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News Media Framing of Gay Teen Suicide and Bullying

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined patterns of framing in newspaper articles that mention gay teen suicide, gay bullying, and the "It Gets Better" campaign. A content analysis of randomly selected newspaper articles from 2009-2011 was performed. After presenting the frequency of content themes, emergent patterns are discussed. The most consistent theme--an evasive frame-- occurred with regard to homophobia, heterosexism, and meaningful solutions to anti-gay bullying. The day-to-day discrimination that LGBTQ people face was rarely addressed; instead, hot-button political topics such as same-sex marriage and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" were presented as signs of social progress. This research shows the importance of media framing, particularly the news media, in stories that report on gay bullying, suicide, and homophobia.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) teens and young adults have been bullied because of their alleged or factual homosexuality, driving many to commit suicide. These incidents have led to a greater realization by the general public of the prejudice that LGBTQ people face (Connolly 2012). As a result, anti-bullying school programs have materialized in America (Crary 2010; James 2009). Sex advice columnist Dan Savage created the "It Gets Better" campaign urging young LGBTQ people struggling with homophobia not to give up on life. This campaign posts videos of celebrities, politicians, or everyday individuals sharing earnest messages that life gets better (Stelter 2010).

Although the LGBTQ teens and young adults whose recent suicides have attracted national attention are not the first to be bullied or harassed, their deaths are now treated as indicators of ongoing, widespread homophobia, particularly in schools (Hanlon 2009; Russell 2011; Stein 1999). Approximately 10 percent of all hate crimes in the United States are committed in educational institutions, and other students are the most frequent anti-gay hate crime perpetrators (Rayburn et al. 2003). Other studies show that gay and lesbian youths and young adults are at higher risk of victimization than other students (Huebner, Rebchook, and Kegeles 2004; O'Conor 1994; Savin-Williams 1994).

News media play a central role in how personal troubles gain recognition as public issues or social problems (Mills 1959). With regard to anti-gay bullying and teen suicide, what ideas might the general population gain from how the news is reported? What unintentional messages might the news media convey to readers about LGBTQ issues? This study analyzes newspaper portrayals of LGBTQ youth suicide and bullying for emergent patterns. The patterns that appear

in newspaper articles may also occur in other forms of media as well as in everyday social interactions. Ideally, these emergent themes will help us understand how homophobia and heterosexism--root causes of LGBTQ bullying--are enabled or challenged in the news media. The next chapter reviews current research on these underlying influences.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE

Prejudice and discrimination against homosexuality has long been part of the socialization process in America. Not only is homosexuality perceived as a breach of "compulsory heterosexuality," but it is also demonized as violating conventional gender roles for men and women (Rich 2003). This demonization, in many cases, can lead to violence, prejudice, and discrimination by heterosexuals, especially against males (Alden and Parker 2005; Barron et al. 2008; Cohen, Tuttle, and Hall 2009; Davies 2004; Herek 2002; Van Der Meer 2003). Through socialization male children are encouraged to adopt socially positive characteristics such as strength, dominance, and assertiveness, while female children are encouraged to take on socially negative characteristics such as submissiveness, weakness, and passivity (Lorber 1994). Conforming to these socially constructed gender roles becomes a frequently subconscious yet important goal. People who fail to exhibit these characteristics may violate the cultural expectations associated with gender roles and be ostracized or victimized.

Gender socialization, while often subconscious, is used to maintain a patriarchal gender order where males are seen as superior to females (Johnson 1997). Therefore, homosexuality in males, which is assumed to be at odds with what is considered "masculine," is often portrayed as inconsistent with what is seen as "good" in society (Barron et al. 2008; Hansen 1982; Kimmel 2007). Conversely, when women do not act in accordance with patriarchal gender roles, they too can be sanctioned negatively. According to Kleinman (nd), a lesbian is perceived by many to be pretending to be a man or as stealing masculinity that does not rightfully belong to her. Because lesbians can live independently of men, this can be seen as a threat and another factor in the perceived deviance of lesbians (Kleinman nd).

Studies have shown that approximately two-thirds of adults in the United States hold negative attitudes toward homosexuality, although their opinions have become more favorable in the last 30 years (Davies 2004; Herek 2000; Loftus 2001; Shackelford and Besser 2007). Still, negative attitudes continue to manifest in the form of laws and policies that illegalize marriage for non-heterosexuals and make it difficult for them to adopt children (Herek 1991, 2000). Homophobia has become institutionalized in American culture through these kinds of laws, and religion has a large influence on many of them (Herek 1991; Rivers 2011).

Religious sources are an important source of negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Olson et al. 2006; Woodberry and Smith 1998). Conservative Protestants typically have the most negative views of homosexuality, while adherents of non-orthodox Judaism and more liberal Protestant groups are relatively more accepting (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Loftus 2001; Rosik 2007). According to de Plevitz (2005), many religious-based schools will not enact anti- gay bullying rules because that would undermine religious doctrine that vilifies and condemns homosexuality. People's religious views have a powerful influence on the existence of systemic homophobia in schools and on resisting efforts to end it (Rivers 2011).

Many studies have shown that the more contact people have with those they are prejudiced against, the more accepting they will be towards that group (Dovidio and Gaertner 1999; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Wright et al. 1997). For example, previous interaction with gays and lesbians is a main factor in how homosexuality is perceived (Herek and Capitanio 1996; Herek and Glunt 1993; Shackleford and Besser 2007). According to Herek and Glunt (1993), interaction with a gay person is associated with more positive attitudes about homosexuality. Women are much more likely to have contact with- and thus accept-gays than heterosexual men (Herek and Capitanio 1996; Herek and Glunt 1993).

How LGBTQ people "do gender" is also a major factor in how they are accepted by others (Cohen et al. 2009; Herek 2002; Shackelford and Besser 2007). Heterosexual men are much more likely to accept a masculine gay man than a man who acts more feminine, while women showed no difference level in their acceptance of gays or lesbians (Cohen et al. 2009). This is attributed to how feminine gay men contradict the scripted role for men. Heterosexual men are more likely to believe that gay men will molest children or are mentally ill and are less likely to support same-sex marriage and gay adoption rights (Herek 2002). According to Beaty and Alexeyev (2008), bullies are more likely to be male so opinions that many heterosexual men learn to hold about gay men may likewise influence homophobic bullying in schools. Also, bullies are more likely to victimize those who are considered to have a "weak temperament," which becomes an important factor when examining stereotypes about gay men (Rivers 2011).

There is an inextricable link between homophobia and sexism. According to Pharr (2007), patriarchal gender roles are established and maintained by economics, violence, and homophobia. These three "weapons of sexism" are used, not always consciously, to keep women and non-heterosexuals inferior to men and heterosexuals (Pharr 2007: 168-172). Heterosexism, a system of inequality in which heterosexuals and heterosexuality are valued over homosexuals and homosexuality, reinforces homophobia. Heterosexism also reinforces heteronormativity, in which anything that is not heterosexual is considered abnormal or bad (Barron et al. 2008; Hansen 1982; Herek 2004; Kleinman nd; Korobov 2004; Martin 2009; Pharr 2007). Heterosexism and heteronormativity depend on a socially constructed definition of masculinity that is heterosexual by default (Herek 2004).

