

# **The Mistress is the Mastermind: Framing Women Involved in a Government Fund Scam by a Social News Network in the Philippines**

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## **Abstract**

The study investigated the framing of how women involved in the Philippine ‘pork barrel’ scam or misuse of discretionary funds given to members of Congress are framed. These discretionary funds were supposedly for development projects and were officially called Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF). First exposed by Philippine media in 2013, the alleged scam implicated five senators and 23 members of Congress. Informed by framing and feminist theories, this study content analyzed 107 stories and the framing of 33 major stories reported by Rappler, a social news network in the Philippines. The labels used for women in the 107 stories were “mastermind” (49.44%), Mrs. Napoles” (14.61%), “Brains behind the pork barrel scam” (12.36%), and “Pork barrel queen” (8.98%). Only two stories labeled her as the “scapegoat of corrupt lawmakers.” The three-level codings of the 33 stories revealed five primary frames, namely: 1) consumerist women, 2) social climbers, 3) bad mother, 4) woman vs. woman, and 5) woman vs. herself, while the secondary frames included 1) personalization and suspicion, and 2) minor men. The “minor men” frame showed that the male counterparts of the women (Mrs. Napoles’ General husband and son) were glossed over in the stories, hence ‘pushing’ Janet Napoles further in the limelight as the ‘mastermind’ of the complex Philippine ‘pork barrel’ scam.

**Keywords:** feminist theory, media framing, media and women, online or social news network, pork barrel, Philippine media, Rappler, Philippine Congress, corruption, gender discrimination

## **Introduction**

Media plays an important role in influencing people’s perceptions, opinions, and behavior (Entman et al., 2009). Pernia (2004) reiterates that the words disseminated by the media cause people to

create images in their minds that would later be transmitted and reinforced in society. From a cultural perspective, news organizations' text can be considered an "artifact" of the given culture bearing its key values and meanings (Berkowitz, 2011). The most important truths about the world's culture can be revealed by looking at how ordinary news is reported daily (Ettema, 2011). One way to study the cultural meaning of news is to focus on its implication for power and hegemony. A society's subconscious ideas of who is powerful or not are culturally developed and, thus, depicted in and, at the same time, reinforced by the media (Berkowitz, 2011).

Journalists consciously or unconsciously use frames in writing their news and reports. Besides the definition of framing as the process of organizing, defining, and structuring a story (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), media framing also includes selecting and focusing on various aspects of perceived reality (Entman, 1993). Hardin and Whiteside (2010) suggested that a feminist lens in framing studies can help advocate for feminist goals like "nonstereotypical, socially just news coverage of women and men."

In July 2013, the Philippines was shaken when an expose about a multi-billion 'pork barrel' scam spread in the media. The Philippine 'pork barrel' scam, or misuse of discretionary funds given to members of Congress supposedly for development projects and officially called Priority Development Assistance Fund, was first exposed on July 12, 2013, by the mainstream newspaper, Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI). A whistleblower revealed the modus operandi of one woman - Janet Lim-Napoles, wife of a retired Philippine General - who allegedly collaborates with legislators to use and allocate their 'pork barrel' on her bogus non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Five senators and 23 congressmen were allegedly involved in the scam.

Days after the report in the newspaper, news on the businesswoman's properties and lifestyle spread on different media, including the Internet. Media organizations also picked up numerous reports about the lifestyle of her youngest daughter living in the U.S. It was Rappler, the first social news network founded 2011 in the Philippines, that picked up the issue, drawing visitors to their site starting August 2013 while investigations were going on. With women as leading players in a national controversy, the researchers felt that it was appropriate to study how the media framed the issue's coverage and how gender myths affected their framing. This is the central question of this study.

While there is a rich collection of literature about the general portrayal of women in different media, few studies have been conducted on how the media report news on women involved in controversies such as

crimes and political controversies.

Barnett (2011) investigated how journalists framed in their reports women who killed their children. A textual and narrative analysis of stories published in America since the 1990s showed that the ‘flawed mother’ theme was the most employed narrative in the stories. Women who committed infanticide were regarded as mad and insane. Journalists also treated cases of infanticide as “mysteries,” leading to the sensationalizing of the stories. Instead of sensationalizing stories, Barnett recommended journalists “explain why women come to this violent point in their lives,” which may include romanticized notions of motherhood, gender norms that delegate child care to women, lack of recognition of the complex work involved in daily child care, lack of understanding about postpartum depression, and lack of family, community, and institutional support for mothers.

