"Because We Gays Have Been in the News Rather a Lot Over the Last Year" -

The Intersections of Sexual Orientation, Race, Class and Gender in the

2012 U.S. Presidential Election

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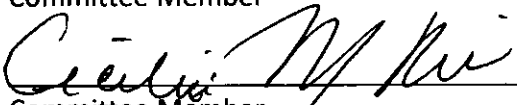**OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**
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**Abstract**

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The multi-tiered content analysis investigated the newspaper representations of LGBT-individuals prior to the 2012 U.S. presidential elections. Specifically, the study analyzed whether four national newspapers considered the intersections of sexual orientation, race, class, gender and religion in their representation of LGBT- issues. Newspapers analyzed were *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Post*. Results suggest that the most discussed LGBT-issue in the presidential elections was same-sex marriage. The study also found that the representation of LGBT-individuals was based on gay and lesbian, upper-class identities, with bisexual and transgender individuals absent in the discourse. Moreover, race and religion of LGBT-individuals remained largely unaddressed. If racial and religious communities were discussed, they were likely to be represented as opposing LGBT-rights. Building a bridge between feminist scholarship and communication research, the study aims to contribute to the emerging engagement with the intersectional framework in media studies.

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**1. Introduction**

Rather than investigating the complex intersections of identity categories, studies on the media representation of cultural identities largely focus on a single identity marker, tending to "distort rather than to explore identity" (Nielsen, 2011, p.6). Investigating the newspaper representation of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) -individuals, the current study takes an intersectional approach both in regards to theoretical framework and methodological approach. Examining four national newspapers in the six months prior to the 2012 presidential elections, the study analyzed whether the discourse considered the intersections of race, class, gender, and religion in the coverage of LGBT-issues and individuals.

The current multi-tiered content analysis is based on the assumption that the media representation of LGBT-identities presumes a White, middle-class, gay, male identity, ignoring the diversity of the community regarding race, class, gender and religion. As the mass media play a central role in our understanding of political events and their consequences (Graber, 2006), the current study investigated the newspaper discussion of LGBT-issues in the six months prior to the 2012 presidential elections. Investigating two traditionally liberal newspapers *The New York Times* and The *Washington Post* and two traditionally conservative daily newspapers the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Post*, the study determined whether the publications considered the framework of race, class, gender and religion in the discourse on LGBT-

issues and individuals. Building a bridge between the intersectional framework emerging

out of feminist thought and communication research, the study seeks to contribute to the

academic engagement with media representation of minorities in general and LGBT-

individuals in particular.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Media Representation of Cultural Identities

Today the media play a critical function in our understanding of the social world, having replaced older institutions like churches as primary sources of information (Talbot, 2007). At the center of media theory is the question of whether media representations reflect or construct social realities. This question is central to the three different approaches to media representation established by Stuart Hall (1997a). According to the reflective approach, language reflects the meaning inherent in an object or idea. Based on the intentional approach, the author of a text uses language to give meaning to an object or idea. The constructionist approach, used for the purpose of this study, contends that neither the object or idea itself nor the author convey the meaning of texts. Rather, meaning is socially constructed based on shared codes and symbols.

A large number of studies demonstrate how the media construct identities based on shared societal meanings. The findings of a study on the media coverage of terrorism in post 9/11 America, for example, suggest that the media discourse was informed by a notion of Orientalism, a concept that distinguishes between the dominant, superior Western world and the inferior Orient (Powell, 2011). Hence, a majority of news stories constructed Islam as a threat in contrast to the U.S. as the "good Christian nation" (Powell, 2011, p.105).

Other studies analyzing the media construction of identities investigated the role of women's magazines in disseminating feminist values in Romania (Chirita, 2012), the role of the media in Evangelical Protestant's understanding of masculinity and religiosity (Hoover & Coats, 2011), and the influence of the changing media environment on youth

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identity construction (Zemmels, 2012). Understanding media representations through a lens of social construction of identities is particularly useful when considering controversial social issues. This framework will also be central for the current study to determine how media reflect and perpetuate societal understandings of LGBT-individuals in the U.S.