Prejudice, discrimination, and violence against LGBTQ people are ongoing problems that not only affect youth but also LGBTQ adults. Herek (2009) completed a study of 662

participants who identifies as LGBTQ were used. This study showed the prevalence of anti-gay hate crimes and stigmas. Approximately half of all respondents reported verbal harassment, 1 in 10 experienced job or housing discrimination, and 20 percent reported person or property crimes. Discrimination is exacerbated when the victim is male, HIV positive, younger, or open about his/her sexual orientation (Huebner et al. 2004).

According to Herek (2009), gays and lesbians are more likely than heterosexuals to feel psychological distress. This is mainly because many gays and lesbians will be victimized psychologically and physically in their lifetime and most are faced with social disapproval. More than half the participants in Herek's study felt some sort of social stigma attached to their sexual orientation. LGBTQ people who have been victimized fear crime more, feel less trusting than before they were victimized, feel more vulnerable, are more depressed and anxious, and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder more than victims of non-hate crimes (Herek et al. 2009). Hershberger and D'Augelli (1995) found that self-acceptance and family support were mediators of psychological distress only if the level of victimization was low.

Issues of prejudice, discrimination, and violence also affect LGBTQ youth in physical and psychological ways (Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz 2009; Rivers 2011; Toomey et al. 2010). According to Rivers (2011) and his studies on homophobic bullying in schools, LGBTQ students who have been bullied at school because of their sexuality have higher rates of self-harm and suicide than heterosexual students as well as higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder later in life. Toomey et al. (2010) found that LGBTQ students who had been bullied based on their sexuality or gender identity had higher rates of negative psychosocial adjustment. Although this study found that boys had higher rates of victimization than girls, rates of negative psychosocial adjustment were the same for both groups (Toomey et al. 2010).

9

According to Zacharias (2010), the bullying of LGBTQ students is at an "epidemic" level in the school system, with an estimated 31 percent of LGBTQ students being injured or threatened within 12 months and 91 percent of LGBTQ students hearing homophobic slurs on a regular basis from classmates. Bullying can promote insecurity, substance abuse problems, behavioral problems, and depression in those who are targeted which, in turn, can lead to suicide. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS 2009) states that "gay male adolescents are 2 to 3 times more likely than their peers to commit suicide" and "GLBTQI adolescents account for 30% of all adolescent suicides" while the National Education System (2009) states that "160,000 children miss school every day out of fear of attack or intimidation by other students." According to DeLara (2006), adults in the school system too often ignore the bullying, encourage it, or participate in it. These stark examples of systemic homophobia have attracted interest and concern, at least for the moment, in the general population.

If a large portion of Americans hold homophobic and heterosexist beliefs and homophobic bullying is portrayed as reaching epidemic levels, how are stories about gays and lesbians portrayed in the news media? According to Cassady (2007), before the 1980s, homosexuality was portrayed as an illness or perverted behavior. As time went on, especially after gay activism and academic scholarship began to make their mark, media outlets and members of society have become more accepting and tolerant of homosexuality. Today, though not as pejorative and negative as before, the media tend to focus on non-heterosexual people's sexual identities and behaviors more than they do for heterosexuals (Cassady 2007). Typically, even if a news story has nothing to do with the non-heterosexual person's sexuality, it will become a main focus of the story. For example, "From Ringside, Gay Man's Play Packs a Punch" (Veltman 2011) and "Gay Killer May Have Struck Again in Florida" (Rhodes 1997).

Such articles highlight the sexuality of a person, if they are not heterosexual, as something abnormal or strange and as something that needs to be discussed (Cassady 2007; Sloop 2006).

Often when LGBTQ people are discussed in the media they are either portrayed as a collection of people who merits acceptance in mainstream society or who are involved in deviant sexual practices. Although one view is more progressive than the other, both show heteronormativity through their treatment of homosexuality as something that must be tolerated or feared while leaving unquestioned heterosexuality's privileged status (Cassady 2007; Gill 2007; McGowan 2001; O' Donnell 2009; Sloop 2006). In either situation--acceptance or rejection--the dominant group's majority power and exclusive claim to normativity is reinforced.

Just as their sexuality receives greater scrutiny for LGBTQ people, another asymmetry can be observed in how victimization news stories are framed for heterosexuals versus non-heterosexuals. First, newspaper stories about heterosexual victims are usually longer and given more prominence than those about LGBTQ victims (Alwood 1996). News stories also tend to use an "us" and "them" binary when differentiating between heterosexuals and LGBTQ people (Moritz and Crapanzano 2010). More positive news coverage of LGBTQ people tends to occur in metropolitan cities that have larger gay rights organizations while smaller, more conservative cities have lagged behind in their news coverage of LGBTQ issues (Hoynes et al. 2012). Though news coverage of LGBTQ people tends to be sympathetic and tolerant, in no way does this challenge the heteronormative frames that are often employed when discussing LGBTQ issues (Hoynes et al. 2012). These heteronormative frames could include discussing which man is going to wear the wedding dress during a marriage ceremony or asking which woman in the relationship "wears the pants."

Not only are heterosexuals and LGBTQ people portrayed differently and unequally in the news media, but so are LGBTQ people of different races as if the worthier race is white. Consequently, hate crimes are not framed the same way across race. According to Pearson (2006), the story of Sakia Gunn, a black teenager who was stabbed to death because of her sexual identity, was given much less news coverage than that of Matthew Shepard, a white teenager who was also killed because he was gay. An additional suggestion is that the more lurid and gory the news story, especially in the case of LGBTQ teens, the more news coverage it will receive from the press. Pearson (2006) speculates that the Matthew Shepard case got more attention, not just because he was white, upper-middle class, and male, but because his death was more horrific and grisly that Sakia Gunn's. According to Walsh (2009), media stories perpetuate a racial hierarchy with whites at the top and thus reinforce "color-blind racism" (see Bonilla-Silva 2010). Jiwani (2009) states that there is a "white standard" in the media where whites are considered the norm and other races are relegated as "other" and are portrayed differently.

News stories about anti-gay violence often use the "tragic frame" (Ott and Aoki 2002). This means that the victim is shown in a tragic light whereby the public's liberal guilt over the incident is pushed onto the perpetrators of the crime or into society itself. The "tragic frame" is used to bring superficial and premature closure to a problem so that the guilt that members of the dominant group might feel about perpetuating harm is dissolved. This makes it more likely that the social problems that created the tragic incident may be ignored. In essence, the "tragic frame" offers an illusion of closure by blaming society and the perpetrators of the crime (Casey 2006; Grace 2003; Lynch 2007; Ott & Aoki 2002; Wilcox 2001). Researchers such as Jenness and Broad (1994) have argued that focusing on homophobia as the root of anti-gay violence, rather than on heterosexism, will not solve the inequalities facing LGBTQ people. Riggs and Patterson

(2009) state that as long as portrayals of LGBTQ people in media are infrequent, do not show the diversity of LGBTQ people, and do not include discussions of heteronormativity, violence towards LGBTQ people will continue.

