risk-averse options; when framed negatively (emphasising losses), people were more likely to take risks. This demonstrates that choices can be influenced by wording rather than purely rational evaluation. Second, attribute framing focuses on a particular feature of an object or event (Levin et al, 1998), emphasising how its positive or negative description affects people’s evaluations. Unlike risky choice framing, which involves choosing between independent options, attribute framing measures basic evaluations such as rating favorability or making yes/no judgments reflecting how framing affects perception directly. Third, goal framing highlights the intended outcome or purpose of an action, presenting issues in terms of potential gains (positive frame) or potential losses (negative frame). Both frames aim to encourage the same action, but the key question is which frame emphasising gains or avoiding losses is more effective at persuading people. This effect is widely used in persuasive communication, where messages stress either the rewards of acting or the risks of inaction to influence decision-making.

The second type of framing effect, known as emphasis framing effect, occurs when a speaker highlights certain relevant factors, prompting people to pay more attention to these factors when forming their opinions (Druckman, 2001a). For example, if a politician frames a campaign around human-interest issues, voters are likely to assess politicians in terms of their human-interest policies. This can lead voters to favor politicians with a stronger human-interest stance. Like valence framing effects, emphasis framing effects shape opinions by drawing attention to specific facets or descriptions of an issue. However, unlike valence framing where different frames present logically equivalent versions of the same message emphasis framing involves highlighting distinct and potentially relevant considerations.

Researchers have explored two main effects of emphasis framing (Druckman, 2001b). One approach looks at how different frames cause people to base their opinions on different reasons, without focusing much on their overall stance. For instance, Kinder and Sanders (1990)

found that when framed as undeserved advantage, White individuals oppose affirmative action mainly due to racial biases, while a reverse-discrimination frame causes opposition based on perceived threats to their own group's interests. Another approach focuses on how frames change overall opinions without examining the underlying reasons. For instance, Sniderman and Theriault (2004) discovered that public support for increased government spending on the poor rises when such spending is portrayed as a means of helping them advance in society.

Framing in Political Communication

Framing operates on two distinct levels in political communication, distinguished by intent and agency. Strategic framing is employed intentionally by political actors to shape public opinion, guide media coverage, and build support (Benford and Snow, 2000; Hallahan, 2011; Matthes, 2012). Elites selectively emphasise issues where they have an advantage and employ polling to tailor messages. These frames are proactive tools of persuasion, often designed to influence news coverage. By contrast, news framing is largely non-strategic: reporters construct stories through routine practices guided by newsworthiness, institutional constraints, and cultural proximity (Shoemaker and Reese, 2013). While news frames may reflect institutional biases, they are not crafted with persuasive intent. Political actors often target these passive news frames, generating a ripple effect in which strategic political framing aims to dominate public discourse.

A growing body of literature has examined how political figures, particularly presidents, manipulate frames to maintain or enhance their popularity, respond to public opinion, and control the agenda in both domestic and international contexts. For instance, Druckman and Holmes (2004) investigated the strategic frames used in President George Bush's 2002 State of the Union address. Faced with a divided audience, whose attention was shifting from terrorism and homeland security to a struggling economy and potential recession, Bush was predicted to highlight terrorism and the economy equally in response to this shift in focus. However, Bush strategically emphasised terrorism and homeland security because his approval ratings in this area were dramatically higher (about 86 percent) compared to the economy (about 31 percent). By framing the nation's status around terrorism, Bush aimed to boost his public image, which he successfully did. This strategy was evident in his address, with 49 percent of his focus on terrorism and only 10 percent on the economy, influencing subsequent media coverage (Gubitza et al., 2018). Druckman and Jacobs (2020) expanded this understanding by examining how contemporary U.S. presidents use framing to influence public

opinion. Three U.S. presidents, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan were investigated to explore how these governments utilised private polling data to impact public perception. The presidents monitored public opinion on various issues, and then framed their statements accordingly to emphasise the topics that could improve their public image.

