

NEWSPAPER USE OF FEAR APPEAL IN COVERAGE OF LGBT ISSUES

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SAMANTHA SINKHORN

DR. GERARD LANOSGA – ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights have become one of the most controversial topics in society, and media coverage of same-sex marriage has increased over the last two decades since the issue was first brought to media attention in the 1990s (Li and Liu 2010, 72-73). Sixteen states, as of May 2011, (including the District of Columbia) currently allow same-sex couples to enter legal marriages, unions, or partnerships (National Conference of State Legislatures), and Supreme Court rulings on same-sex marriages have kept LGBT issues on the national public and political agenda.

Because media coverage of the legalization of same-sex marriage, and other LGBT issues (adoption, gays serving openly in the military, and so on) can shape public opinion, it is important for studies to analyze how the media frame these issues. As past studies suggest (Pan, Meng, and Zhou 2010; Price, Nir, and Capella 2005; Brewer 2002), the news media tend to frame same-sex marriage using two frames: the morality frame or the equal rights frame. Media coverage of LGBT issues that use the morality frame, which includes elements of fear appeal (e.g., threats), has the potential to generate negative opinions about the LGBT community.

For the first time in history, the majority of Americans approve of same-sex couples entering a legally recognized marriage (Gallup, 2011), but 39 states still have statutes that define marriage between one man and one woman (National Conference of

State Legislatures). Therefore, it is compelling to examine the mainstream media's coverage of LGBT issues to better understand the public's perception of LGBT issues. This study examines media frames and use of fear appeal in the coverage of LGBT issues in the top-three circulating U.S. newspapers and offers other ways to research the use and effectiveness of media frames and fear appeals in LGBT coverage. The results of this study show that the newspapers analyzed (*The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*) did use fear appeal in covering LGBT issues but only when articles referenced opposing viewpoints.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Fear Appeal

Fear is a part of our everyday lives, can occur in any environment, and is caused by a variety of factors. (Vincent and Dubinsky 2004, 146). Fear appeals are considered to be the triggers that elicit fear. They are a form of persuasive communication that attempts to arouse fear to “promote precautionary motivation” and “self-protective action” (Ruiter, Verplanken, Cremer, and Kok 2004, 13). However, research that aims at measuring fear and the behavior resulting from exposure to fear appeals is often inconclusive or inaccurate.

Burnet and Oliver (1979) suggest there is a lack of “common vocabulary and conceptual structure across disciplines” in fear appeal research (cited in Higbee 1969; Ray and Wilkie 1970). Therefore, fear is rarely measured accurately, and it is hard to delineate in some studies whether fear is a motivating factor. In 1953, Janis and Feshbach became two of the first researchers to study effects of fear appeal and its ability to motivate behavior. According to their research, high amounts of fear appeal in a message will elicit low amounts of motivation; therefore, behavioral change will often be minimal because “high fear produce[s] responses of defensive avoidance” (Berkowitz and Cottingham 1960, 20). Defensive avoidance occurs when an audience avoids accepting the communication entirely.

As Berkowitz and Cottingham (1960) suggest, however, Janis and Feshbach's generalizations may only be successful under specific conditions due to the interest value of the communication. They say "the authors themselves noted that their results cannot be generalized beyond the particular ads, test subjects and research situation used in their study;" still, many consumer researchers have attempted to use or explain "an optimal level of fear for persuasion" (34). The persuasive message must contain sufficient interest in order for a communicator to be successful at changing an audience's opinion. A low interest value may not be necessarily efficient for changing opinion "either because low interest produces inattentiveness or because the frustrated audience ... dismisses the entire communication" (37).

What Janis and Feshbach attempted to identify, along with other researchers, is what type and at what level fear appeals are most persuasive. However, fear appeal effects are contingent upon specific situations because different people fear different things. No threat evokes the same response from all people, even within a narrowly defined demographic group (LaTour and Rotfeld 1997, 46). Because of this, it is difficult to generalize the effects of fear appeals.

Framing

Whether or not communication is successful at evoking fear is dependent on how the message is framed. Entman (2007) defines framing as using elements of a "perceived reality" and constructing a narrative that produces a "particular interpretation" (164). Weaver 2007 draws connections between second-level agenda setting and framing, although they are not always considered the same process: "Both are concerned with how issues or other objects (people, groups, organizations, countries, etc.) are depicted in the

media than which issues or objects are more or less prominently reported” (145). However, there are differences: “But framing does seem to include a broader range of cognitive processes—such as moral evaluations, causal reasoning, appeals to principles, and recommendations for treatment of problems—than does second-level agenda setting (the salience of attributes of an object)” (146).

