
Abolishing Scarlet Letters: A Frame Analysis of Adultery News Coverage in Korea, 1990-2015

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Abstract: Marital infidelity is considered to be abnormal around the world and often becomes an object of social stigma. In South Korea, the criminal penal code prohibited sexual activity outside of marriage to preserve social stability. However, in February 2015, the Constitutional Court abolished the adultery law. This study uses a frame analysis to examine how the Korean news media reported on adultery between 1990 and 2015. Research found that adultery news stories increased with celebrity involvement in extra-marital affairs, as well as during the constitutional deliberations to remove the adultery law in the Korean Penal code. The current study also found that morality and human-interests frames were frequently employed in the articles.

Keywords: news frames, adultery, de-criminalization, South Korea