In 2006, Nacos studied the framing of women terrorists and politicians in the media. A content analysis of American and European print and broadcast news revealed six frames used in portraying women terrorists: the physical appearance frame, the family connection frame, terrorist for the sake of love, the women’s lib/equality frame, the tough-as-males/tougher-than-men frame, and the bored, naïve, out-of touch-with-reality frame. Nacos concluded that women, either those who were involved in legitimate political activities or those in illegitimate political activities such as terrorism, were still portrayed in mainstream media with prevalent gender stereotypes and biases.

Even with the prominence of new media and social media today, most existing studies about the portrayal of women examined content in traditional media, including print and broadcast media. Pioneering a study on the portrayal of women in online media, this study chose Rappler. The news organization calls itself a “social news network” mainly because it operates on a multimedia platform, encouraging participation and involvement among its online readers and viewers. While Rappler is relatively new in the Philippine media landscape, it is one of the fastest-growing news organizations in the country. In a commentary entitled *Rappler: Redefining Journalism in a Social World*, Rappler CEO Maria Ressa (2012) said that the social news network was created with a vision “to create an alternative distribution platform that could empower the bottom of the pyramid.” Rappler is one of the few news organizations promoting women’s empowerment through its stories and campaigns. In November 2013, Rappler joined Pantene Philippines’ #WHIPIT campaign. #WHIPIT challenges the prejudice, labels, and double standards imposed on women in Philippine society and, at the same time, inspires women to stand up against

these prejudices.

The findings of this study could help advance feminist goals and guide development journalists to be aware of and re-evaluate how they issues involving women.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Two theories inform this research: the framing theory, sometimes called the second-level agenda-setting theory, and the feminist theory. According to the second-level agenda-setting theory, the press can tell us how we should think about an issue, affecting our interpretation of an issue's attributes. The second level agenda-setting theory "mirrors the framing process" (McCombs, 1997, cited by Griffin, 2006).

Framing is "choosing a broad organizing theme for selecting, emphasizing, and linking the elements of a story" (Bennet, 2005, p.37, cited in Tubbs and Moss, 2008). Hence, framing can tell the public what issues to pay attention to through the use of "selection," "emphasis," "exclusion," and "elaboration" (Tankard, 1991, cited by Griffin, 2006). According to Entman (1993), a frame is a narrative, a way of telling a story from a particular point of view. Like the frame of a picture, a frame of a story not only encloses but also leaves some things out: "Frames select and call attention to particular aspects of the reality described, which logically means that frames simultaneously direct attention from other aspects. Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include. (p. 55)."

Carragee and Roefs (2004) added that frames could be seen not only as "guides in the meaning-making process" but also as "imprints of power." As such, framing can "define and structure social relationships" over time (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010). The relationship between framing and power can serve as a basis for questioning manifestations of patriarchy in society. Feminist theory traces its roots to the field of sociology. Grounded on the assumptions of feminism, this theory is concerned with the status of women in society. It is used to describe and understand forms of oppression against women, explore the causes and effects of these oppressions, and suggest ways these power inequalities can be overcome (Tong, 2008). To summarize, feminist theory is "the analysis of women and men in society and is intended to improve women's lives" (Andersen & Tay, 2013).

Framing studies with a feminist lens can be considered a " tool supporting an activist research agenda." Throughout history, feminist media researchers have been alarmed about how journalists frame their reports with gender-related myths. These frames contribute to forming and

reinforcing “commonsense assumptions that privilege men in the social hierarchy” (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010).

Situated within the critical paradigm of knowing, a large part of this study’s results emerged from the researchers’ critical reflection. As Baxter and Babbie (2003) put it, critical reflection is the “interrogation of a data set with an eye towards identifying its ideological bias and implications of this bias for power relations. Further, the critiques generated through this study were grounded in feminist theory.

## Methodology

Citing Kitzinger (2007), Mendes wrote in 2011 that “frames are commonly identified through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis.” As such, the study employed content analysis and an inductive framing analysis of the framing elements used in the coverage of the pork barrel scam. Content analysis was used to gather empirical information about the labels used to refer to the women. Meanwhile, an inductive framing analysis was used to study the labels and frames used in the stories.

The time frame for collecting the stories was from July 2013 to September 2013. The time frame was selected based on the start and height of the pork barrel scam issue in the Philippines.

The study used a purposive sampling procedure for all stories in Rappler related to the pork barrel scam. The researchers chose to study the stories in Rappler because it is one of the most dynamic news organizations using the social media platform today. Further, this social news network is one of the few news organizations promoting women’s empowerment today through its stories and campaigns.