Two different frames that are used in presenting and understanding news are the media frame and the individual frame (Scheufele 2007, 106). Media frames, as defined by Gamson and Modigliani (1987), are “a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events ... the essence of the issue” (143). Media frames can also be considered as “working routines for journalists that allow the journalists to quickly identify and classify information” (Scheufele 2007, 106). The media frame, through the representation of how news is reported, can affect how an audience comes to understand particular events (Price, Tewksbury, and Powers 1997, 4). The news media are integral to the framing process because they are able to legitimize “some perspectives and marginalize others” (Sacco 1995, 149). Individual frames are the ideas individuals already have that causally allow for the processing of information (Entman 2007, 53).

In his research, Gross (2008) describes two other frames understood by mass communication researchers. However, she suggests little research has been done on the role of episodic and thematic frames in news coverage. Episodic frames are frames that “present an issue by offering a specific example, case study, or event oriented report” (171). An example of this would be a news story that covers hate crimes from a victim’s perspective. Thematic frames, however, present a story in a larger context (i.e., a news

story that reports the latest hate crime data and uses information from expert sources). Gross' research attempts to identify the roles of these frames in news coverage. She concludes that episodic framing has an influence on an audience's emotional response to persuasive communication: "Episodic frames can actually increase persuasion if the individual's story is compelling enough to generate intense emotional reactions from a significant portion of the audience" (184). For example, news coverage that generates an emotional response (e.g., fear, anger, sympathy, and so on) has the potential to assist in social changes due to the persuasive claims.

Gross suggests thematic frames may be more persuasive over a short period of time. However, "the emotional engagement of the episodic frames might produce persuasive effects over a long period of time" (184). This is because the content under this frame are considered more "emotionally engaging." However, Gross believes it is difficult to test this hypothesis.

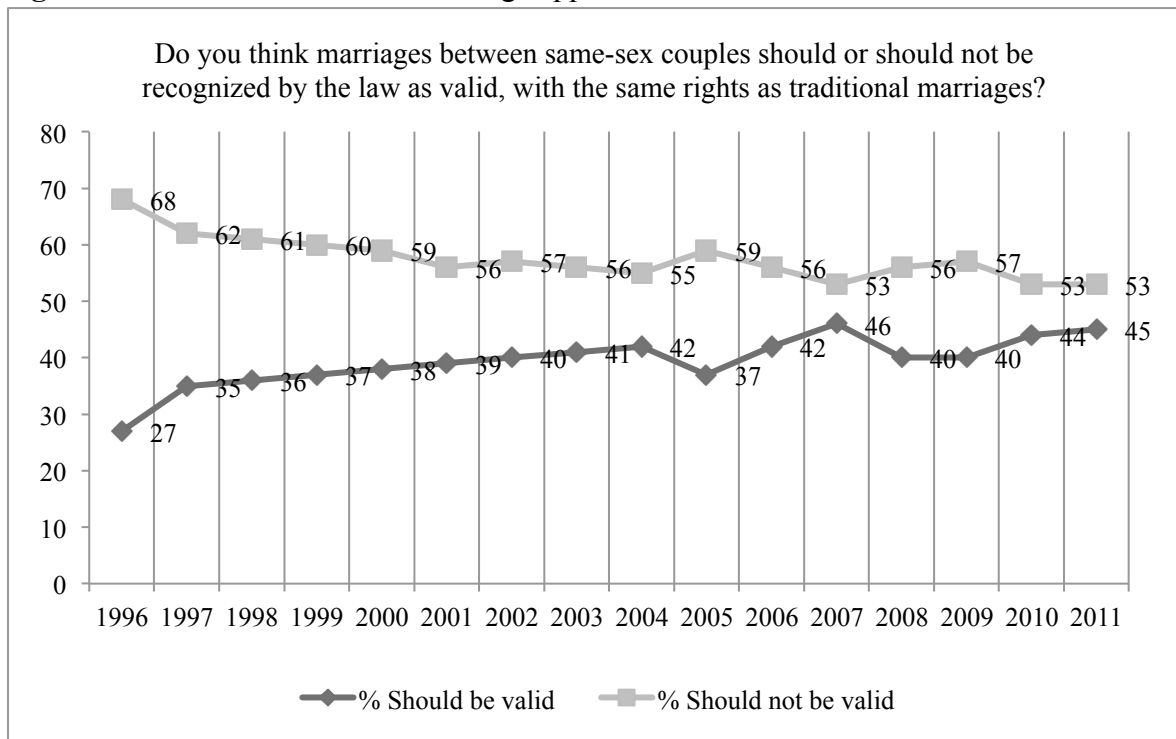
Research has also been done on framing and audience values. Ultimately, researchers conclude people use what they value in order to construct their opinions of certain issues (Brewer 2002, 303). However, they are able to "rely on frames they receive from the mass media in deciding which value or values to connect to specific issues" (304). Frames are capable of adjusting the "accessibility of a value".