According to Loseke (2003), whether a person or group of people is considered sympathy worthy relies heavily on whether or not they are perceived "moral," needing help, or in troublesome conditions. Deciding whether or not someone is sympathy worthy also has a lot to do with deciding whether or not to call that person a victim. If people were to pass the "victim" test, then they would not be held responsible for the negative conditions they must deal with (Loseke 2003). For example, if a gay or lesbian teen were to be bullied, assessing whether or not he or she is deemed sympathy worthy depends on whether others see him or her as moral, needing help, or in a troublesome condition. To what degree a gay or lesbian teen would be seen as moral enough to merit sympathy would be helpful to understand in today's changing cultural context.

In short, the prevalence of homophobia and sexism in America has facilitated many problems. Some of these problems, such as anti-gay bullying, prejudice, discrimination, and violence, may heighten the psychological distress of victims and lead to suicide. How the media portray LGBTQ people may mirror how they portray the recent suicides of LGBTQ youths. The framing of these issues by the media is important for future research on gay teen suicide, anti-gay bullying, violence, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as for promoting mental health support for American youth.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on how recent gay teen suicides and bullying have been portrayed in world newspapers. In order to do this, the author used Lexis Nexis to pull 500 international and American, English language, newspaper articles between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2011 that contained one or more of the following terms: gay teen suicide, gay bullying, and/or the "It Gets Better" campaign. International articles were included in the search in order to gain enough complete articles for analysis. To make sure the articles were randomly chosen, the website www.randomizer.org was used to create a randomized list of newspaper articles. There were 1,000 articles initially and www.randomizer.org created a random sample of 500 of them. Each article was given an identification number for fact-checking purposes so that if a mistake occurred during coding or analysis it would be easy to look back at the original article to cross-check it. Full texts of the articles were downloaded and examples for each code were saved for easier access to the information. Three coders were involved in this study and eight training sessions were completed to ensure reliability of the coding methods. After the eighth training session, where approximately 50 articles were coded, 90 percent agreement was reached on all topics contained in the coding sheet.

While most of the codes arose from working hypotheses, ideas that help guide the researcher's line of inquiry (Geer 1967), a small portion of codes emerged during the training process. Altogether, the various themes arising from the articles and their respective codes were altered, added, and removed based on a process of theoretical sensitivity (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Theoretical sensitivity is where the researcher follows the data wherever they lead and

tries to be mindful about any previous biases that may distract from a correct interpretation of the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

After eliminating duplicate articles and articles that were incomplete, 340 articles were left in the sample. Of these, 64.6 percent were news articles, 30.4 percent were opinion-editorials, and 5 percent were letters to the editor. Articles eliminated as incomplete had at least half of the article missing (e.g., a headline with no accompanying text). Due to time constraints, most of the coding was completed by the author and one other coder. If a topic came up in an article more than once it was counted as only one instance of the topic.

Once the newspaper articles were coded, the most common and least common codes were calculated using SPSS. The amount of mentions for each code was the deciding factor in the commonality of the code. For example, if code 12 was mentioned 200 times and code 9 was mentioned 50 times code 12 would be considered more common. SPSS was also used on 309 articles (31 being unusable for SPSS) to complete chi-square calculations on certain codes to see if there was any significance between their occurrences.

<p align="center">Description of Coded Topics</p>

LGBTQ Rights Accomplishment Occurred. This topic was defined as a step toward equality or progressive change. For example, an article that discussed the repeal of the armed forces' "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy or a state legalizing same-sex marriage would be coded with this topic.

LGBTQ Rights Called For. This topic was defined as a plea for gay rights and equality for LGBTQ people. An example would be if the writer of the article or someone interviewed for

the article stated that same-sex marriage should be legalized or that LGBTQ people should be allowed to adopt children.

"It Gets Better" Campaign. This topic was defined as any mention about the "It Gets Better" campaign.

Suicide or Death of a Particular LGBTQ Teen, Adult, or LGBTQ People. This topic was defined as any mention of a suicide or death of an LGBTQ person or people.

Bullying of a Particular LGBTQ Teen, Adult, or People. This topic was defined as any mention of bullying of an LGBTQ teen, adult, or LGBTQ people.

Race. If the race of the victim of suicide or bullying was mentioned, this was marked on the coding sheet. Racial codes were White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and/or Other. "Other" includes people identified as bi-racial or other races that were not included above.

Gender. If the gender of the victim of suicide or bullying was mentioned, this was marked on the coding sheet. Gender codes were Male, Female, and/or Other. "Other" includes people identified as intersexed.

Legal Action or Policy Enacted Against Bullying, School District, Anti-Gay Structure, etc. This topic was defined as any mention of legal action or school policy against bullying or anti-gay activity. Examples would be if a school was to create new policies against bullying or a law was passed giving LGBTQ couples the right to adopt children.

Religion mentioned as pro-gay. This topic was defined as any mention of religion that supported LGBTQ rights or decried religious attacks on LGBTQ people.

Religion mentioned as anti-gay. This topic was defined as any mention of religion that denounces the rights of LGBTQ people based on religious teachings.

Public figure is pro-gay. This topic was defined as any mention of a public figure who supported LGBTQ rights, such as a celebrity, politician, school official, or anyone seen as a social authority by a community.

Public figure is anti-gay. This topic was defined as any mention of a public figure who denounced LGBTQ people or their rights.

Tolerance, acceptance, or reduction of prejudice. This was defined as any mention of tolerance, acceptance, or reduction of prejudice toward LGBTQ people.

Heteronormative expectations/conformity. This was defined as any mention where LGBTQ people are expected to conform to situations where heterosexuality is considered to be the norm while other sexual orientations are seen as abnormal. Examples would be high school prom, marriage, etc.

Adultism. This was defined as any mention where teenagers or young adults are treated as if they are children who do not know anything. This code was applied when teenagers were called kids or described as unable to understand basic social problems or situations.

LGBTQ teen or person as sympathy worthy. This was defined as any mention where an LGBTQ teen or person is described in a way that suggests sympathy. Examples would be an LGBTQ teen described as a good student, as a good person, as vulnerable in some way, or some other positive attributes.

Suicide and/or bullying method mentioned. This was defined as any mention where the method of suicide or bullying is discussed. For example, the code would be applied if the article discussed that an LGBTQ person jumped off a bridge or an LGBTQ teen was pushed against lockers in a school corridor.

Detail of bullying or suicide. This was defined as how detailed the mention of the bullying or suicide was. Coders noted if details were less than 10 words, 11 to 25 words, 26 to 50 words, and 50+ words.

Type. The articles were categorized as letters, news pieces, or opinion-editorial pieces. The following coded topics require no further elaboration:

Homophobia criticized or identified as a problem.

Being LGBTQ criticized or identified as a problem.

Homosexuality a choice.

Homosexuality not a choice.

Suicide or death blamed on homosexuality.

Suicide or death seen as mystery/uncertain of cause.

