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Reproductive justice and media framing: a case-study analysis of problematic frames in the popular media

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Reproductive justice is an important and comprehensive conceptualization for understanding the complexity of reproductive issues faced by women. When considering attitudes and beliefs that give rise to policies related to reproduction, it is critical to examine the ways in which the issues are framed. In this case-study-style analysis, the problematic ways in which the popular media frame issues related to reproductive justice are explored. In both popular music and television series, reproduction is framed in ways that limit reproductive justice for women. Women who actively choose to use birth control are portrayed negatively, misinformation about condoms and access to reproductive healthcare is perpetuated, and stereotypes about women and reproduction are reinforced. Based upon these analyses, it is recommended that further systematic content analyses be performed in addition to experimental work on the effects of media framing on support (or lack of support) for policies related to reproductive justice. It is also suggested that different types of media related to women's reproduction might be used to help young men and women develop skills for critically deconstructing and reframing messages about sex and reproduction put forth by various forms of media.

Introduction

Issues related to women and reproduction, particularly with respect to abortion, have historically been controversial in the United States, and at times have even led to violence (Joffe, Weitz, and Stacey 2004; Wilcox and Riches 2002). Reproductive rights continue to be controversial and women continue to face reproductive oppression. In the current conservative political climate, attempts to undermine women's access to reproductive healthcare, contraceptives, and abortion are increasing. Understanding attitudes and perceptions related to women's reproduction, and the relationship of these beliefs to public opinion and social policies, is extremely important to prevent further erosion of women's rights, as well as to promote them.

One method for examining the shaping of attitudes and perceptions and their potential impact on policy is to study how particular issues are framed. Although there are many possible sources of reproductive information (e.g. parents, peers, political figures, and the government), the media are particularly powerful and prominent sources. In contrast to the large literature demonstrating the links between framing and subsequent attributions for crime, poverty, welfare, and terrorism – see Iyengar (1991) for a review of framing in television – the framing of reproductive rights and women's health, and how those framings may impact public opinion and policy, have not been thoroughly explored.

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The first aim of the current analysis is to introduce the more comprehensive term of reproductive justice as a way to position the media frames exemplified in this analysis within a broader and arguably more meaningful context that moves beyond the more limiting conceptualization of ‘reproductive rights.’ This is followed by a discussion of recent political decisions around abortion and reproductive rights. A brief review of the framing literature is provided to explore the ways in which the media could be a vehicle by which messages relevant to the notion of reproductive justice are conveyed. Then, examples of media framing that occur around the topic of women and reproduction will be examined, with speculation about the consequences of these framings on attitudes and policy decisions. Lastly, directions for future research and suggestions for using the media as a site for education are explored.

A new conceptualization of ‘reproductive rights’: importance of reproductive justice as a more current, comprehensive, and intersectional perspective

While ‘reproductive rights’ and ‘abortion rights’ are frequently used synonymously, *reproductive justice* is an important and more contemporary term that combines elements of social justice and human rights movements to more fully encompass the struggles around reproduction that women continue to face (Silliman et al. 2004). For example, the interpretation of the landmark abortion case *Roe v. Wade* identified a woman’s right to have an abortion as a ‘privacy’ right; and, as such, women are guaranteed ‘freedom from’ government interference, but are in no way guaranteed access to necessary services and healthcare (Smyth 2002). This ‘right’ is then meaningless if women cannot have abortions due to lack of providers, financial reasons, or any number of other barriers that may prevent women from actually obtaining desired services. Labeling recent policy decisions as an infringement of ‘reproductive rights’ also minimizes the overall detrimental impact and effects of policies that are less obviously related to women and reproduction, and also limits the scope of the types of analyses and criticisms that can be made.

Thus, the concept of reproductive justice is a more comprehensive and appropriate term, which encompasses legal safeguards for women (such as the rights to legal abortion, contraceptives, and family planning), access to necessary reproductive healthcare (e.g. sexually transmitted infection [STI] screenings, pap smears, prenatal and postnatal care), and acknowledges that reproductive oppression is the result of multiple intersecting oppressions, including race, class, sexual orientation, ability, age, and immigration status (Mendez 2006; Shen 2006). These authors suggest that reproductive justice is a paradigm in which these intersectionalities can be constructed into a cohesive concept and become part of the consciousness of elected leaders; subsequently, this can be reflected in the actions of leaders and the policies that are enacted. In an attempt to draw attention to the multidimensionality of reproductive oppression, the National Organization for Women (NOW) has outlined a reproductive justice agenda that includes: affordable childcare and housing for low-income women; access to pre-natal and post-natal care, child nutrition and pre-school programs; comprehensive and appropriate sexual education; guaranteed job security for pregnant employees; paid family and medical leave; access to birth control and emergency contraception; affordable and accessible reproductive healthcare; treatment programs instead of jail time for

pregnant substance abusers; and universal healthcare. While this list does not address all issues related to women and reproduction, the formulation of this agenda highlights the ways in which current policies (not only in domains traditionally related to reproduction, but also in areas of welfare, criminal justice, education, and healthcare) may be interrelated and inhibiting reproductive justice.