LGBT Issues, Fear, and the Media

One subject that seems under-researched in regards to fear is the topic of LGBT issues. Significant research has been done on how LGBT groups and issues have been portrayed in the media; however, few studies have been done on the fear of same-sex marriage and the fear of gay rights.

LGBT rights—which are considered to be issues of “adoption, marriage, and involvement in community activities” (Chomsky and Barclay 2008, 2)—continue to be a hot-button issue in American society, as the legalization of gay marriage is being put to a vote state by state and legislation was signed in December 2010 that resulted in the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT). According to a May 2011 Gallup Poll (see Figure 1), more than half of Americans (53 %) believe that same-sex marriage should be “recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages.” This is the first time in Gallup’s history that the majority of Americans show approval form same-sex marriage. However, at the turn of the century, less than 40% of Americans showed approval for same-sex marriage, and the lowest approval rating recorded by Gallup was 27% in 1996.

Figure 1. Americans’ same-sex marriage approval from 1996-2011



Source: www.gallup.com

Although recent polls now show approval for same-sex marriage and LGBT rights, there have been integral changes in the newspaper industry as well as the public's perception of gay issues over the last 50 years. Between the 40s and 50s, homosexuality was considered as a "social problem." The majority (60%) of newspaper articles published during this period "described homosexuals as a direct threat to the strength of the U.S. military, the security of the U.S. government, and the safety of ordinary Americans during this period" (Chomsky and Barclay 2008, 1). Homosexuality was openly discussed in the 60s and 70s due to the organization of political actions that dealt with gay rights, and the visibility of gay men and women became more prominent in the 80s and 90s following the establishment of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation in 1986 (2). But now, homosexuals are "often described as a threat to children development as well as a danger to family values in the news media" (2).

In their study, Chomsky and Barclay researched the influence of ownership control (in regards to the coverage of gay and lesbian issues) at *The New York Times*. They suggest newspaper owners can usually only try to satisfy their personal preferences on editorial and news pages; the way gays and lesbians are portrayed in these sections "are subject to the perspectives and preferences of media owners" (11). Although Chomsky and Barclay found that LGBT rights usually are supported by the *Times*, the newspaper at times "has complained about the 'gay lifestyle,' "opposed grassroots activism," and "warned that outings and demonstrations harmed the cause of lesbian and gays generally" (11-12). Still, in a study about content diversity in opinion editorial (Op-Ed) newspaper sections, Day and Golan (2005) found that the *Times'* columnists, along

with its guest contributors, approached the topic of gay marriage from a neutral, if not supportive, standpoint (67).

In his research, Davidson (1991) elaborated on the portrayal of gays and lesbians in the news media, and unlike the study of Chomsky and Barclay and Day and Golan, his findings were almost conclusively negative. He suggests:

Anti-gay prejudice in the media occurs not just as vicious as slander, but also as casual bias, perpetuation of negative stereotypes, deference to the prejudice of others, and lesbian and gay invisibility. Problems with media coverage of the lesbian and gay community are rooted as much in heterosexism (the attitude that heterosexuals are important and homosexuals are not) as in homophobia (fear and loathing of gay people). (72)

Although Davidson mostly looked at what some would call “non-traditional” journalists, he also discovered similar findings in the Op-Ed sections of newspapers. Atheide (2009) suggests “the use of ‘Op-Ed’ and editorial pages for audiences to express other points of views, help account for the expanded use of [moral panic] in news reports” (80-81). This is dependent on the news outlet because each has its own standards on whether homophobic content can be deemed acceptable. Still, Davidson (1991) suggests, “guidelines for rejecting homophobic material are much weaker than those applied to racist, anti-Semitic, or sexist content” (74).