Each code topic that appeared was marked for each article. Each code, even if mentioned numerous times in one article, was only counted once per article if it appeared.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

<u>Public Figures</u>

During this study, many major topics involving LGBTQ youth bullying and suicide came

to light. The most common topic that emerged in the articles, with 180 mentions, involves pro-

gay public figures. This is most likely due to the "It Gets Better" campaign. Many celebrities

filmed public service announcements for the "It Gets Better" campaign and donated money.

Some examples from the newspaper articles include:

> [Katy] Perry dedicated the video to the It Gets Better
>
> campaign, which supports teens who have been bullied
>
> for being gay (Saxberg 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> The cast of HBO's True Blood just released several video
>
> PSAs for the It Gets Better Project (Nededog 2011).

In contrast to the large number of articles mentioning pro-gay public figures, anti-gay public

figures were mentioned in only 33 articles. While most pro-gay figures in this study were

celebrities, most anti-gay public figures in the articles were politicians and school board

members. For example,

> Michele Bachmann, the Republican presidential candidate who is
>
> fiercely anti-gay…was 'glitter-bombed' by a lesbian activist as she

left the stage at a conservative conference in Minneapolis over the

weekend (Roeper 2011).

***

Bronx Senator Reverend Rubén Díaz Sr. is more than the last

Democratic holdout against gay marriage in New York's Senate

(Thrasher 2011).

***

'I was shocked and saddened by the recent comments of board

(chair) A.A. LeMay of the Halton Catholic District School Board

(HCDSB) regarding the banning of gay-straight alliances in Halton

Catholic schools' (Anonymous 5 2011).

<u>Homophobia</u>

The second most common topic, with 168 mentions, was the blaming of a suicide or

death of an LGBTQ person on bullying or homophobia. This topic, much like the articles

mentioning pro-gay public figures, is a direct result of the search terms that were used in Lexis

Nexis. Even so, the prevalence of this topic speaks to how the deaths of young LGBTQ people

are currently framed in the media. For example, the [St. Paul Pioneer Press] reported:

A string of student suicides between November 2009 and May 2011 pushed the

[bullying] issue to the forefront. Gay-rights groups and some parents say a few of

those students were targeted by bullies at school (Horner 2011).

An article in The Age noted,

James Monroe [High School]'s Gay-Straight Alliance is one of a network of

thousands of student clubs across the US that are part of a concerted effort by

educators and rights groups to push back against anti-gay harassment in schools,

recognised as a key factor in youth suicide (Mann 2011).

Many of the newspaper articles which blamed the suicide or death on bullying and/or

homophobia used the "tragic frame" where the blame is pushed onto society and diverted from

the real causes of social problems—for example, conditions that contribute to heterosexism and

homophobia--giving an illusion of closure (Ott and Aoki 2002). For example,

I'd like to believe that our society is better accepting of sexual orientation and the

like; but, it seems that we have a ways to go (Anonymous 2011).

***

…the high level of stigma from society and external pressures significantly

increase the risk for suicide for these kids…(Weise 2010).

Some of the newspaper articles that used the "tragic frame" in this study relied on treating

society as a sentient being. It can be easy to forget that society is something created and

controlled by actual people, not an entity that makes decisions. Social problems like homophobia

and heterosexism will never be solved if "society" is reified and treated as omnipotent and

independent of people's everyday actions. Although 49 percent of the articles in the sample

blamed a suicide or death on bullying or homophobia, some articles in the sample either

neglected to mention what caused the suicide and others implied that homophobia was the cause

but never said it blatantly.

Only one article blamed the suicides or deaths of LGBTQ people on their homosexuality. In the following passage, the writer claims that members of the "homosexual population" are more likely to be psychologically unstable:

> These numbers confirm only that there is a disproportionately high
>
> number of unstable teens among the homosexual population. The
>
> more responsible theme to investigate is whether this is an uncanny
>
> coincidence. An objective study would look for deeper
>
> psychological factors in individuals, because these numbers prove
>
> we cannot blame the village (Zilbauer 2011).

While there may be some truth to the suggestion that LGBTQ people experience more than their fair share of psychological distress, the writer does not consider the role of social pressures and homophobia that they face from others.

The third most common topic that emerged, with 165 mentions, is when homophobia was criticized as a problem. Many articles discussed the negative effects of homophobia on young people, especially young gays and lesbians, but most articles focused on bullying, suicide, same-sex marriage, and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" without analyzing the sources or origins of homophobia. Some examples of this are:

> Mayor Peter Davies met Doncaster's gay pride committee to tackle homophobic
>
> bullying in the borough's schools (Anonymous 2011).

***

Erica, her partner, and their kids will probably all live to see same-sex marriage

legal not just in New York, but throughout the United States (Thrasher 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

Homophobia kills. LGBT kids are two to three times more likely to commit

suicide than their straight peers (Condou 2011).

Thus other chronic problems for LGBTQ people such as negative media portrayals, job

discrimination, and characterization of gays and lesbians as sexual deviants, went unmentioned.

Possibly this narrow scope on homophobia resulted from the sample's search terms.

During the analysis process, I found that blatant homophobic actions in schools, while

mentioned, were not identified as homophobia by the writers. Many of these stories deal with

how LGBTQ students were treated by the faculty. Students who came out to their classmates and

were victims of bullying were often told by their teachers that if they had kept quiet about their

sexual orientation the bullying would not have happened or that they brought it upon themselves.

For example,

It's absolutely crushing when these kids report incidents and are

told not to tell people they're gay (Madden 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

Frei said his son endured ongoing bullying. When it was pointed

out to staff, he said, his son was sometimes told he brought the

problems on himself (Horner 3 2011).

In contrast to the large number of articles mentioning homophobia as a problem (165), a small number of articles (23) turned the tables by treating LGBTQ people as problems. Many of these articles presented homosexuality as harmful and wrong. For example,

> Science, biology, religion, history, common sense and human experience all argue against homosexuality, as do grim, persistent health statistics that the media ignore (Knight 2010).

<div align="center">***</div>

> As an HIV-compromised, ex-homosexual who'd founded an AIDS hospice once said at lunch with my wife and me, it's at best false compassion to facilitate, or even blandly to tolerate, behaviors that harm their participants (Arata 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> Homosexuality is a cage in which you are trapped in an endless cycle of constantly wanting more -- sexually -- that you can never actually receive, constantly full of emptiness, trying to justify your twisted actions by politics and 'feel good' language (Denizet-Lewis 2011).

Such references invoke common negative stereotypes about LGBTQ people and reinforce advocates' claims that homophobia, not homosexuality, is the central problem facing LGBTQ people.

The sixth most common topic in the articles, with 90 mentions, is when legal action was taken against a school policy, a school board, a law, an individual, or any homophobic social structure. Most of these articles discussed legal action against a school board and/or its members due to bullying policies or the lack thereof or teachers accused of failing to stop bullying or participating in it, criminal cases against bullies, and the enactment of anti-bullying legislation. For example,

> The curriculum is part of a settlement between the district and the
> American Civil Liberties Union, which filed a complaint on behalf
> of former Bethel High student Rochelle Hamilton, who alleged
> harassment from her teachers (Banes 2010).
>
> ***
>
> McMillen sued the district and received a $35,000 settlement
> (Kieffer 2010).
>
> ***
>
> The charges say Ravi targeted Clementi and invaded his privacy
> knowing that Clementi would be intimidated because of his sexual
> orientation (Anonymous 2 2011).
>
> ***
>
> Lady Gaga has announced she is to meet Barack Obama to discuss
> new legislation to counteract bullying. Following the recent suicide
> of a 14-year-old fan, Jamey Rodemeyer, a victim of bullies, the

singer called on American lawmakers to make bullying illegal

(Michaels 2011).