Additionally, the public's response to the initial frame can impact how the administration adjusts its frames. Iyengar and Kinder (2010) examined how media framing affects the salience of political issues, demonstrating that the framing of news stories can determine which issues the public considers important. Similarly, Barone and Swan (2009) found that framing in the context of the 9/11 attacks shaped public opinion on civil liberties, illustrating how media narratives can shift values and beliefs depending on the emphasis applied. Other scholars have extended this work to international contexts. Roth and Gray (2012) examined how media framing and cultural factors impact public perception and policy decisions regarding foreign conflicts, while Tarish et al (2022) explored how the American media frame the speeches of Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump concerning the foreign policy of the Middle East.

While political figures use framing to shape public opinion and influence the media, these efforts are often amplified, reinterpreted, or challenged by journalistic practices, especially in the context of international conflict. The next section examines how media institutions frame global conflicts, how these practices reflect broader political and cultural interests, and how framing influences audience perception of war and peace.

Framing Practices in International Conflict Report

Framing in international conflict reporting is one of the most insightful and critical applications of framing theory in communication studies. Rather than merely describing events, these practices actively construct political realities, shape public opinion, and influence diplomatic outcomes (Carragee and Roefs, 2004). Through strategic selection and salience, framing patterns identify which aspects of the conflict such as causes, actors, consequences, or solutions are emphasised or omitted. The process can underscore specific interests, biases, or agendas, making it essential to critically examine how conflicts are portrayed. Therefore, understanding these framing dynamics is crucial for evaluating media narratives and their broader implications for international relations.

Framing theory provides a useful lens for examining how media interpret and mediate meaning during international crises. Unlike domestic issues, which may be covered with relative proximity and cultural familiarity, international conflicts require the media to act as

interpreters of distant events, cultures, and ideologies. The frames that journalists and media institutions use guide audience interpretation, especially when direct experience is lacking. These frames also intersect with national identity, foreign policy agendas, journalistic norms, and public sentiment all of which shape the final media product (Gilboa, 2002).

Scholars increasingly use framing theory to explore how wars, humanitarian crises, and political and economic tensions are constructed in the global news agenda. This includes analysing frame selection, frame contestation among different actors (e.g., states and media outlets), and frame effects on public opinion and policy outcomes. In the digital era, framing has become more complex and dynamic, often combining official, journalistic, and user-generated narratives. These developments call for a renewed focus on framing practices not only as static textual features but as part of interactive, transmedia processes embedded in cultural and political structures (Chong and Druckman, 2007a; D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2010).

Framing War

The study of how wars and conflicts are portrayed in the media is critical to understanding the broader political, cultural, and social implications of these events. Media framing of war is not merely a reflection of battlefield realities it is a powerful process that shapes public perception, policy debates, and ultimately, political outcomes. This section reviews key scholarly contributions that reveal the complex, strategic, and dynamic nature of war framing in the media.

For instance, in their analysis of U.S. and Swedish coverage of the Iraq War, Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2005) found American media were more likely to emphasise military strategy and national interest, whereas Swedish media highlighted civilian suffering and international law. The differences illustrate meso-level institutional and normative factors that influence framing decisions. Media framing can shape public opinion differently across countries by focusing on certain aspects of war while ignoring others, potentially fostering national consensus or silencing dissenting perspectives.

Boydston and Glazier (2013) used the example of the “War on Terror” to showcase how media framing evolves over time. They proposed a two-tiered approach, where the first level focuses on issue-specific frames (such as democratisation, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction), and the second level deals with generalisable frames (such as gain vs. loss or self-referential vs. other-referential frames). This paper highlights how the framing of the war shifted from predominantly fear-based, self-referential loss frames to more charity-based, other-referential gain frames. It shows how early media coverage emphasised potential losses

(e.g., the danger to U.S. troops) later shifted to potential benefits (e.g., democratisation efforts). The approach provides compound insights into the framing process, enhancing our understanding of how media influence public opinion and policy decisions.

Manor and Crilley (2018) examined how the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) used Twitter to frame the 2014 Gaza War. They identified 14 linguistic frames, supported by visual media, to legitimise Israel's policies. The study highlighted three main visual tropes: Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East, a high-tech start-up nation, and the David-versus-Goliath narrative. These frames created a moral dichotomy between Israel and Hamas, portraying Israel as morally superior. The research underscored the MFA's proactive and reactive framing and its strategic use of digital diplomacy to influence global audiences. However, news organisations and journalists are not the only actors employing framing techniques; governments also construct frames to present their policies positively in the media. The use of framing by governments is especially evident in foreign policy and war contexts (Entman, 2009).

