Reflection Essay

I began my research project in the midst of a media firestorm centering on Representative Ilhan Omar – a freshman Democrat from Minnesota who I’ve always felt an especially close connection with. I am from Minnesota, and like many other Muslim-Americans across the nation, Ilhan Omar’s induction into the MN House of Representatives and then Congress was a source of hope and comfort for me, especially since the political climate lately has become increasingly negative towards Muslims. In previous research projects, I had read works by Edward Said and other scholars who discussed Orientalism and how Islamophobic ideas are perpetuated by influential figures in society like the media. As the controversies around Rep. Omar started to pile up, I became curious about the way that different media sources were covering her, and whether the angles they were using in their articles furthered Islamophobic stereotypes or negative messages about minorities in general.

I decided to use generic news frames to analyze my articles and determine whether liberal, centrist, and conservative media outlets used more fact-based frames (which don’t encourage readers to relate to Omar) or news frames that made their readers sympathize with Omar. However, I wanted to add a second layer to my project by looking at whether those same media outlets also framed their articles in an Islamophobic manner. Since the article about news frames we had read in class talked about both generic and issue-specific news frames, I assumed that finding an article about issue-specific frames related to Islamophobia would be fairly simple.

After consulting my professor and the Gelman librarian who led a workshop on how to use Gelman’s resources, I realized that there was not a lot of literature on Islamophobia and that I would need to broaden my search to find an article on issue-specific frames that I could actually
use for my project. GW students have access to Gelman’s vast array of online journals, which were especially helpful for me in this phase of my research. Instead of focusing only on Islamophobia, I decided to widen my search to “othering,” otherwise known as assigning negative values to difference, which I believed would still help me with my goal to investigate biases in media outlets. I combined literature in the field of sociology about othering with the articles I’d previously found in journals for political science to construct my argument. I also spent much of my time looking through Gelman’s newspaper databases, such as its database for the Wall Street Journal and LexisNexis, along with the newspaper’s websites themselves. I primarily searched in the references sections of the articles I found to obtain more sources and to evaluate the validity and authority of my sources for my paper, and I ended up using the Pew Research Center’s work on biases within news media, which was very helpfully explained on Gelman’s website.

The fact that Gelman had many books and longer articles available online was also especially helpful and convenient for me, since I often did not need to submit a inter-library loan request and could just read the materials online – two of the books I consulted as background sources (but that didn’t make it into my paper) were fully available online. With the knowledge I have gained about navigating Gelman’s online system, I now feel confident in any future research I may do that requires articles and resources of all kinds.
The Othering of Ilhan Omar
How The Media Frames Minority Congresswomen

Noor Qureishy
UW: The Political Brain
The Othering of Ilhan Omar
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Responding to the increasingly negative coverage of Muslim congresswomen, especially Representative Ilhan Omar, prominent Democrats and activists such as Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Women’s March Co-Chair Linda Sarsour have drawn attention to the disproportionate and sometimes Islamophobic nature of the criticism and media coverage about Omar. In order to better understand the nature of media coverage and therefore public opinion about Omar, I studied news articles released around four major events since Representative Ilhan Omar’s induction into Congress from one conservative news source, The Wall Street Journal, one liberal news source, The New York Times, and one centrist news source, USA Today. Adapting the questions for the generic news frames laid out by Godefroidt, Berbers and d’Haenens (2016) and the othering frame, which consists of three mechanisms of othering developed by Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012), I determined the frequency at which generic news frames and the “othering” news frame is employed by each of these sources. Finding that the nationalization, conflict, and responsibility generic news frames were the most common for all three sources and that USA Today was the publication that employed the othering frame most often, I considered the implications for current patterns of media coverage of Muslim congresswomen and minority congresswomen at large.