Despite legal action against homophobic actions, policies, or laws, very few articles discussed the limits of legal action in actually bringing about a reduction in oppressive othering (Schwalbe et al. 2000) of LGBTQ people more generally. Most of the lawsuits mentioned in the articles were started by students or their parents in an attempt to gain justice for their child or people are being charged by the state for bullying or their involvement in someone's suicide or death.

One theme, which appeared in 51 articles, seems directly connected to identifying homophobia as a central problem and taking legal action: when advocates call for LGBTQ rights. Most of the calls for LGBTQ rights stressed a need for change and criticized the status quo but gave no suggestions on how to achieve change. For example,

Victims of bullying, parents, and educators - don't wait for it to get

better. Take action now (Anonymous 2011).

***

'At the same time,' he adds, 'as a gay man, it made me feel like

there's still so much work to be done, and there's still so many

things that need to be looked at and addressed' (Kellogg 2011).

"Awareness" of homophobia came up often in articles that mentioned calls for LGBTQ rights. For example,

Wilson added that the purpose of his community engagements is to

'reach out to local groups through sharing of the film, raise

visibility and awareness, talk about the issues the film raises and

how it relates to communities' (Knaub 2011).

***

In January, Sheffield and members of the Clearfield High Gay-

Straight Alliance plan to tackle the term 'that's so gay,' which

teenagers often use to describe things they don't like, in a video

skit for the school. The group hopes to raise awareness that the

term is hurtful (Anonymous 2011).

While awareness about social problems is always important, its effectiveness is limited for

altering social practices that reproduce homophobia and inequality.

LGBTQ rights accomplishments were discussed in 19 articles. Many of these articles

cited same-sex marriage or "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" as signs that homophobia is lessening. For

example,

'Things seem to be changing, finally, for the better culturally'

Satyal reasons, adding: 'With the repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'

for example, and the 'It Gets Better' campaign' - aimed at helping

LGBT youth who are at risk of suicide - it seems that Americans

and people from other countries are becoming attuned to the

problems of LGBT citizens' (Mehta 2011).

***

> The flamboyant assertion of gay identity in the annual Pride parade
>
> looks almost quaint in an era when same-sex marriage is legal and
>
> gay celebrities are commonplace (Gee 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> …let's not overlook the triumph that is the repeal of Don't Ask,
>
> Don't Tell, and the hopeful outlook on California's Prop. 8 lawsuit
>
> (Nelson 2010).

Although this topic had a low frequency, pointing to achievements may suggest that homophobia is a thing of the past and undermine the sense of urgency that LGBTQ rights advocates claim is necessary.

Heterosexism and heteronormativity were rarely acknowledged as underlying problems by LGBTQ proponents, just as heterosexual privileges could be assumed without ever openly discussing them among LGBTQ opponents. Coders found 16 instances of mostly unacknowledged heterosexism and heteronormativity. In an article written by the mother of a youth who was bullied and attempted suicide, the mother describes the burden of "normality" that LGBTQ people face.

> If he could conform to what many believe is "normal", he surely
>
> would (Anonymous 2011).

Another article written by the former friend of a man who went from being an LGBTQ advocate to an "ex-gay" fundamentalist Christian describes how marriage, a right denied to many LGBTQ people, is within his reach now that he has "become straight."

'Yes,' he insisted, adding that he has dated two women since

coming out as ex-gay... 'Whatever God has in store for me next

will hopefully involve courtship and getting married' (Denizet-

Lewis 2011).

This example shows how many LGBTQ people, especially those who are "ex-gay," conform to a heterosexual standard in order to receive the same privileges that heterosexuals receive (Wolkomir 2001). Another article describes the discrimination against two LGBTQ youth who were denied the chance to attend a school dance together; something straight youth never face.

Hannah Williams, 16, and Savannah Supski, 15, are in the news

today because they say their school would not let them attend its

annual dinner dance together (Muradian 2010).

This example shows how many LGBTQ youth are forced to conform to heterosexism and a heterosexual standard, even school traditions such as prom (Best 2000). These examples show that often the privileges that heterosexuals take for granted, such as marriage, "normalcy," and school dances, are denied to LGBTQ people on a regular basis. These examples also show that heterosexuality is considered to be normal, the standard that non-heterosexuality is measured against and, ultimately, comes up short.

Ninety-seven articles contained references to tolerance or acceptance of homosexuality. In the articles, tolerance and acceptance were usually discussed as something that must be done. For instance,

Respect and tolerance must be at the heart of every school (Flynn

2011).

The ["It Gets Better" campaign]'s pledge asks people to spread the

message that 'everyone deserves to be respected for who they are'

and promise to 'speak up against hate and intolerance whenever I see

it, at school and at work' (Healy 2011).

Another common example was God's acceptance of homosexuality. A woman was quoted in the

Sarasota Herald Tribune as saying,

They realize God does love and accept them for who they are

(Heisler 2011).

And another article contained this passage:

God created us all equally so why should we discriminate? The

world would be a better place if we can just accept others just the

way they are (Arellano 2011).

 Gay-straight alliances in schools were also a common topic connected to discussions of

tolerance and acceptance. For example,

The solution then is to increase social support and acceptance in

the form of gay-straight alliance organisations in all schools and

university campuses… (Donaldson 2011).

***

The Hubley family's statement said Jamie recently tried to start a

Rainbow Club at his school to promote acceptance of others

(Pearson 2011).

***

The local school has a strong track record in the region for

tolerance, with a long-running Gay-Straight Alliance where gay or

lesbian students and their friends can support each other (Cressman

2011).

Queer theorists point out that "tolerance" and "acceptance," though much more preferable to

blatant homophobia, still mark the dominance of heterosexuals in society while masking how

heterosexuality is over privileged and automatically "accepted" (Hoynes 2012). In other words,

tolerating or accepting homosexuality does not mean that LGBTQ people are fully integrated

into society as equals. If something is "tolerated" it implies that it is bad or unwanted. Indeed, by

tolerating a category of people who deviate from the norm in some unfortunate way,

heterosexuals can think of themselves as benevolent people.

<u>Religion</u>

Two topics relating to religion were coded: anti-gay values and neutral or accepting

values. Because many major religious denominations support anti-gay policies, any instances of

neutrality, tolerance, or acceptance of LGBTQ people from a religious perspective seemed

important to track. Thirty-six articles mentioned anti-gay religious views; most of these articles

discussed how certain religions believe that homosexuality is a sin and those who participate in

homosexual acts are going to Hell. Twenty-six articles mentioned neutral or LGBTQ positive religious views. For example,

> 'The Pope's barbarism is so enormous that all he could do is quit to impress me at this point, so deeply mired in hypocrisy, in bad thinking. I have very little patience for organised religion, which is mostly dedicated to demonising homosexuality…' (Anonymous 4 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> 'I recognize Catholic educators face a difficult challenge. Jesus calls us to love all of God's children, while the church teaches us that engaging in homosexual activities is a sin' (Piscitelli 2011).