Contemporary policy and threats to reproductive justice

Using this broader and more comprehensive analytical lens of ‘reproductive justice,’ an examination of political actions in the past decade reveals policies and political appointments that directly threaten reproductive justice for women. The political actions discussed here are not intended to be a comprehensive list of threats, but rather to highlight the ways in which they can be analyzed with a lens focused on the outcomes for reproductive justice initiatives. In 1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was passed, resulting in ‘family caps’ (States can deny benefits to children born to mothers while they are receiving welfare).

Beyond the consequences for low-income women and their ability to choose their family size, PRWORA provided federal funding for abstinence-only education in public schools. The federal government provides \$100 million per year for abstinence-only education, although the current administration has proposed an additional \$35 million per year increase (The White House 2002). In addition to this funding, the Bush administration created the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance – Community Based Abstinence Education Program and has provided over \$60 million in grant funding to faith-based community organizations for the promotion of abstinence-only education. Interestingly, the millions of dollars being funneled into these programs are not based on any empirical research showing that they effectively reduce teen sexual activity, teen pregnancy, the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, or any other potentially negative outcome of teen sexual activity (Guttmacher Institute 2007). While comprehensive sexual education is of the utmost importance, another threat to an area of reproductive justice, although not typically associated with it, is access to quality education for young children. The current federal government has severely compromised education to young children (and the job opportunities to the mostly female staff) by simultaneously drastically cutting the funding to Head Start, while increasing the requirements for who should be served and the types of services offered (Save Head Start 2008). If women want to have children, they also want to know that their children will have access to quality, affordable education. While this may be less of an issue for financially stable women, low-income women and homeless women may face obstacles to obtain the type of education that they desire for their children.

With respect to areas more traditionally associated with reproductive justice, the current administration has very clearly threatened women’s access to legal abortion and contraceptives. For example, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 was passed – and as a provision of this act, pharmaceutical companies were banned from discounting contraceptives provided to university health service centers, as well as clinics serving low-income women (Stevens 2007). Also, despite the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA’s) approval of mifepristone (RU-486, a drug used for early-term abortions) and over-the-counter availability of emergency

contraceptives (only for those over 18 years old), opponents have continued attempting to persuade the FDA to have RU-486 withdrawn, and have passed or proposed laws allowing pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions or distribute emergency contraceptives (NOW 2004; Guttmacher Institute 2006). In 2002 Dr W. David Hager was appointed head of the FDA's Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee. Prior to his appointment, Dr Hager had published a book entitled *As Jesus cared for women: Restoring women then and now*, refused to prescribe contraceptives to unmarried women in his private practice, suggested that women who suffer from premenstrual syndrome should seek help from reading the Bible and praying, and endorsed medically inaccurate representations of birth control pills as abortifacient (Planned Parent Federation of America 2004). Furthermore, in 2003 President Bush signed the 'Partial Birth Abortion Ban' into law, which prohibits a particular type of abortion procedure that is typically performed at later stages of pregnancy, and does not include an exemption to preserve a woman's health. Bush described the petition as being effective in remedying 'a terrible form of violence that has been directed against children who are inches from birth, while the law looked the other way' (The White House 2003). As a final example, in 2004 the House of Representatives passed the Unborn Victims of Violence Act. This act established that, in federal law, the fetus was a separate legal person guaranteed individual rights separate from the pregnant woman (NOW 2004). Moreover, this recent legislation is in addition to the continued passing of the Hyde Amendment. The Hyde Amendment, which first passed in 1976 and has been re-signed every subsequent year, continues to bar the usage of federal funds for abortion. Currently, only 13 states allow state funds to be used for abortion (outside the case of rape, incest, or threat to the mother's life).