Introduction

As the political sphere grows increasingly diverse, aspects of politicians’ identities, such as their race, gender, or religion, have become a central feature of the media’s coverage of congressional campaigns. The ease of access associated with news media makes it an essential source of information for constituents to learn about their congressional candidates before elections. However, the quality of news coverage varies depending on the candidate; for example, coverage of minority women (in terms of race) is more infrequent and negative compared to both Anglo women and minority men (Gershon 2012b, 106; Lucas 2017, 570). The disparity in current media coverage has the potential to become even more salient because of the emergence of congressional candidates who not only differ in their race and gender, but also in
their religion. Media coverage of Muslims has a long history of spreading Islamophobic stereotypes and heightening a culture of fear of Islam by consistently linking Muslims with terrorism and a larger threat from Islam to the West (Powell 2011, 107). Ilhan Omar, the U.S. Representative for Minnesota’s fifth congressional district, is a prime example of a congresswoman whose identity as a Muslim is a central, and often negatively portrayed quality in news media. Hence, coverage of Omar relies not only on negative perceptions about her gender and race, but also her religion. Recent media coverage of Omar has focused on her comments about lobbying done by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, and has led to allegations of anti-Semitism and an amount of negative coverage that has never been seen before in her political career. Since coverage of minority congresswomen is known to be distinctly different and negative as compared to their peers and constituents are electing increasingly diverse members of Congress, it is critical to see if and how coverage of congresswomen of uniquely diverse backgrounds in terms of religion are affected.

Using newspaper articles released around four major events that occurred after Omar’s induction into Congress, I study the degree to which media outlets engage in “othering,” or attaching negative connotations to perceived differences between her and their audiences. Previous literature has focused only on candidates who differed from their peers in terms of race and gender, ignoring how the intersection of a variety of identities can result in a more general “othering” of candidates who have a different race, religion, and gender than the majority of their colleagues. In this article, I expand on current literature concerning media coverage of minority candidates by investigating how minority candidates can be “othered” by media outlets by their use of certain generic and issue-specific news frames. Media coverage by both conservative and liberal news sources covering Omar contain generic and issue-specific news frames concerning
the many aspects of her identity that differ from the majority that feed into existing stereotypes about the groups Omar belongs to and perpetuate an Islam versus the West mentality.

**The History of Anti-Zionism in America**

After the Six-Day War in June 1967, scholars aiming to defend Israel against increasing sympathy for Palestinians coined a term called “new anti-Semitism,” which is essentially understood as anti-Semitism in the form of anti-Zionism. “New anti-Semitism” rested on the belief that anti-Zionism and opposition to the Jewish state was no different from anti-Semitism (Schroeter 2018, 1173). Critics of Representative Ilhan Omar and other prominent Muslim politicians often draw on the rhetoric advanced by scholars who advocated for “new anti-Semitism” to address their perspectives on Israel and anti-Zionism. In addition, the radical left and the Islamic world were considered to be the places where dangers from new anti-Semitism would emerge.

However, there is also a history of condemnation of Israel from many Jewish and Israeli anti-Zionist groups and individuals who opposed policies that singled out Palestinian citizens and encouraged settlements among other actions done by the Israeli military that violate human rights. Jewish organizations and critics such as Jewish Voices for Peace, Jews against the Occupation, Jews for Peace in the Middle East, Brit Tzedek, *Tikkun*, Women in Black, B’Tselem, Gush Shalom, and Yesh Gvul are among those who were involved in debates opposing policies in Israel in an anti-Zionist manner (Judaken 2008). Within the Jewish community and Israeli intellectuals, there is also a long tradition of “principled anti-Zionism” that draws on opposition to political Zionism. Therefore, there is clearly a long and established tradition of anti-Zionism without anti-Semitism within the Jewish community, both within Jewish organizations in America and in Israel.
The History of American Christian Zionism