Last November 2013, Rappler launched a campaign called #WHIPIT in cooperation with Pantene Philippines. #WHIPIT challenges the prejudice, labels, and double standards imposed on women in our society and, at the same time, inspires them to stand up against these prejudices. Exactly 287 stories were recorded and downloaded. Through the identification of news and news features that tackled substantively women involved in the scam, the number of stories was refined to 107. The stories under this refined list were the only ones that went through a content analysis. As for the inductive framing analysis, only 33 significant articles that featured in-depth (more than 50 percent of its content) the women involved in the pork barrel scam were analyzed.

News stories written from July 2013 to September 2013 with the keyword ‘pork barrel scam’ were acquired through an online archive search

on Rappler.com. To ensure all related stories were collected, the keywords 'Napoles' and 'PDAF' were also used to crosscheck the list of stories gathered. No opinion articles, photographs, or editorial cartoons were included in the A coding sheet determined the labels attached to the women involved. Guided by the procedures suggested by Van Gorp (2010), three levels of coding – open, axial, and selective coding – were performed to surface the frames used in reporting about women involved in the scam.

## **Results And Discussion**

### **Labels for Women Involved in the Scam**

Name-calling, labeling, and stereotyping are some of the most prominent forms of oppression experienced by women. Labels can be considered a framing device because these are journalists' choice of language in referring to the women involved.

Almost half (49.44%) of the recorded labels called Janet Napoles the 'mastermind' of the scam. This was followed by Mrs. Napoles (14.61%), the brains behind the pork barrel scam (12.36%), and the pork barrel scam (8.98%). Only two labeled her as a scapegoat for corrupt lawmakers.

The summary of the top labels used in referring to the women in the pork barrel scam based on the content analysis of the 107 stories is listed in Table 1 and Figure 2. The labels are explained in the next section.

**Table 1***Top Labels Used in Referring to Women Involved in the Pork Barrel Scam*

Party animal	
TOP LABELS	NUMBER (n= 89)
Mastermind	44
Mrs. Napoles	13
Brains behind the pork barrel scam	11
Pork barrel queen	8
Others	13
woman at the center of the pork barrel scam	4
scapegoat of corrupt lawmakers	2
VIP/star inmate	2
head of a syndicate	2
beneficiary of pork barrel scam	1
Grinch	1
Party animal	1

***Mastermind***

Mastermind was the most common label used to refer to Janet Lim Napoles, the primary woman involved in the pork barrel scam. This term was used 44 (49.44%) times in the 107 stories subjected to content analysis. A mastermind plans, strategizes, and directs a complicated project. This term, however, has a negative connotation because it is usually attached to those who supervise unlawful acts. Throughout history, notorious male criminals have usually been branded with this term. However, when the whistleblowers tagged Janet as the scam's mastermind, the popular image of a mastermind – a male with cunning and intricate intelligence – was shaken. She seemed to have violated the societal expectations of what a 'real woman' should be. The persistence of this label in the stories affirmed that women who commit "unladylike acts" seems more newsworthy to the media (Nacos,



2006).

“Mastermind” was often used as part of the lead of pork barrel scam-related stories, which included an introduction about Janet. This label is often accompanied by “alleged” or “supposed”. The use of this label to refer to Napoles may be because the whistleblowers who used to be her employees tagged her as the “mastermind” of the said scam.

Mrs. Napoles. “Mrs. Napoles,” as a term used to refer to the primary woman involved, should also be given attention. It can be observed that since the issue of the pork barrel scam was exposed in the media, the “Napoles” surname has become a buzzword. As a surname she just acquired from her husband when they married, the use of the title “Mrs.” in referring to her seemingly creates an impression that the male Napoles has a smaller part in the issue. True to this, only a very small part of Rappler’s coverage tried to delve into the whereabouts of retired Major Jaime Napoles. This aspect of the coverage will be discussed further in the frame analysis part of the study.

Brains behind the pork barrel scam. This was the third most common term tagged to Napoles. It was observed that the label “brains behind the pork barrel scam” was used as a substitute for “mastermind.” Similar to “mastermind,” journalists also used words such as “alleged,” “supposed,” and “believed to be” to qualify their statements.

This label formed an image of Napoles as an intelligent criminal. This image, somehow, was similar to the interpreted attribute of the label mastermind, which was the violation of society’s expectation of an intelligent criminal as a man with cunning and intricate intelligence. In fact, along with the label “brains behind the pork barrel scam,” phrases such as “well-entrenched” and “intricate web of corruption” were also used in the reportage.