Vladislavljević (2015) provided a critical overview of how contemporary media frame different types of political conflict. He approached the research through three lenses: interstate and civil wars, institutional conflicts and popular protest in democracies, conflicts in non-democratic regimes and democratisation. This study highlights the importance of understanding the political context in which media framing occurs and its impact on political outcomes. Framing is strategic when communicators such as politicians, commentators, and editorial writers aim to exert political influence by proposing interpretations that advance their interests or goals.

Frames in communication can be seen in how different outlets or state actors choose to present an issue (e.g., U.S. strategic/military vs. Swedish humanitarian priorities; the digital tropes of the Israeli MFA). These choices strategically underscore definitions of problems and their morality. Such cues shape how audiences think about the issue, guiding them to focus on aspects like security, legality, or victimhood when evaluating a conflict. The resulting framing effects appear as emphasis effects (e.g., civilian suffering vs. military success), valence effects (e.g., -liberation/security-gains vs. -casualty/occupation-losses), and affect perceived legitimacy, intervention support, and toleration of cost.

These studies demonstrate that war coverage is far from neutral or objective. Instead, media narratives actively interpret, emphasise, or obscure aspects of conflict to align with political, cultural, and institutional interests. This process is influenced by journalistic routines, institutional norms, and geopolitical considerations. Scholars have identified recurring frame

types such as military strategy, human interest, victim, and moral evaluation that shape how conflicts are portrayed and understood by audiences (Canetti et al, 2019). Research by Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2005) and Boydston and Glazier (2013) illustrates framing shifts across time and context, reflecting underlying power dynamics and audience expectations. Similarly, strategic framing by state actors, as Manor and Crilley (2018) show, demonstrates how governments actively engage in shaping international public opinion to legitimise their policies. Vladislavljević (2015) further underscores that framing is inherently political, functioning as a tool for competing actors to shape domestic and global understandings of conflict. Overall, these insights reveal war reporting is a highly contested arena where selective emphasis and symbolism construct meaning, reinforce moral dichotomies, justify violence, and shape policy debates (Markham, 2013; Hackett, 2006).

Framing Humanitarian Crises

Framing theory has proven valuable in the analysis of humanitarian crises, where media representations significantly shape public understanding, emotional engagement, and political reactions (Berinsky and Kinder, 2006; Xu and Zhang, 2024). Commonly identified humanitarian frames include victimisation, human interest, responsibility, and intervention/relief, which serve to construct both the moral narrative and the call to action (Chouliaraki, 2010; Cottle and Nolan, 2007). These frames determine what is reported and how suffering is contextualised shaping the line between compassion and indifference.

A critical concern in this area is the tendency of Global North media to emotionally charged, individualised portrayals emphasising helpless victims and heroic aid responses (Pantti et al, 2012). While these frames may mobilise short-term attention and donor support, they risk reinforcing stereotypes of passivity and dependency, especially when local agency and political complexity are downplayed. This suggests the need for media to move beyond emotional appeal and incorporate more nuanced portrayals that respect the dignity and resilience of affected communities.

Comparative and cross-cultural research further demonstrates that frame selection is shaped by media systems, national ideologies, and geopolitical interests. For example, Zhang and Fahmy (2009) compared how *The New York Times* (U.S.) and *The Moscow Times* (Russia) covered political movements in Ukraine, Belarus, and Uzbekistan. They found *The New York Times* exhibited a pro-movement bias, using more favourable terms and sources, while *The Moscow Times* showed a pro-incumbent bias, often depicting protesters unfavourably. Both

newspapers focused on internal causes of the movements, but *The Moscow Times* placed more emphasis on external influences, such as U.S. involvement. The study underscores the influence of geopolitical interests on media coverage and the challenges of maintaining journalistic independence.

Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) compared specific frames with generic frames in humanitarian crisis reporting, investigating how Spanish newspapers cover countries experiencing such crises. The findings revealed that most humanitarian crises are underreported, with Afghanistan receiving the most attention. Media often employ mixed frames, such as attributing responsibility for to governments, rather than classic framing types. The discussion points out that media tend to overlook many crises, concentrating on a few, and emphasising conflict and human interest over economic consequences and moral considerations. The study calls for more balanced and comprehensive reporting on humanitarian crises.