## 2.2. Media Representation of LGBT-Issues & Individuals

Today the media play a significant role in our understanding of social issues. In an increasingly diverse context, societal understanding of diversity and the construction of minorities as "others" is highly influenced by media representation. Fuersich (2010) points out that the media does not only construct the "other" in regards to nations, but also construct the "other" in terms of minorities within a nation. As the media tend to function as channels for dominant groups rather than agents of social change, populations like ethnic minorities are marginalized in the media sphere and represented as exotic and abnormal (Fuersich, 2010). One strategy for minorities to challenge misrepresentations and enter the mainstream media discourse is strategic community-organization (Gross, 1991). Especially in the last decade, the LGBT movement gained political momentum and media visibility, making the media a critical tool in the cultural war over LGBT-equality.

In the mid 1990s, a strengthened and professionalized LGBT-movement organized to fight same-sex marriage bans across the nation. In the following years, same-sex couples throughout the United States sought legal recognition for their relationships, with Massachusetts becoming the first state to legalize same-sex marriage in 2004 (Cahill & Tobias, 2007). The subsequent social transformations and legalization

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efforts in other states led to heightened media visibility for the LGBT-community, with several studies analyzing the framing of same-sex relationships and marriage.

A study conducted by Xigen and Xudong (2010) analyzed whether five national newspapers met the journalistic objectives of fairness and balance in their coverage of same-sex marriage in early 2004, a time when San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom's decision to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples led to heightened media attention for the same-sex marriage movement. In their analysis, the scholars found that same-sex marriage was covered equally fair and balanced in all five newspapers, giving both proponents and opponents the opportunity to express their viewpoints.

While Xigen and Xudong find similar results in their sample of national newspapers, a content analysis of *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* conducted by Pan, Meng, and Zhou (2010) concludes that the two newspapers used different media frames in covering the same-sex marriage debate. Based on a sample of news stories published between fall 2002 and 2004, the scholars found that while *The New York Times* emphasized the importance of equality and civil rights, *the Chicago Tribune* embedded the discussion in a framework of traditional values and morality. Further, the study concludes that *The New York Times* – unlike the *Chicago Tribune* – increased the coverage on LGBT-issues after same-sex marriage was legalized in Massachusetts and became an outspoken advocate for LGBT-rights.

Analyzing the portrayal of same-sex parenting, one study conducted by Landau (2009) went beyond the traditional media representation of same-sex relationships. Based on a content analysis of stories and photographs published in national newspapers and magazines, the scholar argues that media visibility for same-sex couples has improved

because they are now represented in their family lives. The representation of same-sex couples' children, however, is still based on a heteronormative framework that presumes the children's heterosexuality and traditional gender identities.

A large number of studies have analyzed the print media representation of LGBT-individuals. With a methodological focus on quantitative content analysis, many analyses investigated the newspaper representation of LGBT-individuals in *The New York Times*. Especially since the issue of marriage equality has entered the political mainstream, studies have shifted focus to the media discourse on same-sex marriage. A lack of diversity is not only apparent in the thematic focus, but also in the analytical approach as studies did not consider the framework of intersecting identities.

## 2.3. The Feminist Discourse on Race, Class, Gender and Beyond

With the reawakening of the liberal feminist movement in the 1970s, women across the nation came together to demand equal opportunities in the political, social, and economic spheres. Soon, however, the feminist movement came under attack for only addressing the concerns of White, middle-class, heterosexual women. Dissatisfied with African-American women's invisibility within the feminist movement, the Combahee River Collective, an organization that had emerged out of the National Black Feminist Organization in 1974, provided essential groundwork for a theoretical framework considering the intersections of identities. Through educational and political activism, the Collective shaped the notion of identity politics, emphasizing that "the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p.29).

In the following decades, the intersectional framework became a key concept for feminist thought to analyze women's oppression. Coined by Kimberle Williams

Crenshaw (1991), the intersectional framework contends that an analysis of women's oppression solely based on gender fails to acknowledge other social identity markers. Rather, the complex intersections of race, class and gender determine women's societal location (Hill-Collins, 2009). With early feminist thought on intersecting identities primarily focusing on the identity markers race, class and gender, more recent approaches utilize this framework for considering sexual orientation and gender identity as categories of analysis (Anzaldua, 1990; Trujillo, 1991; Galupo et al., 2013).

Intersectional theory has inspired several lines of research perspectives aimed at understanding identities through an intersectional lens. Different approaches conceptualize the analysis of intersecting identities. Through the framework of an additive approach, identity markers are conceptualized as separate categories additively impacting identities. The multiplicative or interactionist approach conceptualizes the intersections as unique locations that cannot be fully understood as the sum of the contributing identities. Rather, identity markers are interdependent categories reinforcing one another (Parent et al., 2013).