Pork barrel queen. Another prominent label given to Napoles is “pork barrel queen.” Despite its relatively low-frequency count, this label is one of the more popular labels used in the mainstream media in reporting about Napoles. Unlike the previously discussed labels, “pork barrel queen” was used more freely by journalists. This can be proven by the lack of attachment of words like “alleged” to the label. In one of the stories, the writer straightforwardly referred to Napoles, calling her “fugitive and pork barrel queen.” The same goes for a story about the Court’s order to examine the accounts of Napoles. In this story, “pork barrel queen” was chosen to describe her when mentioning her reported 430 bank accounts. Further, a story in the sample has Pork barrel queen parties with solons for its headline.

The label “pork barrel queen” has become a more acceptable and safer way for journalists to call Napoles. This may be because the other



label, “mastermind,” has implications for the Law. Being a mastermind of a crime is a grave violation of the Law. Thus, accusing a person of being a “mastermind” can lead to a libel case for a journalist when proven otherwise. In the label “pork barrel queen,” on the other hand, a symbolic name was used to call Napoles. Unlike the others leading the count, this is, by far, the most stereotypical label attached to Napoles. “Pork barrel queen” was never used by the whistleblowers when talking about Napoles during their testimonies. It was a label created and, at the same time, reinforced by the media.

Other labels. Aside from the more common labels attached to Napoles, a few more terms were used to refer to her in other stories. These were “woman at the center of the pork barrel scam,” “scapegoat of corrupt lawmakers,” “VIP/star inmate,” “head of a syndicate,” and “Grinch.”

“Woman at the center of the pork barrel scam” had the most occurrences among the labels categorized under “Others.” The lead of one story read: The woman at the center of the alleged pork barrel scam has partied and rubbed elbows with lawmakers, indicating she’s more than an acquaintance to them. It can be observed that this label was used along with implications that Napoles had physical social contact with lawmakers, who happened to be males. Thus, it can be said that this label was used to emphasize that Napoles, a woman, mingled with some of the powerful men in the national government.

In another usage of this label, a contrast was employed by starting a story with the sentence: The manhunt continues for the woman at the center of what investigators describe as one of the biggest scams in the country’s history. Manhunt, a general term used in the search for fugitives, was used to search for the “woman at the center” – or one who apparently held everything in the palm of her hands.

“VIP/ star inmate,” on the other hand, was also used in a few of the stories published after Napoles surrendered and after she had been detained. The label “head of a syndicate” was used as another substitute or variation to “mastermind” and “brains behind the pork barrel scam.” “Grinch,” a fictional character known for stealing Christmas, was called Napoles. The said story reported the issuance of Php 95 M worth of agrarian reform funds to one of the fake NGOs of Napoles on December 23, 2009. Hence, she ‘heartlessly’ stole the supposed “Christmas gifts” to the real beneficiaries– and she did so on a Christmas Day, the season of love and sharing– just exacerbated her notoriety to the reading public.

In one story, Napoles was also labeled a “party animal” because of her habit of attending social gatherings.

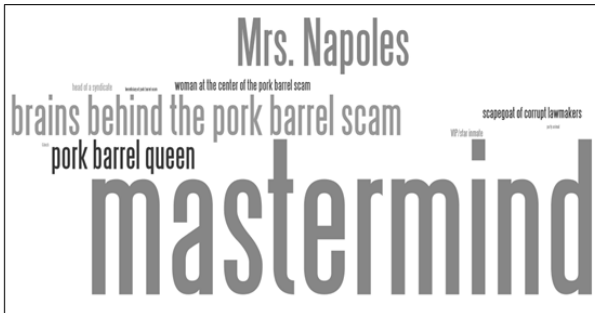
“Scapegoat of corrupt lawmakers” and “beneficiary of pork barrel

scam” could be considered the most passive labels attached to Napoles. The first label was used in two stories citing the statements of Atty. Lorna Kapunan, lawyer of Napoles. While implying a more passive role of Napoles in the scam, “beneficiary of pork barrel” was actually used alongside the more prominent label “mastermind.” The usage of the said label in the lead of the story entitled “Kapunan: Napoles is the scapegoat of corrupt lawmakers” goes: According to Luy and other whistleblowers’ testimonies, Napoles is the beneficiary and mastermind of a massive pork barrel scam which funnels government money into ghost projects of fake foundations created by Napoles. This sentence is actually a double jeopardy because to be the mastermind is bad enough, but to be the beneficiary of the scammed government funds emphasized her seeming culpability.

Another notable feature of the labels was the multiple usages of these in the stories. For example, in Pork barrel queen parties with solon, the term “woman at the center of the pork barrel scam” was used to describe Napoles instead of the one mentioned in the headline. One good reason for this was the desire of journalists for variation. However, the researchers believe that this also tells us about the prominence of labeling and name-calling towards women to the point that you can attach several labels to them in just one story or, further, in just one issue.