These clear examples about the current (and sustained) attempts to limit women's access to various aspects of reproductive healthcare, education, child-bearing and rearing options, as well as options for terminating pregnancy, unambiguously demonstrate the ways in which a political and institutional agenda can be quickly implemented by those in power. Furthermore, these policies and appointments underscore the ways in which the term 'reproductive rights' denies the broader scope of challenges that women face in relation to reproduction.

Framing of reproductive-related issues

While there may be any number of reasons that particular policies are promoted and implemented, examining the ways in which the media frame particular issues, or aspects of them, is an important avenue to consider. Although there may not be a direct link between media framing of issues related to reproductive justice and the laws, policies and practices that follow, the media may play a role in reflecting and perpetuating currently existing attitudes and political agendas rooted in stereotypes and oppressive ideologies. The media could also play a role in shaping attitudes and knowledge around lesser-known issues related to reproductive justice by providing information that could indirectly give rise to support for particular policies.

Drawing on work in the disciplines of linguistics, sociology, and psychology, framing can, very generally, be understood as a way in which meaning can be imposed on a particular event, issue, or situation. Simply put, Lakoff and colleagues at the Rockridge Institute defined frames as the 'mental structures that allow human

beings to understand reality – and sometimes to create what we take to be reality’ (Lakoff and Rockridge Institute 2006, 1). For example, abortion is often framed as ‘pro-life’ (with specific frames around themes of morality) or ‘pro-choice’ (with specific frames around themes of rights), and these two different frames drastically alter the ways in which issues around abortion are perceived, and to a large extent, help construct the core tenets of the debate (Rohlinger 2002). Furthermore, Nelson and Kinder argued that frames are an ever-present feature of public discussions of political issues and may actually instruct people how to think about complex social policy problems, ultimately ‘providing a kind of mental recipe for preparing an opinion’ (1996, 1058). In sum, drawing on the work of Lakoff, Rohlinger, Nelson, and Kinder, framing can be conceptualized as a way to impose a particular meaning on a situation, event, or issue, and the frames used are not neutral entities but, rather, can be manipulated to convey the particular desired meaning, agenda, or intent of a person or institution. Frames are regularly used to talk about social issues, to identify the essence of the issue, and may actually inform people about how to articulate their opinions and take action.

Within the area of social science, there is a body of literature demonstrating, very broadly, the powerful effects of frames (for example, Nelson and Kinder 1996; Bullock and Fernald 2005; Kelly 1996; Bullock, Fraser-Wyche, and Williams 2001; Iyengar 1991). More specifically related to aspects of reproductive justice, the large majority of framing research has been focused on issues related to abortion and motherhood, and the relationship between those frames and policies around access to abortion (Rohlinger 2002; Wilcox and Riches 2002; McCaffrey and Keys 2000; Smyth 2002), welfare (Bullock, Fraser-Wyche, and Williams 2001), and the criminalization of ‘failure to care’, respectively (Daniels 1997; Fine and Carney 2001). Wilcox and Riches found that, on average, 5–10% of respondents typically opposed abortion under all circumstances and 33–44% would allow abortion with no restrictions. However, about one-half of the public would never allow for abortions qualified as due to social circumstances, such as poverty, single motherhood, or control of fertility. In the specific case of RU-486, support for the drug was mediated by pre-existing political affiliations, religiosity, education, ideas about when life begins, and attitudes about laws requiring women to deliberate prior to abortions. Additionally, as Bullock, Fraser-Wyche, and Williams (2001) pointed out, negative media images of single teenage mothers and mothers on welfare (both typically portrayed as promiscuous and irresponsible) is in line with PRWORA’s agenda of curbing out-of-wedlock births, increasing two-parent (mother and father) families, and enacting ‘family caps’ and reduced benefits for those who have more children than ‘allowed.’ Lastly, the works of Daniels and of Fine and Carney highlight the socially constructed nature of women’s responsibility, and the public support for policies and laws that punish women for ‘failing’ to appropriately put the care of their children above their own health and well-being. Overall, framing effects within the context of reproductive justice (although not necessarily explicitly identified as such within the existing literature) appear to be important to both public perceptions and policies. Furthermore, the media probably play important roles in the framing of these issues, cultivating attitudes and beliefs, perpetuating pre-existing attitudes, and informing the public in ways that might influence support for policies related to reproductive justice.