Support for Zionism within the Evangelical Christian religious tradition also has a long and established history in America. As Evangelical Christians form much of President Trump’s voter base and are therefore able to influence much of the current conservative dialogue in America, their support of Zionism and Israel has a substantial effect on conservative media coverage and portrayals of Representative Ilhan Omar, who is a vocal anti-Zionist. Both prominent politicians and much of the primary base of voters for President Trump support Israel not only because of their political alignment, but also because of their religious tradition. Christian Zionism is a popular subset of American Evangelical thought, and in 2009, around 50-60 million American Evangelicals were thought to support it (Fink 2014, 27). John Hagee, one of the most prominent American Christian Zionists created an organization called Christians United for Israel (CUFI) in 2006 which has played a major role in shaping American foreign policy decisions. Fink reports that “in CUFI’s first lobbying effort, in July 2006, over 3400 Christian Zionists from all 50 states came to Washington, DC and participated in 280 meetings with congressional representatives, and on the day of the CUFI banquet the House of Representatives passed a strongly pro-Israel resolution by a vote of 410 to 8,” (Fink 2014, 28). Vice President Mike Pence along with other politicians like U.S. Representative Dick Armey have also expressed support for Zionism as a central facet of their religion. The importance many Evangelical Christians, 81% of which voted for Trump in the 2016 election, give to Zionism and to the defense of Israel undoubtedly has an effect on how conservative media covers Representative Ilhan Omar (Pew Research Center 2016).
Media Framing

Since 9/11, media coverage of prominent Muslim women in politics can be understood through three distinct approaches: generic news frames; “othering” and Islamophobic framing; and the framing of minority female politicians in general. To avoid bombarding the public with an indigestible amount of news to make sense of, media outlets often pick which events are newsworthy and which ones are not on a daily basis. Journalists are given the freedom to not only choose which events they think are important enough to cover, but also to choose which tone they wish to use in their reporting; this is called framing, which “revolves around how information is presented in public discourse” (Godefroidt, Berbers and d’Haenens 2016, 780). Generic news frames are divided into conflict, human interest, economic impact, morality, responsibility, and nationalization frames and are frequently used to structure the facts within a news article (Godefroidt, Berbers and d’Haenens 2016, 781). The selection of certain generic news frames over others can work to influence public perception of Muslim politicians by telling the public how they should think about said politicians.

When “primary definers of news,” or politicians, military officials, religious leaders, and other prominent figures repeatedly frame an issue or topic in the same way, it can result in that frame, or assumption, becoming dominant within discussions of that topic (Kumar 2010, 256). Once a frame becomes dominant and therefore “commonsense,” it starts to form an ideology, or set of beliefs, which can then influence public opinion (Kumar 2010, 255; Powell 2011, 93). Kumar claims that primary definers of news then influence the media by “establishing the initial definition or primary interpretation of the topic in question. This interpretation then ‘commands
the field’ in all subsequent treatment and sets the terms of reference within which all further coverage…takes place” (Kumar 2010, 256). By using the following five discursive news frames – 1) Islam is a monolithic religion 2) Islam is a uniquely sexist religion 3) The “Muslim mind” is incapable of rationality and science 4) Islam is inherently violent, and 5) The West spreads democracy, whereas Islam spawns terrorism – Kumar argues that primary definers of news set the agenda for larger discussions on Islam, which often leads the media to report on Islam and Muslims in a way that encourages negative public opinion about them. These five discursive frames are based on Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism, which is a concept that describes the cultural lens the West used to define and “otherize” the parts of the East controlled primarily by Muslims. These five frames also often manifest within the news media in the form of othering framing, which is a more common and subtle tactic used against congresswomen of minority religious backgrounds to portray them in a negative light.

Framing that engages in the process of “othering” is a common tool that can be used by media outlets to portray congresswomen of minority backgrounds. Othering is defined as “the process of attaching moral codes of inferiority to difference” by Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012, 299), who argue that writing about people from historically marginalized groups often runs the risk of representing the individual in a reductive manner, making the interaction between the writer and the Other into one based on control and dominance. The oppressive force of othering comes from the separating line created between the Other and members of a homogeneous group, thereby creating an exclusionary effect and sending the Other into “symbolic exile” (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi 2012, 300). Krumer-Nevo and Sidi define four mechanisms of othering that apply to the marginalized group of people they chose to study: women in poverty. These mechanisms are objectification, decontextualization, dehistorization, and deauthorization
Therefore, the use of these mechanisms as frames by media outlets can be thought of as “othering” framing.