## Figure 2

*Word Cloud of Labels Used in Referring to Women Involved in the Pork Barrel Scam*



## Framing of Women Involved in the Scam

The results of the three-level coding framing analysis showed five primary and two secondary frames. The primary frames include consumerist women, social climbers, bad mothers, woman vs. woman, and woman vs. herself. The secondary frames are personalization suspicion and minor men. Frame #1: Consumerist women. The consumerist women’s frame was one of the most common frames used to depict the women involved in the pork

barrel scam. The core idea of this frame is that women are susceptible to consumerism. Further, these women serve as symbols of consumerism. According to Peiss (1998), consumption is now considered in society to be a woman's role. Women are even tagged with the phrase "born to shop." She added, "consumption is coded as a female pursuit, frivolous, and even wasteful, a form of leisure than productive work." The naturalization of this role of women in society has led to the stereotyping of women as not only the main players in the consumption process but also as followers of consumption as an entire way of life. Thus, a consumerist lifestyle.

Under this frame, Janet and her daughter Jeane Napoles were portrayed as women with the habit of buying lavish products and services, a stereotype attached to women. Two stories were specifically written about the lifestyle and properties of Jeane: Napoles's daughter blogs about the lavish lifestyle, and Napoles's daughter owns a Php80M LA property. These stories were published just a few days after Benhur Luy first exposed the scam in the Philippine Daily Inquirer on July 12, 2013. In the two stories, words such as "lavish," "luxurious," "expensive taste," and "extravagant" were used to describe Jeane's lifestyle. Brand names of high-end clothes, bags, and shoes, such as "Louis Vuitton, YSL, Chanel, and Christian Louboutin" Jeane owned, were also mentioned to support the story of her lavish lifestyle. The brand of car that Jeane drove in Manila before was also mentioned. The textual and visual descriptions of these products highlighted Jeane's consumerist behavior.

Janet's appeal to the public dissemination of the stories about her daughter's lifestyle was also reported. Janet defended her "right to shop." We can observe that the term "shop" was used instead of other words that can also be applicable, such as "buy" or "purchase." The term "shop" further tells us that shopping is always associated with women. As Peiss puts it, "Shopping was now transformed from a functional activity into a form of leisure." Contrast this to the account of Jaime Napoles, her husband, in a report by ABS-CBNnews.com, who said that the lavish 21st birthday party was part of her daughter's school project in fashion or merchandising. The father defended his daughter's spending based on a need in school, which was seemingly reasonable; the mother defended her daughter's spending as something of a woman's nature, which was seemingly unreasonable, hence deplorable.

In a study conducted by Foust and Bradshaw (2007), one of the dominant frames that resulted from the framing analysis of images of women in Broadcasting magazine is the portrayal of women with stereotypical roles such as heavy shoppers and gossipers. The study found that women were

portrayed in magazine advertisements as heavy shoppers to the point that they frustrated their husbands because of their seemingly endless desire for material goods.

Ellen Willis (1970), an activist in Women's Liberation, tried to criticize this stereotype attached to women in her article "Women and the Myth of Consumerism." Willis claims that society has labeled women as consumers. This is because our patriarchal society usually assumes that women should make themselves presentable to men. Thus, women are forced to purchase products and services that would make them fit the expectations of men. As Willis claims: "Consumerism as applied to women is blatantly sexist." Despite the low number of full-length articles under this frame, parts of the stories were repeatedly mentioned in some of the other pork barrel scam-related stories in the sample. Also, as an affirmation of the popular theory of consumerism, which directly identifies consumerism with femininity, no article delving into the purchases and lifestyles of the men involved was recorded.

With this frame, the coverage implied that the women involved sustained their consumerist lifestyle through the money they got from the pork barrel scam. Conversely, men may become business partners with those involved in the scam, but they fade from the 'media limelight' after a few explanations that they were not guilty.

**Frame #2: Social climbers.** Based on observation, women have been extensively portrayed as social climbers in media and literature. Though some academic researchers have tried to look into the phenomenon of social climbing and its association with women, this stereotype is often portrayed in films and fictional stories.

A social climber strives for a higher societal position by associating or affiliating with the echelons or the upper crust. Striving to belong to a group of wealthy and famous people, according to its popular definition, is also considered social climbing.

When photos of Janet Napoles with public officials in social gatherings leaked on the Internet, Rappler published numerous stories about these photographs. In one story, Janet was depicted with visual descriptions of her "smiling and posing for cameras" with famous personalities. Moreso, the writer described Napoles' actions as that of someone who felt like "it was her party." This phrase is speculation and lends a negative connotation – implying that Janet was appropriating a social event as if it were her own.

