

Protecting Teachers or Protecting Children? Media Representations of *Vergara v. California*

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TIME Magazine and Vergara



- “Taking on Teacher Tenure”
- The first time, in the United States, that a court case was filed and passed that linked the quality of a teacher to a pupil’s right to education.
- High profile news story

Data and Methods

- Media discourse analysis
- Print news media articles
- Initial LexisNexis and ProQuest search for newspaper articles from May 2012 to May 2014.
- Search terms: “David Welch”, “Students Matter”, “teacher tenure”, and “Vergara”
- 42 news, editorial, and opinion print media articles
- Categorized articles by objective characteristics: year published, article type (news article, editorial, opinion), news source (California, national, international, other)
- Substantive and inductive codes

References:

- Altheide, D. & Schneider, C. J. (2013). *Qualitative media analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Smith, M. L. (2004). *Political spectacle and the fate of American schools*. New York: Routledge
- Students Matter. (2014). About Students Matter. Retrieved from: <http://studentsmatter.org/home/about-students-matter/>.

Background of Vergara

- David Welch and Students Matter
- May 2012: Nine student plaintiffs, two school districts, and the State of California
- Five California Education Code statutes: the permanent employment statute, three separate statutes regarding teacher dismissal, and the last-in first-out statute
- January 2014: Trial began
- June 10, 2014: Judge Rolf Treu ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, determined that all five statutes were unconstitutional
- *Vergara* decision is currently being appealed in California

Initial Findings

Table 1: Objective Characteristics of Print News Media Articles

	California newspapers, N=31	National newspapers, N=8	International newspapers, N=1	Other sources, N=2
Article type				
News	12 (38.7%)	7 (87.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Editorial	4 (12.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (50.0%)
Opinion	15 (48.4%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (100.0%)	1 (50.0%)
Year published				
2012	9 (29.0%)	2 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2013	3 (9.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2014	19 (61.3%)	6 (75.0%)	1 (100.0%)	2 (100.0%)

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Conceptual Framework

- Theory of Political Spectacle -- Smith (2004) :
 - **use of metaphorical language**
 - casting political actors in character roles (e.g. heroes, villains, and victims)
 - dramaturgy or the staging of events
 - **use of numerical data, opinion polls, and research to justify policy claims or decisions**
- a disconnection of means and ends

Vergara as Political Spectacle

- Key metaphor: Teachers’ employment protections as a problem and an undeserved benefit
- Illusion of rationality: Repetition of alleged cost of dismissing a teacher
- Over use of pejorative adjectives to qualify the term ‘teacher’

Next Steps

- Revising for publication in an edited book.
- Analyzing editorial and opinion articles for future projects.
- Following developing cases: *Dauids v. New York* and lawsuit filed by Students Matter