Humanitarian crises within conflict zones are frequently framed through a lens of suffering and victimhood, rather than through a critical interrogation of root causes or international complicity. As Chouliaraki (2006) argued, this spectacle of suffering risks fostering disengaged spectatorship rather than active public concern. Such framing may ultimately weaken democratic accountability by diverting attention from the root causes of crises and international complicity. Thus, a critical examination of framing practices reveals their potential to either sustain or challenge prevailing power structures.

In this case, communication frames are victimisation, responsibility, and intervention discourses, which shape the sense of agency or lack thereof for the agentic and the agented. These cues when combined with frames can promote compassion, deservingness, or fatigue. The effects of framing include emphasis effects (e.g., focusing on human-interest details tends to increase willingness to support relief) and goal framing/attribute framing (loss-focused versus gain-focused appeals to prevent suffering or save lives), which can motivate action but may also shift attention away from structural factors.

In conclusion, framing theory helps explain how media influence audience perceptions, emotional engagement, and political will to humanitarian crises. The dominance of victimisation and human-interest frames, particularly in the Global North media, often mobilises empathy but risks oversimplifying complex realities and reinforcing stereotypes. Comparative studies, such as those by Zhang and Fahmy (2009) and Ardèvol-Abreu (2015), underscore the extent to which national ideologies, media systems, and geopolitical interests shape frame selection and narrative emphasis. This literature reveals a persistent tension between eliciting compassion and promoting critical awareness highlighting the need for more

nuanced, context-sensitive reporting that does not merely depict suffering, but interrogates its origins and systemic perpetuation.

Framing of Economic Conflicts

Economic conflicts, such as trade wars, financial crises, and transnational development projects, are fertile ground for media framing analysis. These conflicts are shaped not just by material realities but by how media highlight and interpret events, influencing public perception and policy legitimacy. Across different geopolitical contexts, media apply distinct frames depending on institutional interests, political alignments, and audience expectations.

The U.S.–China Trade War. The U.S.–China trade war (2018–2020) provides a clear example. American media often adopted a national-interest frame, aligning tariffs with the protecting domestic industries and national sovereignty. Trump’s populist “Tariff Man” rhetoric reinforced a blame frame, casting China as responsible for economic problems (Busby et al, 2019). This rhetorical strategy mobilised public sentiment against globalisation while legitimising protectionist policies. In contrast, Chinese state media framed the conflict through a global economic consequence lens, emphasising the broader risks to the world economy and advocating for multilateral cooperation. Ha et al. (2020) found that the outlets such as *Xinhua* and *People’s Daily* portrayed the trade war as a product of U.S. unilateralism, framing China as a rational actor defending global stability. The conflict frame was also used to depict China as a victim of Western aggression, highlighting resilience and national dignity.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The framing of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) varies significantly between domestic and international media. Chinese outlets emphasised the BRI’s potential for development, employing a national-interest and economic-opportunity frame to highlight mutual benefits and “win-win” cooperation. This narrative constructed China as a benevolent global leader, fostering connectivity and infrastructure development (Huang, 2016). Western media, particularly in the U.S. and Europe, often framed the BRI with skepticism and strategic conflict frames. Concerns over “debt-trap diplomacy,” neo-colonial ambitions, and the geopolitical motivations behind the initiative were prominent. These frames emphasise power imbalances and portray recipient countries as vulnerable, contributing to narratives of China as a challenger to Western hegemony (Yang and Van Gorp, 2023).

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Media framing of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC) played a crucial role in shaping public understanding of its causes and appropriate responses. In the U.S., coverage often employed an episodic frame that focused on individual

failures such as personal debt and irresponsible borrowing thereby deflecting attention from systemic regulatory issues (Iyengar et al, 1991; Krippner, 2012). This individual responsibility frame supported narratives justifying austerity and neoliberal recovery policies. European coverage varied: German tabloid *Bild-Zeitung* notoriously used blame frames to depict Southern European nations, especially Greece, as lazy and corrupt, fuelling public opposition to EU bailouts (Mylonas, 2012). Meanwhile, Greek media adopted a structural injustice frame, attributing the crisis to EU-level economic imbalances and austerity pressures from creditor institutions.