Methodologically, a majority of research studies analyzing intersecting identities take a qualitative approach in order to fully explore the depth of experience. Parent (et al., 2013), however, points out that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies may be used to analyze intersecting identities through the framework of both the additive as well as the multiplicative approach. Within the paradigm of intersecting identities, Warner and Shields (2013) differentiate between intersectionality as a theory and intersectionality as a framework. While the former aims to make explanations about identity, the latter is a "strategy for studying identity."

## 2.4. The Framework of Intersecting Identities in Communication Studies

In 1988, a special edition of *Women's Studies in Communication* addressed a prevalent issue in communication research. Throughout recent decades, the discipline had become a canon largely representing dominant groups in society, with the voices of those marginalized by race, class, gender and beyond remaining largely unheard (Houston, 2012). While contemporary communication research aims to present the perspectives of non-dominant groups, Griffin and Chavez (2012, p.16) point out that "simplicity continues to pervade communication scholarship more generally by emphasizing only on one 'dimension' of identity and neglecting others […]." The identity label most likely to be discussed in an intersectional context is class, which is often linked to race and gender. Chavez and Griffin further point out that LGBT-issues are represented from a monolithic and male-dominated perspective, with bisexual, transgender and queer identities being largely absent from the discourse prior to 2004.

Analyses on the media representation of LGBT-individuals tend to focus on sexual orientation rather than considering intersections of identity markers. The analysis of one identity marker as category of analysis, however, tends to "distort rather than to explore identity" (Nielsen, 2011, p.6). One study considering racial diversity in the news media representation of same-sex couples in context of the marriage equality discourse was conducted by Moscowitz (2010). A study investigating the media representation of bisexual men in *The Los Angeles Times* between 2001 and 2006 allowed for an intersectional analysis based on sexual orientation and race. In contrast to bisexual African-American men who were portrayed as deceitful and a threat to their

communities, bisexual White men were depicted as engaging in romantic relationships (Pitt, 2006).

In a critique of the language used to discuss the same-sex marriage discourse in *The New York Times*, Hackl, Boyer and Galupo (2012) allow for the analysis of the intersections of sexual orientation and gender identity within the LGBT-community. The study suggests a shift in language in the marriage equality debate from gay marriage to same-sex marriage. Further, results highlight the absence of bisexual and transgender individuals in the same-sex marriage discourse. Utilizing a similar methodological framework, the current study seeks to come to a better understanding of the media portrayal of LGBT-identities in news media by considering the intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, class, gender and religion. Analyzing both sexual orientation and gender identity in an intersectional approach, it is important to note the differences between both as they are largely collapsed under the umbrella term LGBT (Petchesky, 2009), failing to acknowledge the unique needs of identity groups within the community (Fassinger & Arsenau, 2007).

**3. The Current Study**

Selecting and framing social issues for its readership, newspapers have a great impact on our understanding of LGBT-identities. While media attention for LGBT-issues has significantly increased throughout the last decade, LGBT-individuals are still represented in a monolithic way that ignores the diversity of the community. The current study analyzes the discussion of LGBT-issues in the national newspapers *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The New York Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* in the six months prior to the presidential election. The current study predicted that (1) the portrayal of LGBT-individuals in national newspapers was primarily based on a White, gay, male, middle-class identity; (2) if diverse groups regarding religion, race and class were represented, they were portrayed as opposing LGBT-rights.

**3.1. Defense of Method**

For the purpose of this study, different approaches to content analysis are appropriate tools as they focus on communicative texts rather than on the motivations and opinions of those producing media content (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000). Interviews, for example, would be an appropriate tool to analyze journalists' attitudes towards LGBT-issues. A field survey within different media organizations would be appropriate to analyze the gatekeeper function of newspapers as it could determine why certain social issues are picked up for media discussion over others. This study, however, is concerned with media texts that are publicized for public discussion, making a multi-layered content analysis the appropriate tool to analyze the print media discourse on LGBT-issues.

**3.2. Overcoming the Dichotomy of Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis**

While some scholars make a clear distinction between quantitative and qualitative analyses (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000), Krippendorff (2004) points out that "all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers" (p.16). At times, qualitative approaches are referred to as interpretive as they require a close interpretation of a smaller number of texts into new, deconstructive narratives (Krippendorff, 2004).