The current analysis

This case-study analysis draws on feminist and critical race perspectives to deconstruct three frames utilized in popular media. I do not argue that these frames are representative of all frames used in media but, rather, they were selected because of their appearance in very popular and widely consumed media. Problems and biases associated with these frames are discussed in relation to a reproductive justice framework. The use of a reproductive justice framework highlights the ways in which women face reproductive oppression within a particular social context, at the intersection of multiple identities. This approach also underscores that these are not individual experiences, but about experiences supported by larger societal structures. Consistent with feminist media critiques (for example, Watkins and Emerson 2000) and critical race feminism (for example, Wing 1997), I examine messages that frames convey about gender and power, as well as offer an analysis of how multiple social identities are represented.

Problematic framing of birth control usage in hip-hop lyrics: responsibility re-framed as promiscuity

Although the misogynistic nature (for example, Adams and Fuller 2006) and sexually objectifying nature of rap/hip-hop music is well documented (for example, Johnson et al. 1995), the specific ways in which reproductive justice concerns are portrayed is unexamined. While rapping about reproductive justice is probably not part of the formula for commercial success, elements related to the subject are often mentioned and framings in this venue may be particularly problematic.

In 2004 Kanye West released the critically acclaimed album *The college dropout*, which won the Grammy for Best Rap Album in 2004. A song entitled ‘Get ’em high’ was one of the tracks on the album, and included the following lyrics:

(Verse 2, performed by Kanye West)

... she don't believe me, please pickup the line/She gon' think that I'm lyin', just spit a couple of lines/Then maybe I'll be able to give her dick all the time, and get her high.

(Verse 3, performed by Talib Kweli)

I don't usually fuck with the internet/Or chicks with birth control stuck to their arms like Nicorette/Are you really fucking that much or trying to get off cigarettes? (West 2004)

The juxtaposition of these two verses indicates that the rapper would like to have sex with women and get them high with marijuana, but he does not want to have sex with someone who is (in this case visibly) using birth control because that indicates she is promiscuous. Instead of framing women who use birth control as being responsible, empowered, independent, and having agency in their reproductive decisions, women are essentially framed as being promiscuous, immoral, and unworthy of male attention.

Framing birth control usage as promiscuous is problematic for several reasons. This framing confirms a bias reported in empirical literature, such that contraceptive decisions become vehicles for testing relationships (Nathanson 1991 cited in Davies, McKinnon, and Rains 2001). While the song lyrics refer explicitly to a form of birth control that is visible and placed externally (commonly called ‘the patch’), if this notion is extended to beyond this form of birth control pills to condoms then this framing becomes even more troubling. Oftentimes, the suggestion of using a condom

is equated to an accusation of relationship fidelity or a test of relationship fidelity, such that the mere suggestion means that a partner must be cheating or a condom would not be needed (Davies, McKinnon, and Rains 2001). If women feel that they must prove fidelity or commitment to a relationship via a lack of birth control, particularly those that protect from STIs, women may put themselves at risk for unplanned pregnancies and STIs in order to begin a relationship (by demonstrating purity and the lack of necessity for birth control) or to maintain a relationship by demonstrating their fidelity.

Furthermore, at least among heterosexual women, even with access to the contraceptives of their choice, they still may be unable to make a truly 'free' choice about contraceptive use if they feel that their ability to attract a partner and maintain a relationship is diminished by their use of birth control. This notion also seems to reflect and reinforce the punishment of gender norm violations, such that if women do not conform to expectations regarding femininity and purity, they will face negative repercussions.

Lastly, through this problematic framing, men are positioned as having the power to pass judgment about the 'value' and desirability of a woman based on her use of birth control. Sternberg and Hubley (2004) argue that a more successful reproductive justice movement requires the involvement and support of men, but dominant frames such as the one just described are likely to inhibit their support. Given the potential role of hip-hop as both the 'engine and mirror' of a social movement (Trapp 2005, 1482), it is important to consider the ways in which this type of derogatory framing impedes reproductive justice, and the ways that hip-hop (or music in general) could be used as a tool to influence attitudes, perceptions, and potentially support for policies related to reproductive justice. It is unlikely reproductive justice will be the subject of a song on the Billboard Top 100, but systematically examining the ways in which issues related to reproductive justice are framed in music, and calling upon artists, both men and women, to more critically consider their framings of such issues would be a move in a more positive direction.