Furthermore, the racial framing used by media outlets to portray minority female politicians often also encourages negative public opinion about them. In two frequently cited articles, Gershon discusses how minority congresswomen’s coverage is less frequent and often more negative, although coverage of African-American women in comparison to Latina women is often less negative in tone (Gershon 2012b, 106; Gershon 2012a, 710). In both majority-minority and majority-white districts during the 2004 election cycle, the coverage of both biracial and all-black elections is more likely to contain a racial frame than all-white elections (Caliendo and McIlwain 2006, 1). If the press, especially the conservative press, which likely reflects the interests of its Evangelical Christian readers who subscribe to Christian Zionism despite a history of opposition to Zionism from the Jewish community itself, is less favorable towards minority congresswomen as Gershon (2012b) discusses, then the conservative media’s use of generic news frames and the othering news frame as compared to liberal and centrist news media should be impacted in two ways. Firstly, the conservative news source, *The Wall Street Journal*, should have more negative coverage of Representative Ilhan Omar and would consequently use the othering news frame more often in articles about her. Therefore, my first hypothesis is: *The Wall Street Journal* will use the othering news frame more often than the liberal news source, *The New York Times*, and the centrist news source, *USA Today*. Secondly, *The Wall Street Journal* will be less likely to portray Omar in a favorable or sympathetic light in order to continue the pattern of negative news coverage for their Evangelical Christian readers and will therefore use generic news frames that focus on facts rather than human interest or morality news frames, which are generally used to help readers relate to the subject of the article.
Thus, my second hypothesis is: *The Wall Street Journal* will use the nationalization, conflict, economic consequences, and responsibility news frames more often than the liberal news source, *The New York Times*, and the centrist news source, *USA Today*, while *The New York Times* and *USA Today* will use the human interest and morality generic frames at the same rate, but more often than *The Wall Street Journal*.

**Methods**

In order to determine whether the expected generic and othering news frames were used in newspaper coverage of Representative Ilhan Omar, I examined news articles from a liberal newspaper outlet, *The New York Times*, a conservative newspaper outlet, *The Wall Street Journal*, and a centrist newspaper outlet, *USA Today*. I chose these newspaper outlets because they are among the top four highest circulated newspapers in America. The political orientation of these newspapers was determined by consulting Pew Research Center’s study titled “Where News Audiences Fit on the Political Spectrum” which recorded the percentage of liberal and conservative respondents who got their news from various news sources in America, along with which sources respondents had heard of, which ones they trust, and which ones they distrust (Pew Research Center 2014). Based on the Pew Research Center’s survey, *The New York Times*’ audience was “Mostly Liberal” and *USA Today*’s audience had little difference in usage by both liberal and conservative respondents, and therefore is assumed to be a centrist newspaper since it reports on news in a way that appeals fairly equally to both liberal and conservative audiences (Pew Research Center 2014). *The Wall Street Journal* was also determined to be the most conservative media outlet among the top four highest circulated newspapers used in the study (Pew Research Center 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Number &amp; Date</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Event 1, Feb. 11 | Feb. 11 to Feb. 13 | Omar releases two tweets implying U.S. politicians who support Israel do so for the money (“All about the Benjamins, baby”) and identifying AIPAC as the lobbying group who is paying said politicians.

Event 2, Mar. 7 | Mar. 3 to Mar. 9 | The House leadership drops a rebuke of Omar originating from accusations of anti-Semitism against her, and passes a resolution condemning all bigotry instead.

Event 3, Apr. 9 | Apr. 9 to Apr. 11 | A comment Omar made about 9/11 at a CAIR banquet two weeks prior resurfaces and is criticized.