McCall (2005) points out that the analysis of the intersections of race, class and gender calls for "unique methodological demands" (p.1772) that requires the researcher's sensitivity and self-reflexivity in regards to the establishment of coding categories. Analyzing multi-layered inequalities, McCall introduces *intercategorical complexity,* allowing for the thorough study of interdependent identity markers. Utilizing an intersectional framework in the analysis of media representations of cultural identities does not only call for new approaches in regards to coding categories, but also in terms of methodology. Investigating the media representation of cultural identities, overcoming the dichotomy of quantitative and qualitative content analyses becomes a promising tool in responding to the challenges arising when analyzing intersecting identity markers.

The current study takes a multi-methodological approach as it utilizes both quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis. The quantitative approach was used as a first step to investigate main themes of newspaper articles. Moreover, the quantitative approach was utilized to investigate the extent to which identities were represented through an intersectional framework. The subsequent thematic analysis was

used for an in-depth discussion of media representation of LGBT-individuals in consideration of the intersections of race, class, gender and religion.

### 3.3. Quantitative Content Analysis

A content analysis counts the occurrence of certain words or interprets common patterns in body of texts. Texts can be derived from different sources like newspapers, books or movies. Based on the creation of coding categories, texts are counted and recorded (Babbie, 2010; Reinharz, 1992). Berelson (1952, as cited in Riffe et al., 2005) defines the method "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p.18). Based on the establishment of coding categories, content analysis focuses on the meanings and characteristics of communicative texts rather than the intentions of media producers (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000).

While different approaches to content analysis have been established, a common research protocol is determined. In a first step, the researcher identifies a problem or phenomenon that can be investigated by a content analysis. After deriving hypotheses and research questions, the sample and time frame to be analyzed is selected. In a next step, the researcher drafts a codebook utilized to analyze the content. Especially when collaborating with other researchers, it is central to include clear instructions and coding definitions. Based on a small sample of content, reliability and validity of coding categories is pretested. If working with coding assistants, intercoder-reliability is calculated. In a final step, all data is analyzed based on the instructions and definitions determined in the codebook. The analysis can be done either manually or with the help of a data processing program (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000). The protocol used for the

current study incorporated these basic elements for two main purposes. In a first step, the main theme of each article was analyzed. In a second step, the quantitative approach was used to investigate whether articles considered the framework of race, class, gender and religion.

## 3.4. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a flexible research method that identifies and analyzes common patterns in one or more sets of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In contrast to quantitative content analysis that breaks down data into established coding categories, a thematic approach allows for in-depth discussion. Across disciplines, there is no consensus on the patterns a thematic analysis should follow, requiring the researcher's flexibility and self-reflection. Using thematic analysis, the researcher has to decide whether data are analyzed semantically or latently. In a semantic approach, the explicit meanings of data are analyzed. The latent approach, which tends to operate within the constructionist paradigm, goes beyond the description of data by considering the sociocultural context of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After a quantitative analysis determined the extent to which diversity within the community was discussed in the articles, a thematic approach was used for a more in-depth discussion of results. In line with a constructionist approach to media representations, articles were analyzed for their latent meaning, allowing for a discussion on how sociocultural values may impact the media discourse on LGBT-issues- and individuals.

### 3.5. Sampling Design

The newspapers analyzed for the purpose of this study are *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The New York Post,* and the *Wall Street Journal*. The four daily newspapers selected for the purpose of this study are among the ten largest circulated newspapers in the country (Lulofs, 2013), allowing for broader generalizations about the national newspaper discourse on LGBT-individuals. In their discussion of LGBT-issues, newspapers' ideology may likely impact the discourse. On July 25, 2004, *The New York Times* editor Daniel Okrent emphasized the newspaper's liberal ideology. While the other newspapers may not be as direct in revealing their political stance, media organizations have identified the *Washington Post* as liberal and the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Post* as conservative (Boehlert, 2013; Weinberg, 2010). Analyzing two liberal and two conservative newspapers, the study will analyze whether there were common patterns within newspapers of the same ideology.

As social issues are likely to encounter heightened media attention in times of political change, the current study analyzed how the newspapers discussed LGBT-issues prior to the 2012 presidential elections. Hence, the time frame selected for this study was May 6, 2012 to November 6, 2012. The online archives of *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* and the *Wall Street Journal* were accessed through Towson University's online library, *The New York Post* was accessed through its online archive. Keywords used to search for LGBT-related articles were the labels *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Same-Sex, Homosexual, LGB* and *LGBT.* Table 1 includes the number of articles analyzed for the respective newspapers.