The problematic framing of teenage pregnancy in prime-time television: tragic situations and irresponsible, uncaring mothers

Within the field of adolescent sexual health, the focus of research efforts tends to be on the promotion of contraceptive use and the potentially negative consequences of sexual activity (for example, Swain, Ackerman, and Ackerman 2006; Anderson, Santelli, and Morrow 2006). Thus, it is not surprising that *Grey's anatomy* (a wildly successful evening soap opera on ABC, which regularly enjoys ratings in the Nielsen's top-10 viewing list) and *Family guy* (an adult cartoon on the FOX network) both recently aired episodes (Rimes and Minahan 2006; Hentemann and Holmquist, 2007, respectively) that contained scenes about the negative outcomes of teenage pregnancy. However, they both focused on the very infrequent occurrence of the mother dumping her newborn in a garbage can. In both cases, the mothers were high school students, the fathers played no discernible role in the pregnancies, and the responsibility of and for the situations fell squarely on the mothers.

This framing of teenage pregnancy and motherhood is problematic for several reasons. To begin with, this framing may leave little room for questioning underlying assumptions because it portrays an event to which most people would react

negatively and uniformly agree is a terrible situation. It is highly unlikely anyone perceives throwing babies into dumpsters as acceptable. However, by focusing on this ‘episodic’ (Iyengar 1991) exemplar, this framing does not allow for a discussion or consideration of the larger societal context in which this problem is positioned. Frightened mothers, delivering babies and then placing them in garbage receptacles, is not representative of the vast majority of teenage pregnancies. These striking images spark public outrage and undergird demand for changes in laws and policies, but they also misinform the public and perpetuate lack of awareness about the Infant Save Haven Laws. As of 2004, there were 46 states in which babies could be left at hospitals, police stations, or fire stations, with no questions asked (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2004). That potentially lifesaving information was notably absent in this framing and reinforces the idea that, if desperate, the only option is a garbage can. This framing also reinforces the type of ‘responsibility as care’ (by which a woman’s responsibility is judged by her ability to care for all persons in her life, and any failures to care result in punishment) that Daniels (1997), as well as Fine and Carney (2001), articulated, and perpetuates support for the criminalization of teen mothers by overemphasizing the irresponsibility, lack of care, and ‘badness’ of the individuals and discounting the importance of the societal forces that could give rise to these situations. Criminalization serves to ‘individualize solutions to [situations] that are the result of larger economic, social, and political conditions’ (Smith 2005, 123).

Returning to the broader societal context, this framing fails to provide the public with any meaningful information about the structural causes of teenage pregnancy. It is much more difficult for young women (especially low-income young women) to obtain birth control, emergency contraceptives, and abortions. For instance, while emergency contraceptives became available over-the-counter, they only became available for women aged 18 years and older – women under 18 years old still need a prescription (NOW 2007a). Furthermore, contraceptives can be expensive, particularly if young women are unaware of their eligibility for financial assistance through family planning clinics such as Planned Parenthood, and, given the consequences of the Debt Reduction Act of 2005 (limiting discounts provided by pharmaceutical companies to keep the cost of medications including birth control for certain types of providers), university health centers and clinics serving low-income populations are struggling to provide them. Even if young women, in general, do have access to reproductive healthcare, treatment is often not accessible or does not meet the needs for young women of color (McKee, Karasz, and Weber 2004). Conversely, this sort of media framing also negates the experiences of the young women who choose to have children and denies the agency of these young women. In a qualitative analysis, Davies, McKinnon, and Rains (2001) found that some young women actively chose motherhood, welcomed motherhood, and planned to have more children. These young women chose the path to motherhood for many reasons, but all voiced their willingness and desire to be mothers, as well as demonstrated great responsibility and concern for their children. They also discussed the role of the fathers in their lives and the lives of the children, and while not all of the young women were still actively involved with the fathers, many expressed strong connections to the fathers.

In summary, framing of teenage pregnancy and motherhood is problematic in terms of what is explicitly portrayed, as well as what is not contained within the

frame. This episodic framing merely reinforces the notion that any teenager who has a baby is irresponsible, uncaring, and will probably result in tragedy. It also perpetuates a presumed lack of awareness around Baby Safe Haven Laws (although it is unclear whether there has been a study assessing public awareness and knowledge around these laws). It fosters the notion that ‘baby dumping’ is the only option for young mothers with nowhere else to turn, which also provides support for the criminalization of failing the ‘women’s responsibility of care’ by portraying these young women (at least initially) as uncaring, unfeeling, and irresponsible. Lastly, this particular framing excludes the broader societal context of teenage pregnancy (including lack of access to reproductive healthcare) and denies the agency and responsibility of teen mothers in the more normative situations.