A story on Jeane Napoles' lifestyle, also mentioned under the consumerist frame, discussed her presence in high-society events after she returned abroad as surprising. The report added that bodyguards

accompanied Jeane when attending the said events. Bodyguards are usually associated with politicians or the very rich whose lives are at risk or who face threats of kidnapping because of their wealth or influence. Hence, even at a young age, Jeane already apparently had 'high value and influence.'

The mention of the other residents of the Ritz-Carlton Condominium, which reportedly costs Php 80 million, also added to the framing devices of the social climbers' frame. The story started with a lead that said Jean "bought a luxurious Los Angeles apartment in a building where Hollywood celebrities and public figures live." This part of the text implies that Jean knowingly bought the apartment because famous and wealthy people also lived there. Here, a picture of Jean trying to belong to the crowd of people belonging to the higher level of the social ladder was created.

In the same story, Jean was addressed as "an aspiring fashion designer." The use of the word "aspiring" should also be noted. During the analysis of the stories, a pattern in the image of women as dreamers was noticed. Aside from using "aspiring fashion photographer" to refer to Jeane, a profile feature story about Janet started with a lead that said, "She had always dreamt of being rich." Moreover, Christine, another daughter of Janet, was said to have "dropped her dreams" of joining Congress after the issue of the pork barrel scam spread. Christine was nominated as the second representative of the OFW Family Party list, which won two congressional seats during the May 2013 elections.

In an active search for related literature about social climbing and women, the researchers found an article in Yahoo News (initially published in the Manila Bulletin) named Janet, the "queen of social climbing."

The stereotyping of women as social climbers may be rooted in the fact that women are frequently considered as the lesser sex despite the rhetorics of equality. As such, women would always strive to climb the social ladder and demand a better position in society. Furthermore, when they do, they are labeled as social climbers. With the pork barrel scam, money was seen as an instrument used by the women involved in upgrading their social status.

**Frame #3:** Bad mother. One remarkable feature of the Rappler coverage of the pork barrel scam during the first few months of its exposure was the occasional inclusion of familial relationships between mothers and daughters. Discussed explicitly in the reportage was Janet's relationship with her daughter Jeane and her mother Magdalena Luy Lim.

There has been a rich discourse on the prevalence of the concept of "bad mothers" in our society today. In *Bad Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth Century America*, editors Ladd-Taylor and Umasky stated that

mother-blaming has become a common social phenomenon. Some of the stereotypes associated with bad mothers are “the welfare mother, the teen mother, the career woman who has no time for kids, the drug addict who poisons her fetus... and so on”. Ladd-Taylor and Umansky (1998) further suggest that the list of stereotypes seems endless when it comes to mother-blaming. As Caplan (1998) puts it: “In our society, it is acceptable to blame Mom.”

In one story, the language chosen in the report about the statement that Janet “admits funding her daughter’s lavish lifestyle.” Another article also stated that netizens accused Janet of using pork barrel money to “sustain” the lifestyle of her daughter. In using the words “admits” and “sustains,” the writer implied that Janet was consciously providing and maintaining the luxurious caprices of her daughter. This framing device created a picture of Janet as a mother who spoiled her daughter. With this, a reasoning device stating that Janet was partly to be blamed for her daughter’s lavish wants and activities could be derived.

The role of Magdalena Luy Lim as Janet’s mother was also explored in some parts of the text analyzed. In most of the stories analyzed, Magdalena was often mentioned as a woman of faith, a religious servant. Moreover, she reportedly requested her daughter to support financially priests from a specific congregation. In one story, however, the supposed negligence of Magdalena was implied with the mention that she never asked her daughter about their instant source of wealth. Similar to the portrayal of Janet as a mother responsible for Jeane’s wrongdoings, Magdalena was also portrayed as a mother who passively allowed her child to commit unlawful acts.

Aside from the description of the mother-daughter relationship between Magdalena and Janet, it was also mentioned in the story that both were teen mothers who married early. In the story, Janet is described as a girl who married “not long after” she finished high school. A few paragraphs later, Magdalena is introduced in the story as Janet’s mother, “who also got married when she was a teenager.”

This line of reasoning devices and portrayals used in framing the relationships of women involved (who happen to be mothers and daughters) can somehow be encapsulated in the phrase “like mother, like daughter.” As Magdalena was portrayed as a mother who tolerated her daughter’s doings, Janet was also portrayed as a mother who spoiled Jeane’s lavish wants. Further, Janet’s inclinations for designer brands were mentioned, implying that her daughter ‘followed’ her footsteps.