Event 4, Apr. 12 | Apr. 12 to Apr. 14 | President Trump tweets a video criticizing Omar with clips from the CAIR banquet where Omar made a comment about 9/11 combined with a video of the Twin Towers burning on 9/11.

Articles that mentioned Representative Ilhan Omar by name were selected from these sources through each sources’ website. Then, this group of articles was further narrowed down by selecting only the articles containing her name that were released 48 hours after each major event (refer to Table 1) that occurred after Ilhan Omar’s induction into Congress, with the exception of Event 2, which was given a time frame of six days. Event 2 was given a time frame of six days rather than 48 hours because all three of the news sources examined contained coverage relating to this event starting four days before the event and ending two days after it occurred, so in order to include all the articles that related to Event 2 the timeframe was extended accordingly. Every article that was released from each of the sources within their respective timeframes was analyzed for this study. I analyzed a total of fifteen articles from The New York Times, nine from The Wall Street Journal, and ten from USA Today.

Table 2. Description of questions used corresponding with each generic frame used to analyze articles, adapted from Godefroidt, Berbers and d’Haenens (2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic Frame</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict frame</td>
<td>Does the story revolve around disagreement between parties, individuals, groups, countries?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the story refer to fights, riots, and confrontation between two or more parties, individuals, groups, countries?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the story refer to two sides or more than two sides of the problem?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the story refer to winners and losers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Human Interest frame**    | Does the story provide a human example or ‘human face’ on the issue?  
                               Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings?  
                               Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?  
                               Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors? |                                                                                                                                             |
| **Economic consequences frame** | Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?  
                               Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?  
                               Is there a reference to economic consequences of (not) pursuing a course of action? |                                                                                                                                             |
| **Morality frame**          | Does the story contain any moral message?  
                               Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets?  
                               Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave? |                                                                                                                                             |
| **Responsibility frame**    | Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the issue/problem?  
                               Does the story suggest some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?  
                               Does the story suggest that an individual or group of people in society is responsible for the issue/problem?  
                               Does the story suggest solutions to the issue/problem?  
                               Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action? |                                                                                                                                             |
| **Nationalization frame**   | Does the article mention a connection between Ilhan Omar and the individual country?  
                               Does the article articulate or quote the ideas of national politicians or persons that are active on a national level? |                                                                                                                                             |

Table 3. Description of three mechanisms of othering adapted from Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) that make up the “othering frame” used to analyze articles.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>Objectification of the [people mentioned in the article] by the reduction and subjugation of their common humanity and their individual complexity and by ignoring of their personal perspectives. This turns them into stereotypes composed of inferior, mostly negative, features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decontextualization</td>
<td>Decontextualization, a focus on behavior abstracted from the context in which this behavior was developed and continues to exist. Decontextualization can take various forms: Detachment from a general context of policy and socioeconomic structures (such as policies regarding health, housing, education, and the job market); detachment from a general context of symbolic structures, such as racism; or detachment from the immediate context of place and time in which the behavior occurs. Decontextualization contributes to the portrayal of certain behaviors as having no reason or rationality. Behaviors and occurrences become generalized features of many rather than specific characteristics or specific responses to particular circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehistorization</td>
<td>Dehistorization, the focus on the present, which is based on detachment from the personal individual history of the [people mentioned in article] and the ignoring of its implications. This distorts the researcher’s understanding of the present situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each news article was analyzed for generic news frames using the corresponding set of questions developed by Godefroidt, Berbers and d’Haenens (2016), adapted slightly for Representative Ilhan Omar (refer to Table 2). If an article contained positive answers to the majority of the questions that correspond with a frame (over 50%) then I categorized that article as having that generic news frame. Then, I analyzed the news articles for three of the four mechanisms of othering Krumer-Nevo and Sidi claimed were used to perpetuate the association of a marginalized group with the Other (refer to Table 3). The mechanisms I used are objectification, decontextualization, and dehistorization. I did not use Krumer-Nevo and Sidi’s fourth mechanism, deauthorization, because it applies exclusively to research or literary work produced with an anonymous author. Deauthorization is therefore not applicable to my exhibits as I am studying news articles that all give credit to their authors and make an effort to appear
impartial in accordance with the writing style used in this genre of writing (Krummer-Nevo and Sidi 2012, 300). If an article contained any one of these mechanisms, I determined that the article was employing the othering frame.