These discussions sometimes cited religious schools where homophobia was widespread, not just among teachers, but in school policies as well. Some examples of this include:

> Ten years ago, Mary's partner was teaching at a Catholic high school, where she was forced to keep her sexuality a secret or risk losing her job (Volmers 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> When Halton region Catholic schools banned gay-straight alliances earlier this year… (Arthur 2011).

Because anti-gay religious policies and views assume a moral higher ground, the harm of institutionalized homophobia was usually not addressed.

For the articles mentioning religious views that accepted or were neutral toward LGBTQ

people, many reasoned that people should love everyone as God does. For example,

'My God, unlike LeMay's God, loves all children, not just the

heterosexual ones' (Anonymous 2011).

***

The Bible's message is one of equity and inclusion, and we must

be constantly vigilant to ensure we are acting upon this message

for the most vulnerable among us. This policy means we must take

the opportunity to be leaders by ensuring that our schools are a

place where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, and

questioning students feel accepted and safe (Piscitelli 2011).

***

'I told him…, that God loves everyone,' Aaberg said. 'I thought he

believed me, that he was OK' [speaking about an LGBTQ youth

that committed suicide] (Horner 2 2011).

Suicide and Bullying

The fifth most common topic, with 96 mentions in the articles, is the mention of the

bullying, suicide, or death method. This topic was initially entered into the study as a way to

gauge how detailed the mentions would be, because previous research suggested that the more

lurid or gory the story, the more coverage it receives. This is a claim that cannot be supported by

the data because nearly 72 percent of the articles made no mention of bullying, suicide, or death

methods. And secondly, the structure of the sample was not designed to capture how much coverage a particular bullying, suicide, or homicide event received. Nevertheless, what is interesting is how graphic some of these stories are. For example,

> Because of his perceived sexual orientation, Nabozny was called names and was attacked physically by his classmates. At the hands of other students, he was urinated on and beaten so badly that he had to be hospitalized (Johnson 2010).

<div align="center">***</div>

> He described Sept. 9 as 'the worst day ever' and made repeated posts stating that he wanted to kill himself after some 'popular people' came over to his table at lunch and one of the students spit on a plate of brownies before giving them to him (Tan 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> By 5 am he was dead. His body was discovered on an industrial estate in the town where he had spent most of his life, tied to a lamppost. He had been brutally beaten and burned to death (O'Connell 2011).

While these passages are difficult to read, it is important to document the vivid descriptions of some events in the news media.

Uncertainty about the cause of a suicide or death of an LGBTQ person or when the death is seen as a mystery was mentioned in 7 articles. Many of these articles discuss how bullying may or may not have had anything to do with the suicide of an LGBTQ person. For example,

'…the continuation of inaccurate information is not helpful,'

Carlson said in his message. 'Once again, we have no evidence

that bullying played a role in any of our student deaths' (Winters

2010).

***

But the bullying link to the deaths is inaccurate, the district says,

based on the findings of crisis teams sent into schools after the

suicides (Horner 2011).

***

'We may never know the combination of factors that drove

Clementi to take his own life, said Windmeyer, the head of

Campus [LGBTQ] Pride' (Alex 2011).

While bullying may not have been identified as the main cause of a suicide, it is unwise to

assume, especially in the case of an LGBTQ youth who has been bullied, that it had nothing to

do with the death. Although some articles had descriptions linking suicide or bullying to anti-

LGBTQ contexts, a small number of articles had examples of people expressing less certainty or

even denying a connection between bullying and a suicide of an LGBTQ youth.

Portrayals of LGBTQ People

Thirty-three articles contained passages describing LGBTQ people as vulnerable or with

positive attributes such as having an illness or a disability or being a good athlete or student.

These positive attributes are often used as a way to make a victim seem "sympathy-worthy" (Loseke 2003). In essence, they are used to impute a moral identity onto someone and thus elicit concern from others. For example,

> 'But Kopay, a running back who played for five teams during his nine-year [football] career, learned the hard way that the wide world of sports didn't want to make room for gays' (O'Keefe 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> 'Barbara said her daughter went from a happy girl with decent grades in elementary school to a young woman failing her classes and dreading being verbally and physically harassed every day' (Banes 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> At first they thought Conklin's recent pain was an acute MS attack after coping through decades of ups and downs with the disease. An emergency room visit shattered that assumption and their life. Cancer in Conklin's pancreas spread to his liver, lungs and lymph nodes (Weidner 2011).

These articles also focused on the personality of the LGBTQ victims and discussed what good people they are/were. Some examples of this include:

> Everybody liked Stuart. They always say that after somebody dies tragically, but this time it appears to have been true. His friends called him a "classical comedian", "a big softy", "the life and soul." They said that he knew everybody in the town where he lived (O'Connell 2011).

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Jamie's YouTube postings show a bright shining star, whose light went out way too soon. Apparently he asked the readers in his final blog entry to remember him as a unicorn. This was a direct reference to an episode on Glee where Kurt was compared to a unicorn "different but special inside" (Harrison 2011).

As many of these examples show, in order to portray someone as a victim, writers could make him/her seem sympathy-worthy (Loseke 2003). Strong appeals occur when victims' "innocence" is countered by a stigmatizing identity. In the case of LGBTQ people victimized by bullying and those who felt driven to commit suicide, highly sympathetic portrayals compensated for the stigma attached to homosexuality. Ironically, these portrayals communicate that LGBTQ people are still "good" people *despite* being LGBTQ.

Only a few articles mentioned homosexuality as a choice versus an inborn characteristic. Ten articles mentioned homosexuality as not a choice. Most of these articles describe homosexuality as something that is inherent from birth. For example,

Religion and gun control might be things you can have an opinion on, but there is a lot of research out there that says that people (who are gay) are born that way… (Horner 4 2011).

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

It is important for young people to understand that being gay is not a choice any more than one's skin colour (Morris-Dadson 2011).

***

As cruel as these stories are, they are the most poignant evidence

there is against the absurd notion that sexual orientation is a

"lifestyle choice" instead of a biological reality (Floyd 2010).

Nine articles mentioned homosexuality as a choice. Those that described homosexuality

as a choice invoked religion in their explanation. For example,

God creates us heterosexual. We may get other ideas in our head

about what we are, and I certainly did, but that doesn't mean

they're the truth (Denizet-Lewis 2011).

***

Mr. Morgan took it upon himself to mention about how he feels all

this gay shit was crazy and that women are a gift from God and

that 'Born this Way' is bulls[h]it, gay is a choice, and the reason he

knows this is exactly because 'God don't make no mistakes'

(referring to God not making someone gay cause that would be a

mistake). He said that there is no way a woman could love and

have sexual desire for another woman, that's just a woman

pretending because she hates a f[uc]king man' (THR Staff 2011).