Framing Gay Issues in the News Media

Davidson suggests the media is selectively framing gay issues in order to portray them, at times, negatively. Framing is an essential piece to research on LGBT coverage, although some scholars may not directly reference the terms “framing” or “second-level agenda setting.” Even though previous research has been done of the prevalence of LGBT issues in the news media over the last 60 years, “these studies failed to analyze how homosexual

issues were framed in the news media to influence people's attitudes toward gay marriage" (Chomsky and Barclay 2007, 2). These studies also fail to determine how "newspapers reported the national debates on gay marriage as well as what kind of news frames was used in reporting these debates" (2). Ghoshal (2006) studied the success of the frames used in portraying same-sex marriage along with the persuasiveness of the arguments that were used within each frame (1). The objective of this research was to consider whether "a narrative approach is more successful than abstract, logical approach, and further, whether different kinds of 'rational' abstract frames have different levels of success" (2). In more recent studies, Li and Liu (2010) examined how media frames affected fairness and balance of LGBT coverage, and Pan, Meng, and Zhou (2010) analyzed ideological framing of the legitimization of same-sex marriage in the *Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Times*.

Some journalists fail to include multiple points of view in their reporting. Chomsky and Barclay (2007) suggest some newspapers may act like "grocery shops," catering only to the interests of their local audiences (2). In terms of LGBT issues, they found that the stances newspapers took on same-sex marriage did not necessarily coincide with local opinions. Also, some studies have found the public opinion of certain regions tends to be a reflection of the demographic makeup of that region (Chomsky and Barclay 2008, 1). But, Chomsky and Barclay believe this to be an incorrect assumption because "the media have not historically taken liberal positions on gay rights" (16). This is why some researchers devote their entire studies on understanding the framing of gay issues.

Price, Nir, and Capella (2005) examined “the ‘civil union/equal rights’ frame and the ‘homosexual marriage/special rights’ frame” and how these frames “shaped the ways citizens think and talk about the issue” (185). They suggest, through media discourse, same-sex marriage has been framed using two values: equality and morality (184). Gay activists and those supporting equal rights tend to frame the issue in terms of “civil unions,” due to the objections made by those who oppose referring to same-sex partnerships as “marriages”. Those who oppose the matter tend to frame the issue “in terms of traditional moral values, highlighting the threat such unions would pose to the long-standing social and religious institutions of marriage and family” (184). Also, Chomsky and Barclay (2007) suggest those who oppose legalizing gay marriage believe allowing same-sex marriages will allow for the destruction of “American society and values” (1).

These two competing frames can be found in language used by pro- and anti-gay rights organizations (e.g., The Committee on Moral Concerns and Indiana Equality), as well as in the language of court decisions on gay rights (*Romer v. Evans*) (Brewer 2002, 306). Brewer also concluded in his 1999 study of LGBT rights that equality and morality were dominant frames in coverage from 1990 to 1997. Also, in their 2005 study, Price, Nir, and Capella found that the morality frame resulted more results during a LexisNexis search during the 2000 Presidential Election (when gay rights were at the forefront of the public agenda) than the equal rights frame. In their study, the use of framing manipulation “did influence the ways that groups discussed the prospect of legalizing gay partnerships” (200).

Research has also been done on the influence of political knowledge on the morality frame, thus affecting the “mass attitudes toward gay rights policies” (Brewer 2002, 174). In his study, Brewer concludes that over a four-year period (1992-1996), Americans who were politically knowledgeable used their moral beliefs in order to form their opinions about equality of gays and lesbians more so than those who were considered as less knowledgeable (174). Brewer suggests that the argument could be made that individuals are capable of constructing “their own frames for political issues, including frames that link values to issues” (175). However, other scholars may argue that those who are politically knowledgeable “are better equipped” to construct their own frames than those who are less knowledgeable. Still, interest groups and political organizations will frame their messages of homosexuality in a way that will make their stance on the topic seem more favorable.

However, it is important to note that LGBT issues have also been framed in other ways besides equality and morality. Brewer (2002) suggests, “gay rights foes have cast their position in terms of ‘national security’ and ‘equal rights but not special rights.’ Meanwhile, gay rights supporters have invoked ‘fairness’ and ‘tolerance; and have argued that ‘hatred is not a family value’” (307). Still, Brewer believes the equality and morality frames are a key component in the debate over LGBT rights.

The studies reviewed in this paper reveal that while researchers have examined newspaper coverage of LGBT issues, a gap in the literature exists on the use of fear appeal in such coverage. No study has yet to evaluate the use of threats in LGBT coverage in newspapers, although other studies have evaluated the use of different frames in stories involving LGBT issues. Based on fear appeal and framing research, this study

provides an updated analysis of LGBT coverage and adds depth to existing research by answering the following two research questions:

Q1: In what ways do newspapers use fear appeal in framing LGBT issues?

Q2: How has the framing of LGBT issues changed over a 10-year period?