**3.6. Coding Categories**

The assessment of the articles' overall themes was based on the established coding categories *Marriage, Adoption, Health, Military, Bullying* and *Other* (see Coding Sheet – Scheme 1). To determine whether the identity markers race, class, gender and religion were utilized in the articles, the following categories were established: *Religion, Race, Class, Gender, Sexual Orientation m/f* (e.g. women and men showing different attitudes toward LGBT-individuals), *Sexual Orientation heterosexual/LGB* (e.g. heterosexual and LGB-individuals showing different voting behavior), *LGB-inclusive* (usage of sexual orientation label other than gay) and *Transgender inclusive* (see Coding Sheet – Scheme 2).

While often used interchangeably, it is important to note the difference between the categories *LGB-inclusive* and *LGBT-inclusive*. Including Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual, the former category only includes sexual orientation labels. The category LGBT additionally includes the gender identity label transgender. By using sexual orientation labels in conjunction with the gender identity label, the experiences of certain identity groups are at danger of being rendered invisible (Fassinger & Arsenau, 2007). Thus, the current study also investigates whether newspapers make a clear distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity.

## 3.7. Inter-Coder Reliability

In order to ensure reliability of data, two research coders independently analyzed the newspaper articles. Each data set consisted of articles published within one month per newspaper. The first data set for each newspaper was used to pretest coding categories and to determine inconsistencies across research coders. After the research coders discussed possible questions and inconsistencies, each data set was independently analyzed and results were discussed in bi-monthly meetings. Krippendorff (2004) recommends a reliability coefficient of 0.8 to ensure reliability of results; inter-coder reliability for the current study was 0.85.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Marriage Equality Dominates the Discourse in the 2012 Presidential Elections

Reflecting the larger political visibility, LGBT-issues were prominent in the newspaper's discourse on the presidential elections, with 329 articles discussing LGBT-related issues. Specifically, 128 articles in *The New York Times*, 144 articles in *The Washington Post*, 88 articles in the *Wall Street Journal* and 29 articles in the *New York Post* discussed LGBT-issues prior to the presidential elections (see Table 1).

Results further indicate that the larger societal prevalence of the marriage equality discussion is reflected in the print media discourse, with a majority of coded themes discussing same-sex marriage (58.5%). As demonstrated in Table 2, this pattern holds across all four newspapers. Other yet less prominent issues discussed in the four newspapers were Military (10.1%) and Bullying/Hate-Crime Legislation (3.7%).

### 4.2. The Use and Frequency of Identity Categories Varied Across Newspapers

The framework of race, class, gender and religion was utilized about half the time across three of the newspapers, while the *Wall Street Journal* allowed for an intersectional approach in 39 articles (44.31%). Seventy articles in *The New York Times* (54.69%), 77 articles in the *Washington Post* (53.74%), and 17 articles in the *New York Post* (58.62%) allowed for an analysis based on race, class, gender and religion.

Table 3 illustrates that the use and frequency of specific identity markers varied across newspapers. While gender was rarely used, race and religion were more frequently discussed. Overall, religion was the most frequently used identity marker in the *New York Post's* coverage, with more than half of the articles using the identity marker. As the sample size of the *New York Post* is comparably small, however, the results'

generalizations can only be considered limited. Results further indicate that articles published in the *Washington Post* were most likely to be bi-inclusive (25.69%) as compared to the *Wall Street Journal* with the lowest level in bi-inclusivity (15.91%). The results also suggest that LGB-inclusivity does not entail Transgender-inclusivity. Again, the *Washington Post* was most likely to be characterized by Transgender-inclusivity while none of the *New York Post's* articles referred to transgender individuals or issues.

**4.3. LGBT-Individuals in the 2012 Presidential Elections: Gay, White and Upper-Class**

In the print media discourse of the 2012 presidential elections, LGBT-individuals were represented in a largely monolithic way. Especially in the more conservative newspapers, identities tended to be reduced to the sexual orientation label gay. While *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were more likely to expand the discourse to include lesbian identities, both bisexual and transgender individuals were largely marginalized in the discussion of LGBT-issues. If the sexual orientation label bisexual and the gender identity label transgender were used, they were primarily used under the umbrella term LGBT.