People's claims about homosexuality as a choice or as inherent serve as a fair indicator of how

they view those who are LGBTQ. If people define homosexuality as inherent or in-born, they are

more likely to portray LGBTQ people in a sympathy-worthy light than if they define

homosexuality as a choice. In articles taking the latter approach, people who defined

homosexuality as a choice gave themselves license to denounce homosexuality and deny victim

status to LGBTQ people who have been bullied.

<u>Adultism</u>

The topic of Adultism appeared in 20 articles. Adultism refers to the inequalities that

result when adults portray or treat teenagers or young adults as children who are incapable of

logic and as "too young" to appropriately handle life events (Fields 2004). This theme emerged

in the articles as a point of resistance when education and awareness about homosexuality and

homophobia were proposed for a school. For example,

> Kenney, a social worker, said she was concerned about children's
>
> reactions when they view the Respect for All films that show
>
> families with adopted children, children living with divorce or
>
> living with their grandparents (Banes 2011).

<div align="center">***</div>

> Teaching about sexual orientation is not a part of the District
>
> adopted curriculum; rather, such matters are best addressed within
>
> individual family homes, churches, or community organizations
>
> (Horner 3 2011).

Many of the articles with the adultism theme suggested that if students were to learn

about homosexuality, either from school or popular media, then this would "normalize" or

"promote" homosexuality. For example,

May this brash attack upon children's innocence finally motivate
parents to remove their children from the government school
system, and get them into the safe havens of church schooling and
home schooling, Mr. Thomasson said (Teicher 2011).

***

Before the neutrality policy, the Anoka-Hennepin [MN] district
policy read: We recommend that while respect be maintained
toward all people, homosexuality not be taught/addressed as a
normal, valid lifestyle and that district staff and their resources not
advocate the homosexual lifestyle (Horner 3 2011).

***

'We all oppose bullying...whether you identify as gay or lesbian or
not. But for some reason, we have these national groups that are
trying to use that (claim) to take out a policy on curriculum," said
Tom Prichard, president of the Minnesota Family Council. "I think
it's pretty clear what their ultimate objective is...to promote and
affirm the gay lifestyle' (Horner 2011).

Anti-gay advocates who expressed adultist beliefs and resistance to inclusive school curriculums
present all students as incapable of understanding homosexuality, or needing protection from it,
yet this ignores the hidden curriculum of homophobia that youth absorb from peers, parents,
popular media, etc. Ironically, "kids" who are supposedly incapable of understanding
homosexuality may in all actuality be the ones doing the homophobic bullying. If youth are

knowledgeable enough to bully others based on homophobic and heterosexist beliefs, then adultist calls to censor and limit sexuality education end up supporting the status quo. It could be theorized that adultism is often used a way to mask homophobia by avoiding the issue altogether and thereby preventing social change which could help reduce or erase homophobia and heterosexism.

<div align="center">Contingency Table Analyses</div>

After entering data from 309 newspaper articles into SPSS, chi-squares tests were run on a few codes to determine their statistical significance. The following code chi-squares were found to be significant at the .05 level with a degree of freedom of 1. With a p-value less than .001, "Anti-Gay Religion" occurred in 10.7 percent of the articles overall and in 40.9 percent of the articles that discussed "LGBTQ People as a Problem." With a p-value less than .001, the code "Homosexuality a Choice" occurred in 50 percent of the articles that discussed "Anti-Gay Religion." "Adultism" occurred in 6.5 percent of the articles overall, and 18.2 percent of these articles also discussed the code "LGBTQ People Seen as a Problem." This chi-square's p-value was .021. "Pro-Gay Religion" occurred in 8.4 percent of the articles, and 13.5 percent of these articles also discussed the code "Tolerance, Acceptance, and Reduction of Prejudice." This chi-square's p-value was .029. These chi-square tests show how some of the codes are linked and support the framing process.

Chi-squares with the same parameters were also run on the more prominent codes. With a p-value of .001, the code "Tolerance, Acceptance, and Reduction of Prejudice" occurred in 20.8 percent of the articles, and 38 percent of these articles also mentioned the code "Suicide." With a p-value of .145, which is not significant, the code "Tolerance, Acceptance, and Reduction

of Prejudice" occurred in 32.8 percent of the articles that discussed the code "Bullying." With a p-value of .018, the code "Heteronormativity" occurred in 2.6 percent of the articles and 100 percent of those articles contained the code "Suicide." With a p-value of .012, the code "LGBTQ Person Described with Positive Attributes" occurred in 10 percent of the articles, and 13.6 percent of those articles contained the code "Suicide." With a p-value of .030, the code "LGBTQ Person Described with Positive Attributes" occurred in 11.7 percent of the articles that contained the code "Bullying."

With a p-value of .059, which is not significant, the code "Homophobia Seen as a Problem" occurred in 52.1 percent of the articles and 56.5 percent of those articles also contained the code "Suicide." With a p-value of .004, the code "Homophobia Seen as a Problem" occurred in 55.9 percent of the articles that contained the code "Bullying." With a p-value less than .001, the code "Suicide Blamed on Bullying/Homophobia" occurred in 46.6 percent of the articles and 71.7 percent of these articles also contained the code "Suicide." With a p-value of less than .001, the code "Suicide Blamed on Bullying/Homophobia" occurred in 53.9 percent of the articles that discussed the code "Bullying." As with the other linkages that chi-square tests helped identify, these statistically significant co-occurrences of codes underscore the impact of framing as a rhetorical technique. Because the majority of the sampled articles were news (67.6%) and op-ed articles (32.4%), the framing of LGBTQ people and homophobia discussed in this study was reinforced mostly by journalists rather than members of the public.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Overall, my analysis of article themes highlights how the issue of homophobia in society and in schools is interpreted. Often the issue of homophobia in newspaper articles is skirted, not met head-on. This was often true in articles where the "tragic frame," which gives an illusion of closure by blaming society, was used. In many articles homophobia was not presented as a problem requiring immediate attention. This was especially the case in stories about schools, where homophobic incidences and behaviors may be swept under the rug or their negative consequences ignored. Some school board members and parents, wary of programs for students who they think are too young to learn about homosexuality, have defined homosexuality as inappropriate to teach in schools. As I suggested, what these articles leave out is that many times the students who bully those they perceive as gay or lesbian and reinforce homophobia are the ones who are considered "too young" to learn about homosexuality.

Just under half of the articles in my sample blamed a suicide or death on bullying or homophobia. The rest of the articles either neglected to mention what caused the suicide while others implied that homophobia was the cause but never said it blatantly. This probably has less to do with any lurking homophobia on the part of the authors and more to do with the "just the facts" mentality of journalism. Nevertheless, this still contributes to a heteronormative environment by not pointing out possible causes. This implies that social pressures and homophobia are not involved in the suicides or deaths of LGBTQ people. Ignoring the negative consequences of homophobia or remaining silent about them may unintentionally produce further negative outcomes. While these articles and others like them are not the cause of homophobia, homophobic bullying, or the suicides or deaths of gays and lesbians, they, like

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other forms of media, contribute to a homophobic environment. Instead, bullying, not homophobia or heterosexism, is often treated as the primary cause of so many problems for gay and lesbian youth and adults. Some articles discuss how stopping bullying in general, not gay bullying specifically, should be the goal (Baca 2011; Banes 2011). While no one is "pro-bullying," just stopping bullying will not erase the root causes of the bullying in the first place. When social problems are addressed in general ways, it is harder to solve specific problems.