The bad mother frame is a manifestation that mother-blaming is still predominant in our society. This is because our culture, a culture governed



by patriarchy, encourages us to point fingers at our mothers and to focus only on their faults (Ladd-Taylor & Umansky, 1998).

**Frame #4:** Woman vs. woman. The core frame of the woman vs. woman frame is that women involved in the pork barrel scam conflict with other women. Dellasega (2005) states that the media, specifically television shows and movies, promote conflict, competitiveness, and aggressiveness among women. Most of the time, the media pits women against each other (Wade, 2012).

Some stories in the coverage depicted women at odds with each other. In the news feature story about Justice Secretary Leila De Lima and Atty. Lorna Kapunan, their credentials and experiences were discussed side by side. A big part of the story was also allotted to discuss the two women's past as law partners. One of the noticeable texts from the source goes: De Lima did not appreciate reports that her former law partner is calling for the creation of a new investigating body to look into the scam. Along with using negative words, such as "did not appreciate," the writer chose to refer to Kapunan afterward as De Lima's "former law partner." In this sentence, a framing device highlighted the brewing conflict between the former law partners.

Aside from this, part of the story was devoted to discussing the ranks of Kapunan and De Lima in the law firm they used to work in. The report found it necessary to mention that in the said law firm, Kapunan outranked De Lima. However, at the time of the study, De Lima, the country's justice secretary, outranked Kapunan. Though only one full-length story featured the supposed competition between Kapunan and De Lima, mention of their past as former law partners was constantly mentioned in other stories where their names and statements were included.

Another manifestation of the woman vs. woman frame can be seen in a story about the possibility of Janet sharing a cell with her former maid. According to the report, the former maid of Janet was in jail because she set her up for qualified theft. Written as a news feature, the story explores the former dynamics between Janet and her maid. Through the use of this frame in the story, depictions of Janet as an abusive and wicked lady master and her maid as an abused and obedient maid were created.

In another story entitled *The jail that awaits Napoles*, a paragraph reads, "What's more, her former maid is detained there. A lawyer said Napoles set her up for qualified theft." The reasoning device implied in this part of the text was that it would be exciting and interesting to see Janet share a cell with her former maid. Also, the imagined situation seemed to be deemed a poetic justice for Janet.



Many feminists argue that the pitting of women against each other by the media is also a part of the oppression imposed by a patriarchal society. Instead of portraying women supporting each other, women are portrayed more as rivals or, worse, as participants in a catfight. This media portrayal can be considered as a way to divide women and to put them at odds with each other.

**Frame #5: Woman vs. herself.** The woman vs. herself frame creates an image of a woman who symbolically can be considered a hypocrite. Under this frame, the women's own words were used against them.

As observed in one story, the writer ended with a quote from Jeane's blog about her questioning the advocacy of Manny Pacquiao [a boxer who later became a member of Congress] towards fighting poverty. These parts of the text suggested that Jeane was being "ironic" that she was not true to her words.

This frame was also used when a line Janet often told to her employees was mentioned: "*Ang sinungaling, kapatid ng magnanakaw*" (a liar is the sibling of a thief). The inclusion of this direct quotation in the story portrayed Janet as a woman who did not live by what she sermonized.

Kapunan's truthfulness to her principles was also questioned in a story titled Napoles 'entitled to due process' – Kapunan. The title of the story suggested that it was a news story about the statement of Kapunan as Janet's lawyer. However, the story starts with a lead: *She is a lawyer with a long tradition of fighting for various advocacies. She fought alongside critics of former President Gloria Arroyo and has herself called for the abolition of the pork barrel. Why did Lorna Kapunan accept Janet Lim-Napoles as a client?*

Aside from the disconnection between the headline and the story's lead, the use of the women vs. herself frame was evident in this story. The principles of Kapunan, a professional and successful female lawyer, were questioned because she decided to accept Janet as a client.

Women are often stereotyped as inconsistent and fickle-minded individuals. The use of the women vs. herself frame reinforces the notion that women are inconsistent and, worse, notions that many women are hypocrites and untrustworthy.

The two secondary frames are Frame #6. Personalization and suspicion and Frame #7. Minor men.

**Frame #6: Personalization and suspicion.** Personalization, as a frame used in depicting women, is derived from literature about the media portrayal of women in feminist movements. Personalization is the emphasis given by the media on the personal appearance of women involved in the

feminist movement (Bronstein, 2005).

In some of the stories analyzed Janet's personal appearance and clothes were visually described as a part of her introduction. On the other hand, Suspicion was a frame generated from codes that implied that Janet deserved suspicion because of the seemingly special treatment given to her by the government and concerning her health concerns.