The problematic framing of sexual activity in prime-time television: nothing but danger

The notion that sexuality, particularly teenage sexuality, can be extremely dangerous is a problem that has been identified by researchers in the area of young women and sexuality development (for example, Tolman, Striepe, and Harmon 2003). However, *Desperate housewives*, another extremely popular and incredibly successful evening soap opera on the ABC network, recently aired an episode (Murphy, Etten, and Grossman 2007) with an inaccurate framing of contraceptives and reproductive healthcare access that perpetuates the notion that ‘sexuality is dangerous.’ In the episode, condom effectiveness was stated multiple times as *only* being 85% effective and the mother told her daughter that sex was dangerous and ‘sex kills.’ It was also communicated that young women needed to be at least 18 years old to obtain birth control, and that the doctor–client confidentiality rules did not apply to those under 18 years old. Although these gross inaccuracies were brought to the attention of the show’s producers via a letter written on behalf of 11 different organizations working for different aspects of reproductive justice (NOW 2007b), this framing is still extremely problematic in light of the fact that the majority of people who viewed that episode probably did not also read the letter to the producers.

As was the case for the previous two examples, sexual activity is being framed as dangerous and problematic on multiple levels. To begin with, as outlined in the letter to the producers, the 85% effectiveness rate of condoms refers to the effectiveness rates across all users, including those who use them inconsistently, incorrectly, or used expired condoms. When used consistently and correctly, condoms are 98% effective in preventing pregnancy as well as protecting against sexually transmitted infections (World Health Organization 2000). By repeatedly suggesting that they are ineffective (as in the classic framing paradigm focusing on ‘failures’; see Kahneman and Tversky 1984), people may think that using condoms is not worthwhile at all. Moreover, by focusing on the utility of condoms as exclusively to prevent pregnancy, their worth in protecting against STIs is also discounted. In the case of this episode, it was revealed that the young woman’s boyfriend was cheating on her, potentially exposing her to the risk of an STI, but the important role of condoms in STI prevention was never mentioned.

Acknowledging that there are certainly aspects of sexual activity that could lead to reproductive (and overall) health risks, focusing on the message that ‘sex kills’ perpetuates the problematic dominant ideologies about risky sexual behavior, as discussed by Tolman, Striepe, and Harmon (2003). The authors, in their model of

adolescent sexual health, stress the importance of moving beyond risky adolescent sexual behavior to explore the cultural and social contexts in which young women are embedded, and the ways in which their sexual explorations may reflect gender norm socialization, such as female passivity. Extending this research to aspects of reproductive justice, this type of framing does nothing to move beyond ‘dangers’ of sexual activity into exploring the ways that heterosexual and bisexual women can and should have agency in negotiating the interconnectedness of sexuality and reproduction. Drawing on Fine’s (1988) classic work on the ‘missing discourse of desire,’ this particular framing of danger emphasizes the reproductive consequences of sexuality for young women, and fails to provide accurate information regarding the ways young women could have agency about their reproduction to safely explore sex without the risk of pregnancy.

In addition to the misinformation about the effectiveness of condoms, the lack of doctor–patient confidentiality also frames sexual activity as a very risky endeavor. Parents are depicted as finding out about their daughter’s use of birth control with very little effort, and parental knowledge of this information could lead to very negative outcomes for the daughters. This type of misinformation may encourage young women to not even attempt to get birth control, if they so desire. Young women under the age of 18 years should be aware that they have access to birth control at any Title X family planning clinic (federal funding provided for family planning is known as Title X), and do not need parental consent. They are also protected by the same doctor–patient confidentiality afforded to patients at any other hospital or clinic. While this misinformation is consistent with the frame of danger, it may in fact create more danger by making young women feel as though they are helpless to do anything about preventing pregnancy.

Lastly, the framing of sexuality as danger in this particular show highlights the way in which the media may reflect and perpetuate notions of reproductive justice that center on individual choices. In *Desperate housewives*, nearly all of the characters are white, and upper-middle class, including the mother and daughter featured in the previously described scene. As Solinger (2001, 199–200 cited in Smith 2005) argues: ‘choice has become a symbol of middle-class women’s arrival as independent consumers ... middle-class women can afford to choose and have earned the right to choose motherhood if they liked.’ She also draws attention to the fact that when poor women made similar decisions, those decisions were viewed by society as illegitimate. Thus, ‘women are viewed as having reproductive choices if they can afford them or if they are deemed legitimate choice-makers’ (Smith 2005, 128). The fact that this situation was about the daughter choosing between her contraceptive options and strictly being concerned about access to her preferred method clearly reflects her experience as a white, middle-class young woman. This type of framing denies the vast number of very negative experiences that low-income women, women of color, and women with disabilities face around reproduction that have little to do with ‘choice.’ In the United States, these groups have been subjected to forced sterilizations as recently as the 1970s and are often the target of initiatives that encourage the use of long-lasting and oftentimes dangerous birth control, such as Norplant and Depo-Provera (Roberts 1998 cited in Thorburn and Bogart 2005). ‘Project Prevention’ (formerly called Children Requiring a Caring Kommunity or C.R.A.C.K.) offers \$200 to women who are addicted to drugs in exchange for their agreement to be sterilized or use a long-lasting, dangerous contraceptive such as