METHOD

This study used content analysis to answer the research questions regarding fear appeal in newspapers' coverage of LGBT issues. Content analysis has been used in numerous studies that analyzed LGBT coverage (Li and Lui, 2010, Henley et. al, 2002, and Gordon, Tadlock, and Popp, 2004).

Sample

The top three circulating newspapers in the U.S (*The New York Times* - 916,911, *Wall Street Journal* - 2,117,796, and *USA Today* - 1,829,099) were used in this analysis. The circulation numbers were obtained from the Audit Bureau of Circulation. The circulation is a six-month average from September 2010 – March 2011. The top-three highest circulating newspapers were chosen because not only do these newspapers reach a large audience and set the tone for national coverage, but these newspapers also provide a large selection of editorials from which this study could sample. Also, research studies that involve a comparative analysis of LGBT issues in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* are few.

The units of analysis for this study were editorial articles published between December 31, 2000 and December 31, 2010. Editorials, rather than news stories, were used in order to follow the research models of other communication researchers (Day and

Golan, 2005). A ten-year period was chosen to construct a large enough sample to track coverage over time. During this period, the LGBT community experienced strides as well as setbacks in achieving equal rights. In 2000, California's Proposition 22 was enacted, allowing marriage only between a man and a woman. Four years later, Massachusetts became the first state to issue same-sex marriage licenses and soon California followed suit but again banned same-sex marriage in 2008. In 2009, hate crime legislation was developed that provides extended sentencing to persons who commit a crime against someone based on his/her perceived or real sexual orientation. And in December 2010, the ban on gays and lesbians serving openly in the military was lifted.

The ProQuest database was used to compile articles covering LGBT issues, specifically same-sex marriage, DADT, and adoption. The following keywords were used to retrieve articles: *sex-marriage, DADT, Don't Ask, Don't Tell, gay adoption, gay rights*. In a similar study, Day and Golan (2005) analyzed 150 Op-Ed articles using the key words of "gay marriage," "affirmative action," "death penalty" and "editorial" from *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from January 1999 to December 2003. Day and Golan chose to use Op-Eds, rather than news stories, as their unit of analysis because they believe the Op-Ed is a "forum in the marketplace of ideas for fostering the exchange of diverse issues," and that "the original purpose of the Op-Ed was to provide a vehicle for divergent opinions from that normally expressed by the news [...] of the newspaper" (61 and 62).

Editorials were specified as the category in the search. Letters to the editor and their replies were excluded in this collection, although they appeared in the search results. Also, at the researcher's discretion, articles that weren't primarily focused on the

aforementioned topics were excluded. Using the keywords, the search produced 134 results; however, 25 articles were excluded from coding based on the above criteria. A total of 109 stories were selected, including 67 of stories from *The New York Times* (61%), 21 stories from the *Wall Street Journal* (19%), and 21 from *USA Today* (19%).

Measurement of variables

This study used an adaptation of the measurement of frames of coverage of LGBT issues from Price, Nir, and Capella (2005) and Chomsky and Barclay (2006). Frames of LGBT coverage in editorials were measured in three categories: equal rights frame, morality frame, and other. The equal rights and morality frames were chosen because the legal standing of domestic partnerships, civil unions, and same-sex marriage are often framed in this way in media discourse. The equal rights frame, also known as the civil union frame, consists of coverage that is suggestive of equal rights for LGBT groups or individuals. The morality frame, also known as the traditional values frame, consists of coverage that implies LGBT issues pose a threat to “the long-standing social and religious institutions of marriage and family” (Price, Nir, and Capella 184, 2005). The “other” category was used for articles that did not use either frame.

Some researchers suggest it is possible for both the equal rights and morality frames to be present in an article (Gordon, Tadlock, Popp, 2004) when that article is discussing its own viewpoint as well as the opposition's. However, this study took a different approach. Although articles were coded for both frames, the article's viewpoint, not the opposition's, was used in determining frames; however, articles were also coded for whether the author addressed an opposing viewpoint and if that viewpoint suggested LGBT rights pose a threat to society, marriage, family values, morals, or other (See

Appendix). This method was used not only to see if newspapers addressed both sides of the issues discussed but also to see if newspapers used elements of the morality frame in discussing an opposing viewpoint.

In addition to frames, the editorials were coded for stance. In this study, stance was operationally defined as whether the article favored, opposed, or had a neutral position when discussing LGBT issues. More often than not, articles that use the morality frame will oppose LGBT rights and those articles that use the equal rights frame will take a pro stance on LGBT rights.

