

BOOK REVIEWS

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Dangerous Frames: How Ideas About Race and Gender Shape Public Opinion. By Nicholas J. G. Winter. (University of Chicago Press, 2008.)

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For citizens of mass democracies, political judgment is often a matter of judgment about groups. The details of policy elude a large portion of the public, but groups are a notably visible part of social life. As such, citizens habitually rely on stereotypes, group affects, and perceptions of group interest in evaluating policies they may know little about. In some cases, the connection between group and policy is easy for citizens to grasp and for political scientists to make sense of. For example, it is not surprising that value-laden feelings of resentment toward African Americans play an important role in whites' attitudes toward affirmative action, as decades of research on "symbolic racism" and "racial resentment" has demonstrated. However, in many other cases, the link between group and policy is more subterranean and rooted in the forging of subtle connections between members of a group and a policy that is not at all group targeted. It is this second type of group-based policy judgment that Nicholas Winter focuses on in this important volume.

According to Winter, beliefs about race and gender will influence seemingly unrelated policy judgments when political rhetoric establishes subtle conceptual connections between a group and a policy issue. At the heart of Winter's argument is the phenomenon of "group implication," in which "rhetorical issue frames lead people to understand political issues by analogy with their cognitive understanding of race or of gender" (19). Group implication rests on an interaction between the content of political discourse and individuals' beliefs about race and gender. The discursive component of Winter's model focuses on the role of *issue frames*, which weave "a set of considerations together into a coherent story" about an issue (21). Frames provide issues with structure and meaning and provide cues about which aspects of a policy debate one should pay attention

to. In this way, they influence how a policy is evaluated. The individual-level psychological component of Winter's model focuses on race and gender *schemas*, i.e., knowledge structures that organize information about racial and gender categories according to the content of "popular ideologies of race and gender" (33). When these schemas are activated, they provide an interpretive lens through which group-relevant stimuli are evaluated. As Winter notes, this lens is often a stereotypical one: ambiguous information about a target is assimilated to what race and gender ideologies suggest we "know" about members of the target's group.

In turn, frames bring group schemas to bear on the evaluation of issues by way of implicit analogical reasoning: they establish parallels between the relational structure of various issues and chronically accessible group schemas. This analogical process is the essence of group implication, and it is one of Winter's most important contributions. As an illustration, Winter points toward the different frames applied to welfare and Social Security in elite political discourse. While discussion of welfare has typically emphasized themes of "laziness, lack of personal responsibility, and perverse incentives," discussion of Social Security has focused on "hard work and legitimately earned rewards" (9). The content of these frames overlaps considerably with stereotypes of African Americans and whites, forging implicit connections between welfare and "blackness" and Social Security and "whiteness." Among white Americans, the result of this implicit analogical connection should be heightened relationships between attitudes toward African Americans and welfare and attitudes toward the white ingroup and Social Security.

Having developed a theoretical model of group implication, Winter provides both experimental and survey-based evidence for it. In his experimental work, participants read bogus newspaper articles about three issues: grandparent-child visitation rights, Social Security privatization, and government intervention in the economy. Participants were randomly assigned to read these articles under one of

three conditions: a control condition, a racial-framing condition, and a gender-framing condition. Importantly, the treatment frames were subtle and avoided explicit group references. The results of the experiment were largely supportive. When framed to match racial schemas, evaluation of the three issues was more strongly related to racial resentment. Results for the gender condition were more mixed, but the gender frame strengthened the relationship between gender egalitarianism and evaluation of two of the three issues—visitation rights and Social Security privatization.

In subsequent chapters, Winter presents convergent survey evidence from the National Election Studies. First, returning the example of welfare and Social Security, he finds that racially conservative whites tend to be less supportive of welfare but more supportive of Social Security than racially liberal whites. As a second test case, Winter looks at the evolution of public opinion about the Clinton health care reform plan during the 1993–94 period prior to its defeat. Here, he notes that opponents of the plan eventually adopted used frames that highlighted the specter of government interference in the “private” realm of health-care choices and provision, establishing an implicit linkage with concerns about interference in the “private” realm of gender relations. Consistent with this account, Winter finds that gender egalitarianism is largely unrelated to attitudes about government involvement in health care *until* the emergence of the “privacy” frame in 1994; at that time, gender beliefs become strongly linked to health-care attitudes, with gender egalitarians expressing more support than gender traditionalists for government involvement in health care.

On the whole, then, the data provide strong support for Winter’s group-implication argument. The broader implications of Winter’s findings are quite sobering, as they suggest that even universalistic strategies for addressing social inequality—such as Social Security and universal health insurance—may become linked to conflicts over race and gender under the right conditions.

Despite the strength of these results, there are a few relevant issues that I wish Winter’s book had explored more deeply. For example, Winter deals with the issue of intersectionality—“the ways that systems of stratification interact with one another” (11)—at a theoretical level in numerous places. However, this theoretical emphasis is not matched at the empirical level, with the exception of analyses indicating that racial frames do not activate gender predispositions and vice versa. It is important that

this problem be addressed by looking at the effects of frames that match the structure of stereotypes that are truly intersectional, e.g., stereotypes of African-American men or professional women. As Winter himself notes, the content of these subgroup stereotypes may play a unique role at both the discursive and cognitive levels. Another issue has to do with the ability of Winter’s data to differentiate between his causal account of framing effects—based on the specific role of analogical reasoning—and simpler accounts. While Winter’s model provides an interesting and theoretically rich account of why certain frames activate certain schemas, neither the experimental or survey analyses provide evidence that framing effects require an analogical process and not simply the direct activation of stereotype content that is cognitively linked to group schemas. (This, to be fair, is a criticism that can be leveled not just at Winter’s work, but at quite a bit of framing research in political psychology.)

In the end, though, these issues do not seriously detract from Winter’s overall accomplishment. All in all, Winter’s book makes a solid contribution to the literatures on framing, policy judgment, and race and gender, and it will be enjoyed by scholars interested in any or all of these topics.

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