Depo-Provera or Norplant (Scully 2000). Hartmann (1995 cited in Smith 2005) argues that, while contraceptives are viewed as an issue of choice for white women, contraceptives are used as a tool for population control for women of color. It is no wonder as to why some women hold ‘negative beliefs about the role of government in contraceptive policy, programs, or practice,’ and why some women would feel less likely to use contraceptives that require interaction with a healthcare provider (Thorburn and Bogart 2005, 475). Additionally, women of color, women with disabilities, and low-income women often see providers who do not give culturally sensitive, appropriate care (Thorburn and Bogart 2005; Dotson, Stinson, and Christian 2003). African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans were more likely than Whites to report that their doctors did not listen carefully to their questions and they did not fully understand their doctors (Collins et al. 2002 cited in Park et al. 2005). These examples underscore the fact that framing contraceptive use as being about access and ‘choice’ fails to accurately represent the multidimensionality of barriers that many low-income women, women of color, women with disabilities, or any women society deems as ‘unworthy’ of being mothers, continue to face around issues of birth control.

In summary, the framing of sexuality as dangerous is problematic (particularly in a fashion with such gross inaccuracies) because it leads young women to believe that sexual activity is dangerous, thus depriving them the ability to develop a healthy sexuality in which they can both experience desire and have agency in their reproduction-related decisions. However, as problematic and inaccurate as this framing might be, it seems to be well aligned with the current policy trends in providing funding for abstinence-only education. Furthermore, this framing of sexuality as dangerous also implies that the use of birth control (and what type) revolves strictly around ‘choice,’ and makes invisible the infinitely more complex barriers that low-income women, women of color, and women with disabilities confront. Ultimately, this type of framing could reinforce pre-existing attitudes, or help form attitudes toward birth control and sexuality that lead to policies undermining accurate sexual education and healthcare practices and providers who do not understand or appropriately care for their clients.

Suggestions for future research

This analysis revealed a number of ways that research can be used to promote reproductive justice but also exposed areas in need of further exploration. First, research in this area would greatly benefit from systematic and descriptive content analyses of the types of frames used across the various forms of media. While this analysis was based on examples drawn from very popular sources, it was not an exhaustive examination of all framings. There are organizations, such as NOW, which do frame issues in a way to advance reproductive justice, but there is other research to suggest that media, such as television, frame issues in ways that lead to greater endorsement of stereotypical gender and sexual roles (for example, Ward and Rivadeneyra 1999; Ward and Friedman 2006).

In addition to content analyses, the use of experimental methodology to examine the ways in which media framing of reproductive issues can shift attitudes and perceptions, as well as influence support for particular policies, would also be beneficial. There is experimental research suggesting that adolescents who view

television shows that portray women as sexual objects are more likely to support this notion and to support stereotypical gender role stereotypes (Ward and Friedman 2006), but to the best of the author's knowledge there is very little (if any) research examining media framing effects for attitudes and policy through a lens focused on reproductive justice, particularly with respect to groups marginalized based on race, class, gender, or sexual orientation.

Secondly, more thorough investigations of public opinion on all issues related to reproductive justice are needed. There has been some research on public opinions, perceptions, and knowledge about various areas that could be examined in relation to reproductive justice, such as attitudes about sexual education (for example, Public Policy Institute of California 2006; Kaiser Family Foundation 2004), emergency contraception (for example, Wynn and Trussell 2006), perceptions of contraceptive effectiveness for pregnancy, and STIs (for example, Tessler and Peipert 1997; Yarber et al. 2005; Delbanco et al. 1997). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, these projects focused strictly on producing descriptive statistics about particular knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, and did not assess the ways in which the issues were framed – although in some cases the relationship between attitudes and policy were discussed. Therefore, while these are important starting points in understanding how the public feels about these issues, researchers interested in and committed to promoting reproductive justice need to initiate projects in which they can begin to understand the relationships between attitudes, public opinion, framing, and support for policies that have a direct impact on women's experiences of reproductive justice (or lack thereof). These public opinions also need to be understood based on how issues are framed and perceived based on multiple identities related to gender, race, class, and sexual orientation.