This study also measured the use of threats in coverage of LGBT issues. A *threat* is defined as an “appeal to fear, a communication stimulus that attempts to evoke a fear response by showing some type of outcome that the audience (it is hoped) wants to avoid” (LaTour and Rotfeld 46, 1997). The articles were coded for whether the coverage suggested LGBT rights posed a threat to society, marriage, family values, other, or no threat at all. Coders were given key terms to look for in identifying these threats (See Appendix).

As mentioned previously, the articles were also coded for whether or not an opposing viewpoint was present and if that viewpoint suggested LGBT rights pose a threat to society, marriage, family values, morals, other, or no threat at all. Coders used the same key terms as they did when coding for the initial threat. Finally, articles were also coded for newspaper, year published, and topic discussed.

Two coders, including the researcher, were used in this study. Before the intercoder reliability test, both coders underwent a pretest in which they both coded 10 articles from a random sample of *L.A. Times* articles to ensure variables in the codebook

were adequately defined. Both coders also participated in the intercoder reliability test. Each coded every tenth article in the original sample (before articles were excluded based on the above criteria) until 10% of the sample was coded. Nominal variables were calculated using Cohen's Kappa (.89) and Scott's Pi (.89) with a percentage agreement of 95%. Cohen's Kappa and Scott's Pi were calculated out of 210 agreements with 10 disagreements. Both methods were used to ensure sufficient reliability. After reliability was established, coders coded the entire sample.

FINDINGS

The study used frequencies and crosstabulation to determine the results of the content analysis of the three newspapers.

How do newspapers use fear appeal in the coverage of LGBT issues?

In regards to framing, 75% of the coded articles used the equality frame, 2% used the morality frame, and 24% used neither frame. Specifically, *The New York Times* used the equal rights frame in all 67 of its articles, the *Wall Street Journal* used the equal rights frame in five articles and the morality frame in one article, and *USA Today* used the equal rights frame in 11 articles and used the morality frame once. Although newspapers may use the equal rights frame in their editorials, this does not mean the article will always favor LGBT issues. An article may use the equal rights frame but also take a neutral stance. This was apparent in all three newspapers; however, it was more common to see a newspaper use neither frame when taking a neutral stance. For instance, the *Wall Street Journal* used neither frame 15 times and took a neutral stance in 20 articles (see Table 1). But, in both articles that used the morality frame, *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* opposed LGBT issues that were discussed in each article.

Table 1. Use of Frame and Stance in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA TODAY*

Newspaper	Frame			Stance		
	Equality	Morality	Other	Favor	Oppose	Neutral
<i>NYT</i>	67	0	0	64	0	3
<i>WSJ</i>	5	1	15	0	1	20
<i>USA Today</i>	11	1	9	8	1	12

Thirty-nine articles referenced an opposing viewpoint, and out of those, 72% used an opposing viewpoint that suggested LGBT rights pose a threat to society, marriage, family values, morals, or other (see Table 2). The morality frame was found in only two of the articles; therefore, fear appeal was predominately present in articles that used the equal rights frame and also discussed opposing viewpoints that contained threats. In the two articles that used the morality frame, no specific threats were mentioned; therefore the “other” category was marked.

TABLE 2. Threats and Their Frequency of Appearing in Opposing Viewpoints (OV)

Threat	Total	% of Total OV	% of Total Articles
Society	4	10%	4%
Marriage	11	28%	10%
Family Values	2	5%	2%
Morals	7	18%	6%
Other	4	10%	4%
None	11	28%	10%

The New York Times used an opposing viewpoint in 39% of the articles coded and out of these, 92% contained threats, the *Wall Street Journal* used an opposing viewpoint in 14% of the articles with none containing threats, and *USA Today* used an opposing viewpoint

in 48% of the articles with 20% containing threats. This analysis shows that *The New York Times*, which almost always supported LGBT rights, is more likely to use opposing viewpoints including threats in their coverage than *The Wall Street Journal*, which chose a more neutral stance on LGBT rights.

How has the framing of LGBT issues changed over a 10-year period?