Findings

Table 4. Mechanisms of Othering (Percentage of articles that reflect each mechanism, rounded to whole numbers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Objectification</th>
<th>Decontextualization</th>
<th>Dehistoricization</th>
<th>What percentage of articles use the othering frame?</th>
<th>What percentage of articles contain none of the mechanisms of othering?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 indicates that the othering frame was used by all three news sources but that USA Today used the othering news frame nearly twice as often as the other two media outlets studied. Two particularly surprising findings in this table were that The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times used the othering frame at the same rate, and that the only mechanism of othering used by all three news sources was decontextualization; none of the articles I studied from any of the news sources used the other two mechanisms, objectification and dehistoricization. These findings do not support my first hypothesis, which states that The Wall Street Journal will use the othering news frame more often than the liberal news source, The New York Times, and the centrist news source, USA Today.

Table 5. Generic News Frames (percentage of articles that have each frame, rounded to whole numbers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Conflict frame</th>
<th>Human Interest frame</th>
<th>Economic consequences frame</th>
<th>Morality frame</th>
<th>Responsibility frame</th>
<th>Nationalization frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 5 shows, among generic news frames, the nationalization frame was equally common among all three news sources, followed by the conflict frame and the responsibility frame. These three news frames were not only fairly equally common among all three news sources, they were also the news frames that were used most often in coverage from these news sources about Omar overall, as most of the articles I studied used them. The economic consequences frame was most commonly used in *The Wall Street Journal*, while the human interest and morality frames were most commonly used in *The New York Times*. *USA Today* used the human interest and morality frames more often than *The Wall Street Journal*, but not more often than *The New York Times*.

These results only partially support my second hypothesis, which states that *The Wall Street Journal* will use the nationalization, conflict, economic consequences, and responsibility news frames more often than the liberal news source, *The New York Times*, and the centrist news source, *USA Today*, while *The New York Times* and *USA Today* will use the human interest and morality generic news frames at the same rate, but more often than *The Wall Street Journal*. *The Wall Street Journal* did not use the nationalization, conflict, and responsibility news frames more often than the other two news sources, although it did use the economic consequences news frame more often. However, *The New York Times* and *USA Today* did use the human interest and morality frames more often than *The Wall Street Journal*, albeit at different rates – my hypothesis stated that these two news sources would be equal in their coverage of Omar but *The New York Times* used the human interest and morality frames more often than *USA Today*. Since *USA Today* used the othering frame the most often out of the three sources (refer to Table 4), a
possible explanation for the comparative lack of human interest and morality news frames could be that *USA Today* just had more negative coverage overall of Omar than *The New York Times*, and therefore did not use the human interest and morality frames as often, which would have painted her in a more sympathetic light.

**Discussion**

The results from the generic news frame analysis can, in part, be explained by the ideological differences between conservatives and liberals in terms of the moral issues they value. The high rates of human interest and morality news frames used by the liberal media outlet, *The New York Times*, reflects the fact that liberals are most drawn to the care/harm and fairness/reciprocity foundations, according to Moral Foundations Theory (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2012, 1035). The care/harm foundation focuses on caring about and protecting other individuals, which corresponds with the human interest frame because the human interest frame is characterized by a focus on how individuals are impacted by issues. The fairness/reciprocity foundation focuses on the importance of justice and doing the “right” thing, which corresponds with the morality news frame, which focuses on whether articles have a moral message behind them that implies a “right” or moral way of conducting affairs (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2012, 1035). Additionally, the economic consequences news frame, which the conservative media outlet used most often, has an aspect of duty to it, as it emphasizes the financial losses or gains by pursuing a course of action, which reflects the ingroup/loyalty and the authority/respect foundations that conservatives are drawn to as they both focus on the sense of duty individuals feel towards an outside entity.