A final suggestion for future research involves the use of intersectional frameworks of analysis. This could be considered for both content analyses and experimental methodologies such that media framings at the interactions of race, class, sexual orientation, and disability are examined. For example, the examples in this analysis do not address the specific types of barriers that women who identify as being bisexual, queer, lesbian, or having a disability might face. An intersectional approach to this type of research could address the types of frames that may inhibit reproductive justice for some women, or advance reproductive justice for others, based upon multiple identities.

Media usage for change

In addition to future research directions, from a more applied perspective, it is also suggested that the media could be used as an educational tool about sex-related and reproduction-related issues. While the media are not necessarily perceived to be more accurate than parents or sex education teachers, they are consistently ranked among parents, peers, and sex education teachers as providing the most information about dating, sex, and sexual health (Wood et al. 2002; Somers and Surmann 2005). In fact, in a study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, researchers found that young teens rated the media as their number one source of information about sexuality and sexual health (Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now 1997 cited in Ward 2003). Ward and Friedman referred to television, due to 'its accessibility, frankness, and appealing nature,' as an 'almost "ideal" sexual educator' (2006, 134)

– which, if true, is problematic. However, since adolescents rank parents and teachers as important sources of information about some of these topics and as more credible than media sources, it seems both parents and teachers could play very important roles in educating children and young adults to be more critical media consumers. Media examples, such as the ones analyzed here, could be used in both informal settings, such as during conversations between parents and children, or in more formal settings, such as in classrooms. The media examples could be used as teaching tools to help provide children and young adults with the skills to deconstruct the ways in which issues related to sex and reproduction are framed in the media, and the ways in which those framings might reflect or perpetuate certain types of inaccurate information, stereotypes, or prejudices. In order to increase knowledge and awareness about the types of messages conveyed in the media about sexuality and reproduction and work toward advancing reproductive justice, children and young adults need help in becoming more critical media consumers.

Secondly, understanding the messages and frames currently used in the media, and the types of effects these might have on people, is important for those who wish to develop media that could be used to promote reproductive justice. For instance, consuming large amounts of mainstream media is negatively correlated with more positive and egalitarian attitudes about sex, relationships, and gender. Increased exposure to television (such as primetime shows, soap operas, and music television) and more in-depth involvement is correlated with attitudes that relationships are like a game, that men are driven by sex, and that women are sexual objects (Ward 2002). However, these effects are somewhat dependent upon identification with characters in the shows. Gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of an individual is important in determining the extent to which that person identifies with a character or show, and, subsequently, how much his or her beliefs are impacted by the media messages (for example, Ward and Friedman 2006; Ward and Rivadeneyra 1999; Rivadeneyra and Ward 2005). While these effects do not indicate causality, they are important to consider when developing media campaigns to influence peoples' perceptions about a given issue. Advocates for reproductive justice could benefit from using research on framing, sexuality, and reproduction to create nuanced and appropriate frames dependent upon their target audiences and goals.

Conclusion

The year 2008 marked the 35th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* and women continue to face challenges accessing legal abortion. In an effort to move beyond the more limiting conceptualizations of 'reproductive rights' and 'abortion rights,' it is important to more widely adopt the comprehensive construct of reproductive justice. Thus, interpreting current policies with a lens focused on reproductive justice can yield an analysis that demonstrates the many barriers women face in relation to reproduction. When examining the ways in which the public develops attitudes and stereotypes, and how those attitudes and stereotypes might lead to support (or lack of support) for certain policies related to aspects of reproductive justice, it is important to examine the ways in which the issues are framed. The media are an important source of information for the general public, and the specific effects of media framing around issues of reproductive justice have been largely unexamined. In the current analysis, drawn from very popular media, the framings were

problematic both for what was contained specifically within the frame as well as what was left out. Given the prominence, accessibility, and potential impact on providing information to the public about issues around reproductive justice, the media could be used by parents and educators as a means to foster critical media consumption. The media could also be used by advocates of reproductive justice as an avenue for disseminating new framings that counter those currently being used, particularly if care is given to creating frames that are appropriate and sensitive to the needs of women (and men) based on the intersections of multiple identities.

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