This analysis indicates no significant change in LGBT coverage over this time period. For example, as far as topic is concerned, 82 (75%) of the articles discussed same-sex marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships, where as 17 (16%) articles discussed DADT, no articles solely discussed gay and lesbian adoption, five articles discussed multiple issues, and five articles discussed some other topic not included in the codebook. In 2001, 2002, and 2003, articles about DADT were found as well as in late 2010; however, the latter is most likely due to repeal of DADT in December 2010. Still, from this crosstabulation, there is not sufficient evidence to deduce how the date of publication affected the topic covered because 75% of the articles discussed the same topic of same-sex marriage. Also, the date had no effect on whether the equal rights frame or morality frame was used because the morality frame was used only twice and not in consecutive years. This lack of a significant change in coverage over time could stem from a variety of factors, such as the small sample size and a shortened time period.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that the selected U.S. newspapers generally did not use fear appeals in persuasive articles on LGBT issues. The only time fear appeals were present were when the newspaper was using it to characterize or mock the opposing viewpoint. Although this study used a "conservative" newspaper like the *Wall Street Journal*, the newspaper chose to almost always take a neutral stance on LGBT issues rather than using the morality frame. Still, both *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* used the morality frame once; however, they did not suggest the LGBT group pose any certain threats. The lack of appearance of the morality frame was not surprising because of this study's use of top-circulation newspapers and exclusion of smaller regional newspapers.. Although previous framing research found frequent use of the morality frame (Davidson 1991), these studies can be considered outdated. An updated look at the use of framing LGBT issues shows that the morality frame does not frequently appear in editorial coverage; however, the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA TODAY* choose to take neutral stances rather than using either frame. *The New York Times*, which is considered a "liberal" newspaper, does use the equality frame frequently and almost always takes a supportive stance on LGBT issues. This finding is in congruence with Day and Golan's (2005) and Chomsky and

Barclay's (2008) study of *Time's* articles. Also, the stance each newspaper took on LGBT issues was not surprising. Since *USA Today* has been considered a "centrist" newspaper, it made sense the newspaper took more neutral stances in articles than favorable and opposed. Similarly, the *Wall Street Journal* took more neutral stances than favorable or opposed. Although the *Wall Street Journal* is considered conservative in a fiscal sense, the newspaper has never been seen as an advocate of social conservatism. Therefore, it is not surprising the newspaper did not take opposition against LGBT issues.

This study also found that threats present in opposing viewpoints were more often used by *The New York Times*, which used the equal rights frame in every article and took a supportive stance in 96% of the articles. This could be because the *Times* used threats present in opposing viewpoints to illustrate the gap between support and lack of support for the LGBT movement. The *Times* only used the opposing viewpoint once in order to take a neutral stance on LGBT issues; however, the newspaper was more likely to reference opposing viewpoints in order to question and sometimes mock their validity. The *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* used opposing viewpoints (that did not include threats) in order to create a balanced story rather than question or mock validity.

Finally, this study found that although articles were chosen from a 10-year period, the date of publication was not contingent on how LGBT issues were covered in three newspapers. Although the twentieth century marked a turn toward progress for LGBT rights, throughout the decade, many Americans opposed same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and the repeal of DADT. However, articles that illustrated this opposition weren't apparent in this study. Again, many of the editorials took a neutral stance on LGBT issues rather than a pro stance. It may be beneficial for further research to expand

this content analysis to a 20-year period or perhaps beyond to establish when, or if, editorials took an opposing stance on LGBT issues and when a shift to a neutral stance occurred. This type of analysis may be successful when only looking at conservative newspapers regional newspapers.

Recommendations

When analyzing the results of this study, it becomes clear there are many limitations. For example, this study can be adjusted to include a better sample (both in quality and diversity), an extended timeframe, and an additional methodology (e.g., surveys) for triangulation. The following paragraphs discuss recommendations for further research.

As agenda-setting research suggests, as well as past studies on media coverage and audience effects, media coverage “affects the way the public learns, understands, and thinks about an issue” (Li and Liu 2010, 73). Therefore, media coverage of LGBT issues can play an important role in shaping public opinion and public policy. However, this study found no use of fear appeals in the top three U.S. newspapers over a 10-year period even though 60% of Americans believed same-sex marriage should not be lawful in 2001 (see “LGBT Issues, Fear, and the Media,” Figure 1). Because this study attempted to take fear appeal research and LGBT framing research and mold them together definite and conclusive results were not produced. But, this study may be further adapted to create generalizable results. For instance, it may be beneficial to generate a hypothesis that conservative newspapers tend to use fear appeals in their editorials more than liberal newspapers and test this by a comparison of a well-constructed sample of conservative and liberal newspaper editorials. This same hypothesis can be applied to liberal and conservative 24-hour news network talk shows. For example, in their study, Conway,

Grabe, and Grievies (2007) identified the frequency of fear appeals used during FOX's "No-Spin Zone." They found the show used the most fear appeals when discussing illegal aliens, terrorists, and foreigners (209). Shows like the "No-Spin Zone" can also be analyzed for the use of fear appeals when discussing LGBT issues.

