

Opposing views on diversity in the humanities mobilize the same language in different “frames” of understanding.

Examining WE1S [Collection 1](#) (82,234 articles in U.S. media mentioning “humanities”) using a topic model, WE1S studied diversity discourse (the use of words related to racial/ethnic diversity). Model [C-1.250](#) (250 topics) shows that, especially in topics focused on “culture wars” such as topics [38](#) and [119](#), diversity discourse is tense with two opposing ways of what communication and media analysts call the “framing” of similar language.¹

The first frame is characteristic of right-wing narratives about diversity in the academy. One right-wing publication’s [article](#) that is highly associated with topic 38 quotes an art professor who, teaching a course on diversity and the arts, warned students not to use the term *melting pot* because it “signals a Euro-White Colonial standard.” Instead, the article says in its own words, the professor “prefers to describe America’s diversity as a salad, where individual ingredients are mixed together but remain distinct.” In other contexts, such reporting might be read as a benign description of the course or an appreciation of inclusive teaching practice. But in the right-wing frame narrative of the publication in which the article appeared, the point is to lambast liberal values in the academy.

The second frame is representative of the academy’s own internal narratives (and conflicts in narrative) about diversity.

¹ “Frame” analysis draws on communicational, cognitive, and linguistic research on how people reduce complex problems to simpler scenarios. It is especially influential in study of the media. (See [WE1S Bibliography: Frame Analysis of Media.](#))

See also our methods card [M-100](#) on the way topic models bring to view discourses in which political differences interact or blur together on the same linguistic ground.

Another [article](#) highly associated with topic 38 describes how foreign-born feminist professors and students in the U.S. can feel alienated by Western understandings of feminism. The article quotes Mojubaolu Olufunke Okomei, who observes in a book chapter that at some women’s conferences “it became clear ... that the ideals and norms of Western feminism were the new standards by which feminists from other parts of the world would be judged.”² It also interviews a Palestinian-American digital humanities student who identifies as a feminist but (in the article’s words) “feels as though many of her more conservative viewpoints would be viewed as ‘backwards’ to most people.”

One key finding from observing diversity discourse at big-data scale in the media is thus that understanding how viewpoints are “framed” by individuals and groups—and by the media that variously mirrors, constructs, or distorts such frames—is crucial for understanding how ideologically opposed groups use the same language to argue radically different ideals.

Document collection studied: C-1 ([start page](#))

Topic model studied: [C-1.250](#) (250 topics)

Interesting sample topics: [#38](#), [#119](#)

Representative articles: [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#)

Evidentiary documentation for this key finding:
[WE1S report](#)

² In Oyeronke Oyewumi, ed., *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood* (Africa World Press, 2003).