It was observed that stories that included information on Janet's detention almost always included phrases like "so-called cell" and "air-conditioned room." Apart from this, full-length stories were also devoted to featuring the meals served to Janet every day. When it came to her concerns, there was an implied suspicion that she was just making up her health concerns. In one story, Janet reportedly "complained of an anxiety attack apparently due to claustrophobia." The use of "apparently" and "complained" in the mentioned text should be noted as insinuating doubt of the truthfulness of the claim – or that it may be a pretense.

**Frame #7: Minor men.** The last secondary frame generated from the analysis of the stories was the minor men frame. Under this frame, the women's male counterparts were considered to be only secondary players in the scam. This was evident in the very few articles that tried to investigate the role of, for example, Jaime Napoles, Janet's husband, in the dynamics of the pork barrel scam. Writers and readers seemed to have forgotten that Jaime Napoles was a former Marine Major who had connections with other powerful men in the military. To recall, Janet reportedly started her business inside the military through a Php 3.8 million Kevlar helmet contract. The fact that her husband was an official in the military and active on duty when the Kevlar helmet scam happened cannot fully dissociate Jaime from the story. However, there was not a single follow-up story to investigate the role of Jaime in the scam. Moreover, when men were mentioned in some of the stories, they were either allotted only one to two paragraphs or placed in the last part of the stories.

The 'minor men' frame is a counterpart of a concept coined by Tuchman (1978) called "symbolic annihilation." This concept states that women are usually excluded and/or trivialized in the media. While trivialized portrayal may not be true for the men involved, excluding men (Jaime Napoles and their son) from the coverage may be applicable.

James Christopher Napoles, Janet's son, was mentioned once in the coverage through a story about the business relations between James and Bryan Bautista, Sen. Bong Revilla's eldest son. However, it can be observed that after Sen. Revilla slammed the said report through the story "Revilla on Napoles' story: Leave my son alone", no follow-up reports on James's

activities were written. Also, the properties and activities of Janet's other son, Christopher, were not investigated.

In one way or another, the women involved were deemed as more important players in the conduct of the scam, neglecting the possibility that their male counterparts may have had an equal share in the previous transactions under the pork barrel scam. It appears that given their contribution to the scam, women were more ostracized than the men, who were also reported to be involved. These men do not only include Jaime and James Napoles but also the senators mentioned by the witness, Mr. Luy, in his testimonies: Sen. Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr., Sen. Jose Pimentel "Jinggoy" Ejercito Estrada, and Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile.

The results are related to what Entman (1993) said: "A frame of a story not only encloses but also leaves some things out. Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include." It was apparent from the stories that men were downplayed as minor players in the scam, hence omitting them in the equation as possible perpetrators, partners, or even players in the pork barrel scam. By omitting the men in the stories, Janet Napoles had been 'pushed' into the frontline as the 'mastermind' of the complex Philippine 'pork barrel' scam.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Women involved in the pork barrel scam were considered the primary players, while the men were the minor personalities. As such, the woman was labeled as "mastermind" and "pork barrel queen." Only two stories labeled Napoles as a "scapegoat of corrupt lawmakers."

The inductive framing analysis of the stories showed that stereotypical frames were still used when reporting about women (Janet Napoles, Jeane Napoles, Atty. Kapunan, Atty. De Lima). These frames included consumerist women, social climbers, bad mothers, woman vs. woman, and woman vs. herself (for the primary frames), and personalization suspicion and minor men (for the secondary frames).

From a feminist standpoint, the men were downplayed in the scam, hence omitting or excluding them in the equation as possible perpetrators, partners, or players in the pork barrel scam. Hence, Janet Napoles, the primary personality involved, who happens to be a woman, received the majority of public scrutiny and humiliation. Overall, despite efforts for balanced reporting to give fair coverage of and reportage on women in a pioneering social news network, there is still a general persistence in the media of culturally embedded frames that box women with labels and

stereotypes and that encourage patriarchy.

In the pursuit of gender-bias-free coverage of issues and events, media practitioners are recommended to be sensitive and conscious in reporting issues involving women by keeping away from the use of culturally embedded frames that reaffirm patriarchy through stereotyping and labeling. News organizations may also strive to pursue a more issue-based coverage of controversies rather than personality-based stories. While it has been reiterated in the literature that the media see women who commit acts unexpected of their gender, such as crimes and terrorism, as extra newsworthy, journalists must not focus the limelight on these women alone but also on the men who may have also played vital roles in the issues. After all, masterminds can be both masters and mistresses.

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