The finding that the nationalization, conflict, and responsibility frames were almost equally common in all three news sources, despite the fact that they support negative news
coverage of Omar and would be expected to be used more by the conservative news outlet because of their readership, can be explained by the unique nature of the events that were focused on in this study. All of the four events around which the articles were gathered had to do with some controversy or negative reaction to Omar’s actions, so it naturally follows that all the news outlets used the conflict and responsibility frames regardless of their ideological orientation. Additionally, Omar is U.S. Representative, and so her role as an American politician was naturally referenced in every article and many of the other interviewees in articles about her where other American politicians, which explains why the nationalization frame was used equally as often in all three news outlets.

Some of the results from the othering frame analysis are supported by previous research on the media’s tendency to cover minority congresswomen and Muslims in a negative light (Gershon 2012b, 106; Kumar 2012, 255), as all three news sources used the othering frame regardless of ideological orientation. However, the finding that USA Today used the othering frame nearly twice as often as both The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal despite its centrist orientation is a surprising result. Since a common source of suspicion among the public when it comes to the media is the perception that most media outlets have a liberal leaning, it could be possible that USA Today tried to compensate for this by appealing more to its conservative audience in an effort to distinguish itself from more liberal news outlets as a supposedly centrist and therefore impartial news source. The only mechanism of othering used by all of the media outlets was decontextualization, which is defined as “a focus on behavior abstracted from the context in which this behavior was developed and continues to exist…behaviors and occurrences become generalized features of many rather than specific characteristics or specific responses to particular circumstances” (Krumen-Nevo and Sidi 2012,
300). In practice, I applied this definition as a lack of representation of perspectives on both sides of any controversy Omar was involved in. For example, if a reference is made to arguments supporting the claim that Omar’s comments were anti-Semitic, I expected the news source to also mention the viewpoint of those on the other side of the issue in order to avoid the decontextualization charge, since each of the controversies were widely debated among the American public and did have strong supporters on both sides. The style of reporting USA Today uses, which presents news in brief form rather than fleshing out the story like The New York Times is especially known to do, and The Wall Street Journal sometimes does, could have been the reason behind why USA Today failed to provide context more often than the other two news sources and therefore employed the othering frame twice as often.

These findings are significant in suggesting that the othering frame is used to portray minority Congresswomen in all media outlets, regardless of their ideological orientation. However, further research is needed to investigate which aspect of Representative Ilhan Omar’s identity has led to this uniquely negative backlash – whether it is her religion, race, gender, or even history as a refugee that factors into the way media outlets are covering her. It is also unclear if the specific controversies Omar was involved in, which had to do with extremely polarizing issues such as anti-Semitism and 9/11, disproportionately affected the amount of negativity in coverage of her. The findings also suggest that liberal media news outlets cover minority congresswomen in a more sympathetic light, by using human interest and morality news frames more often. The small sample size of this study, a total of only 34 articles, was also a limiting factor in this study so further research conducted with a larger number of media outlets or across a more diverse sample of outlets would help us understand whether these patterns of coverage are true on a broader scale.
Conclusion

The results from this study show that liberal news media portrays minority congresswomen in a more positive light, but that all news outlets, regardless of ideological orientation, use the othering frame when discussing minority congresswomen. The usage of different generic news frames by conservative, liberal, and centrist news outlets suggests that media outlets do use generic news frames to further their underlying ideological agendas. This study provides new insights into how the othering frame is employed by the media rather than just racial or gender framing in general, and focuses on Representative Ilhan Omar, who has many intersecting identities that leave her open to uniquely negative coverage from the media.

References