The themes of tolerance and acceptance can also contribute to the pattern of skirting around homophobia. Many articles discussed tolerating and/or accepting homosexuals. While this may seem like a good thing, the dominance of heterosexuality in today's society goes unquestioned. Heterosexuals enjoy more privileges than homosexuals; the social practices that benefit heterosexuals help reinforce heterosexism and prejudice. Calling for tolerance, acceptance, or the reduction of prejudice will not change how homosexuals are disadvantaged in everyday situations and social institutions. Even when LGBTQ rights were called for, the significance of homophobia and heterosexism went unacknowledged. Most of the articles that contained this theme gave no examples of structural ways to actually change the status quo; instead, most promoted "awareness." Awareness, like prejudice reduction, seems good on the surface-but these cognitive states may not address social practices that support homophobia.

What is most important about the themes represented in these articles is the possible impact that they might have on readers. There were a few articles in this study that did a great job handling the issues and themes that arise when writing stories about LGBTQ people and homophobia. For example,

It cannot get better unless the majority of the people in the world change their own prejudiced, heterosexist and homophobic mind-set (Donaldson 2011).

This is an example of focusing on the underlying causes of homophobia instead of skirting around the issue. Another recommendation for journalists would be making visible to readers and other journalists the privileges that heterosexuals enjoy at the expense of homosexuals. This would help shed light on the consequences of homophobia. For example,

Gay and bisexual youths are more likely to have a sexually transmitted infection, are less likely to use a condom and twice as likely to become pregnant compared with their heterosexual peers, partly because they tend to be sexually active earlier and partly because of a lack of relevant sex education (Tomazin 2011).

This example shows how heterosexuals are represented in sex education while non-heterosexuals are often left out which can have negative consequences for LGBTQ people. The following story makes visible how school curricula beyond the topic of sex education also usually reinforce heterosexism:

At two East Bay private schools the debate has gone beyond whether to include gay history in the curriculum. They have taken the next step, offering a high school class dedicated to gay studies… Many students said they like getting a perspective they haven't received in previous history classes. 'It's learning a completely different history,' said Ian Truebridge, 17, a junior from Danville. 'You don't hear about the gay community that much' (Louie 2011).

This example documents how non-heterosexuals have been left out of the history books. The author frames this story in a way that shows how adding gay studies classes is a positive step for America's youth.

When handling human interest pieces, setting aside the "just the facts" mentality that many journalists have would improve the level of analysis in these stories without hindering the presentation of factual information. For example,

> However, let's not get carried away on the warm and fuzzy tide of our own compassion and acceptance. It would be wrong to give the impression that Ireland is some kind of lavender-scented utopia in which to be gay. Attacks of the kind that happened to Stuart Walker are almost unheard of - unfortunately, less serious assaults are not (O'Connell 2011).

Though some bias is evident here, this example shows the importance of taking violence against LGBTQ people seriously by dropping the "just the facts" mentality and addressing the seriousness of the situation. No reporting style is without its drawbacks, however. Sometimes "just the facts" reporting is necessary. For example,

> Suicide attempts by gay teens - and even straight kids - are more common in politically conservative areas where schools don't have programs supporting gay rights, a study involving nearly 32,000 high school students found (Tanner 2011).

> ***

> Bullying remains a major problem in Canada, and in this province, with almost half of Ontario teens saying they've been bullied. An earlier study found Canada

had one of the highest rates of bullying among a study of 40 nations (Rushowy 2011).

While a "just the facts" mentality may seem clinical and lacking in emotions, sometimes it is necessary. The examples above, although clinical emotionally detached, get straight to the point and highlight the impact of bullying and suicide on the LGBTQ community. It is impossible for all journalists to provide in-depth coverage in all human interest pieces, but handling stories more thoughtfully in this way would help mitigate many of the misconceptions about LGBTQ people.

<div align="center">Discussion of Contingency Table Analyses</div>

The interpretation of the chi-square results led to some interesting findings. First, LGBTQ people were described with positive attributes more often in articles about suicide and bullying than in articles that did not mention either code. Homophobia was criticized more in articles about suicide or bullying than in articles that did not mention either code. Mentions of heteronormativity occurred only in articles about suicide, and homophobia was blamed as a cause of suicide in 72 percent of the articles on suicide and in 54 percent of articles about bullying.

As expected, articles that contained mentions of pro-gay religion also contained mentions of tolerance, acceptance, and reduction of prejudice at a significant level. Articles that mentioned anti-gay religion contained mentions of both "LGBTQ People Seen as a Problem" and "Homosexuality a Choice" at significant levels. Finally, articles coded for "Adultism" contained mentions of "LGBTQ People Seen as a Problem" at a significant level.

Most important in these findings is what is revealed about how LGBTQ people were portrayed in the articles. It seems as though assigning positive attributes helped make victims seem "sympathy-worthy" but only in tragic situations; this neglects the systemic harm caused by homophobia and heterosexism at all times. Describing LGBTQ people in positive ways should not be reserved only for occasions that make them seem sympathy-worthy.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation to the findings of this study was the possibility of human error. Since there were three coders involved, an initial set of 500 articles, and a long list of items to code, there was a great likelihood of making a mistake during coding. These mistakes could be due to coder fatigue, a misreading or misinterpretation of the articles, or simply marking one code instead of another.

Another limitation to this study is not having access to all articles about gay teen suicide, gay bullying, and the "It Gets Better" campaign that were printed between 2009 and 2011. Though Lexis Nexis has a large amount of articles in its database, it is impossible to have a perfect population of all these articles from which to pull a sample. A larger number of articles to pull from might have yielded a more representative sample and thus, more accurate results.

The time constraints that affected the coders also limited this study. With three different coders who had three different schedules completing the coding in a timely manner was not easy. In the end, two coders did almost all the coding due to conflicting schedules. Also, as time constraints got worse, a higher number of articles had to be coded in a shorter amount of time, which heightens the probability of coding errors.

There are a few things that would improve this study if it were performed again. First, a larger sample of articles would lead to more representative findings. Second, focusing on just a few topics instead of many would make the study more manageable. Third, using different search terms when searching the articles would probably lead to a larger, more diverse sample.

<u>Implications for Future Research</u>

Future research exploring patterns in the framing of gay teen suicide and gay bullying is important for understanding how members of society view and treat LGBTQ people. More research should be done to decide whether the themes in this study occur in other articles or other forms of media concerning LGBTQ people or if this is unique to gay suicide and bullying newspaper articles. For example, do films (documentary and dramatic) and magazines contain the same themes? If so, do they have a greater impact than newspapers because of a wider public consumption? Comparing patterns in how other highly-charged social issues are covered in the news would be helpful—in order to understand the degree to which difficult topics are addressed or avoided in mainstream journalism.

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