The Eurozone Debt Crisis. The Eurozone debt crisis further illustrated the interplay of media framing and national interests. Northern European media particularly in fiscally conservative countries like Germany used moral judgment and blame frames, framing the crisis as a result of profligate Southern European governments (Streeck and Schäfer, 2013). This reinforced public resistance to financial assistance and austerity relaxation. Southern European media, by contrast, emphasised the consequences of imposed austerity and the undemocratic nature of European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund mandates. Such frames positioned debtor nations as victims of structural inequality, contributing to discourses of injustice and democratic deficit within the European Union.

In this context, casual attributions and responsibility are structured by frames such as national interest, blame/credit, sovereignty, or structural injustice. These framing guide how audiences weigh protection, fairness, or integration. The resulting framing effects include emphasis effects (e.g., domestic job protection vs. global spillovers) and valence effects (tariffs as shields vs. tax; austerity as discipline vs. punishment), systematically manipulating attitudes toward tariffs, bailouts, and multilateral cooperation.

In conclusion, the reviewed examples underscore the pivotal role of media framing in shaping public understanding and legitimising policy responses during economic conflicts. Across diverse geopolitical contexts from the U.S.–China trade war to the Eurozone debt crisis media narratives selectively emphasise causes, consequences, and moral evaluations in ways that align with national interests, political ideologies, and structural media constraints. While Chinese state media tend to reinforce themes of resilience, sovereignty, and global cooperation, Western commercial media often highlight conflict, strategic competition, and individual accountability. These findings reveal that economic conflicts are not only struggles over material resources but also battles over meaning and perception. As such, future research should further explore comparative framing across media systems, investigate audience

reception, and assess the implications of framing for international political communication and global economic governance.

Conclusion

Framing theory offers a compelling framework for understanding how meaning is constructed, communicated, and interpreted in political discourse. Its conceptual evolution from Goffman's foundational insights to Entman's systematic model of selection and salience demonstrates the theory's adaptability across cognitive, cultural, and communicative contexts. The distinction between frames in communication and frames in thought is particularly important, as it explains how external message construction interacts with internal cognitive processing to influence public opinion and decision-making. Moreover, framing effects, such as valence and emphasis framing reveal how subtle shifts in language or focus can powerfully shape judgments, preferences, and policy outcomes.

The application of framing theory to international conflicts, humanitarian crises, and economic disputes highlights its indispensable role in understanding the media's influence on public discourse and policy formation. Media frames not only structure how conflicts and crises are understood but also reflect broader political, cultural, and institutional interests (Gilboa, 2009). In war coverage, framing guides moral evaluations, justifies violence, and steers political debates. In humanitarian contexts, dominant victimisation and human-interest frames mobilise empathy but can oversimplify complex realities. In economic conflicts, media framing mediates public perception and legitimacy in ways linked to geopolitical alignments and media systems. These examples show framing is not just about communication but also about contest over meaning and power in global affairs. Framing theory thus remains a cornerstone of political communication research, providing a vital framework for analysing media's role in constructing political realities in international conflicts.

Empirical studies show framing is strategic and ideologically charged, reflecting broader power structures, cultural narratives, and institutional goals (Snow, 2004; Zald, 1996). Whether constructing national identities in war reporting, emotional engagement in humanitarian coverage, or policy actions in economic crises, media frames serve as tools for influence and persuasion. These findings underscore the urgent need for critical media literacy and comparative framing research that transcends national boundaries. Examining framing practices helps uncover how public discourse is shaped and encourages more transparent, inclusive, and responsible communication. By linking theoretical foundations with applications

in international conflict reporting, this paper addresses the gap in cross-cultural integration and multimodal dynamics. It enables researchers to move beyond isolated examinations toward comparative and predictive frameworks, such as evaluating geopolitical influences on narrative construction.

Despite its broad utility, framing research faces several limitations. This research focuses on media content analysis, with less attention on audience reception or long-term effects across cultures. In addition, the existing literature is largely Western-centric, raising concerns about generalisability. Future research should aim to bridge these gaps by incorporating interdisciplinary methods that combine textual analysis with audience studies and cognitive psychology. Comparative investigations across media systems and geopolitical environments are particularly needed to deepen understanding of how frames operate in varied political and cultural settings.

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