Also, this study could be adapted to include a comparison of regional versus local coverage (without focusing on circulation size), as well as a comparison of traditional media versus advocacy media. For instance, a study could compare LGBT coverage from a newspaper like the *WSJ* and content (press releases, video blogs, social media updates) generated by national traditional marriage advocacy organizations, such as Focus on the Family or National Organization for Marriage, over a defined time period. Also, the same comparison can be done with content generated by LGBT advocacy groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and The Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance.

Finally, it may be beneficial to mass communication research to adapt this study to include a survey of newspaper managing editors and their newsrooms' protocol (or lack thereof) on covering LGBT issues. Then, these survey results can be compared to newspaper coverage to draw any relationships between protocols and coverage. For this adaptation, it would be beneficial to use only news articles rather than editorials.

Despite that no newspaper framed LGBT issues negatively, this study laid the groundwork for future research of the use of fear appeals in coverage of LGBT issues. Further research in this area is needed to better understand the way the media (whether it's traditional, nontraditional, or advocacy) covers the LGBT group. Then, conclusions can be drawn between the media's portrayal of gays and lesbians and the public's perception of them.

APPENDIX

CODEBOOK

UNIT OF ANALYSIS: Each editorial article published by the (1) *New York Times*, (2) *Wall Street Journal*, and (3) *USA Today* that discusses Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual (LGBT) issues (e.g., same-sex marriage, Don't Ask Don't Tell, and gay and lesbian adoption).

NEWSPAPER ID: Fill in the newspaper ID

1 - *New York Times*

2 - *Wall Street Journal*

3 - *USA Today*

CODER ID: Fill in the Coder ID

DATE: Fill in the date the article was published in the following format:
MM/DD/YYYY

TOPIC: Indicate which LGBT issue is discussed in the article. (The articles will use these words specifically.)

1 - same-sex marriage, civil union, or domestic partnership

2 - Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) or gays in the military

3 - Gay and lesbian adoption

4 - More than one (In this case, list topics specifically along with coding the article with a "4". For example, if an article discusses both same-sex marriage and DADT, the coding would be as follows: "4: 2,1")

99 - Other

FRAME: Does the article use the equal rights frame? Morality frame? Other?

Equal rights frame: If the article uses the equal rights frame, it will suggest the LGBT group deserves rights such as marriage, adoption, serving openly in the military, or other. For example, the following sentence is demonstrative of the equal rights frame: "Now that the Supreme Court has held that gays have the right to engage in consensual sexual relations, it is time for the United States to join Britain, Germany, Australia, France, Israel and many other nations in allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly."

1 - Yes

2 - No

Morality Frame: If the article uses the morality frame, it will suggest the LGBT group, or allowing them equal rights, poses a threat to marriage, religion, family values, society, or other. In this context, the term *threat* is operationalized as a message that suggests traditional marriage, family values, society, and so on. may be at risk if the LGBT are given equal rights such as the right to marry and the right to adopt. For example, the following is demonstrative of the morality frame: "Same-sex marriage would destroy marriage as a functioning social entity in America."

- 1 – Yes
- 2- No
- Other
- 99 – Yes
- 2 – No

STANCE: What is the articles stance?

- 1 – Favor LGBT rights: The article takes a definite pro-LGBT rights stance.
- 2 – Oppose LGBT rights: The article takes a definite anti-LGBT rights stance.
- 3 – Neutral: The article does discuss stances but chooses neither.

THREAT: Indicate whether the article suggests LGBT rights, as discussed above, pose a threat to society, marriage, family values, morals, or none. Again, threat is defined as a message that suggests something may be at risk.

Society: Key words to look for – *society, America, United States, us, our people, and so on.*

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - No

Marriage: Key words to look for – *marriage, between a man and a woman, tradition, traditional values, marriage values*

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - No

Family values: Key words to look for - *family values, tradition, a man and a woman, adoption, parenting*

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - No

Morals: Key words to look for - *morals, moral law, religion*

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - No

Other: Uses a threat other than the ones previously listed

- 99 - Yes
- 2 - No

OPPOSING VIEWPOINT: Does the article address the opposing viewpoint? If “yes” the article will discuss it’s own viewpoint as well as a counter viewpoint.

- 1 - Yes
- 2 - No

OPPOSING VIEWPOINT’S USE OF THREAT: Does the articles opposing viewpoint suggest LGBT rights, as discussed above, pose a threat to society, marriage, family values, morals, or other. (Use “key words” from **THREAT** above.)

Society:

- 1 - Yes
- 1 - No

Marriage:

1 - Yes

2 - No

Family Values:

1 - Yes

2 - No

Morals:

1 - Yes

2 - No

Other:

99 - Yes

2 - No

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