Consistent with prior communication research (Griffin & Chavez, 2012), the identity label most likely to be discussed in conjunction with sexual orientation was class. In contrast to the hypothesis predicting a focus on middle-class individuals, however, LGBT-identities were largely represented as upper-class people whose financial contributions made them key players in the presidential elections. In this context, LGBT-individuals were most likely to be discussed in their support for the Obama campaign.

This pattern was especially consistent across the *Washington Post* and *The New York*. On May, 10, for example, the *Washington Post* discussed the importance of gay financial donors to President Obama's reelection campaign. According to the newspaper, "a review of Obama's top bundlers, those fundraisers who have brought in $500,000 or more for the campaign, shows that about one in six publicly identify themselves as gay" (Eggen, 2012). This pattern was consistent throughout the next months. The *Washington Post* further pointed out that President Obama's endorsement of same-sex marriage was "doing wonders for his campaign's pocketbook" (Eggen, 2012). On May 7, 2012, *The New York Times* suggested that the Democratic Party had a "formidable array of wealthy gay donors" (Barbaro, 2012).

While the identity marker class was less likely to be used in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Post*, LGBT-individuals again were largely represented as wealthy campaign supporters. On May 15, for example, the *New York Post* reported on President Obama's attendance of a "star-studded fund-raiser hosted by singer Ricky Martin and attended by other prominent gay and lesbian donors" (Earle, 2012).

The concept of class was also used beyond the discussion of LGBT-identities to inform the larger context of LGBT-issues. A prominent event across all four newspapers was a fundraiser held by Hollywood actor George Clooney. In all four newspapers, President Obama's endorsement of same-sex marriage was discussed as beneficial in fundraising efforts among the Hollywood elite. Lower class individuals, who were rarely discussed across newspapers, were represented in stark contrast to upper-class individuals. Articles published both in the *Washington Post* (2012) and *The New York*

*Times* (2012), for example, emphasized lower "working class voters" opposition to same-sex marriage.

**4.4. Racial and Religious Communities as Opposing Voices**

While the racial identity and religious affiliation of LGBT-individuals remained largely unaddressed, the identity markers were frequently used across all sources to make sense of communities' opposition to LGBT-rights. In the context of race, an Opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out that Obama's endorsement of same-sex marriage is "almost certain to cut into his support among Hispanics and even blacks" (Taranto, 2012). A similar argument was used in the *New York Post* claiming that an African-American minister group "blasted President Obama over his support of gay marriage" (Shields, 2012).

In the framework of race, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were more likely than the conservative newspapers to use the identity marker to demonstrate support of LGBT-rights. On May 20, for example, *The New York Times* reported on the N.A.A.C.P.'s (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) historic decision to endorse same sex marriage (Barbraro, 2012).

In contrast to the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Post*, the more liberal newspapers were also more likely to utilize the race discourse to demonstrate similarities between the civil rights movement and the LGBT-movement. On May 12, the *Washington Post* discussed the similarities between the historic struggles for interracial marriage to the contemporary same-sex marriage movement. In the article, the Defense of Marriage Act was considered the "ruling's modern-day equivalent" (Marcus, 2012). On May 11, *The New York Times* pointed out that the growing support for same-sex marriage

is "a far more rapid change in public attitudes than on past social issues like interracial marriage" (Baker, 2012)

The religious groups most likely to be presented as opposing LGBT-rights in general and same-sex marriage specifically were Evangelical communities. In the aftermath of Obama's endorsement of same-sex marriage, for instance, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the President "burned any remaining bridge to them […]" (Henninger, 2012). Frequently, the newspapers also discussed religious communities' likely support of Mitt Romney as the result of his opposition to LGBT-rights. One article published in *The New York Times*, for example, argued that President Obama's support of same-sex marriage could likely present an opportunity for the Republican Party to win over Democratic voters (Goodstein, 2012).

**4.5. LGBT-Issues Through the Framework of the Intersections of Race & Religion**

It is clear that race and religion were at times used to conceptualize opposition to LGBT-rights. Especially in the more conservative newspapers, the intersections of race and religion were frequently used to frame communities' opposition to LGBT-equality. On October 28, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on African-American clergies in Florida encouraging their constituencies to vote early. According to the article, "some black clergy members share the unhappiness over Mr. Obama's support for same-sex marriage" (Nichols, 2012). On November 1, the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out that the Romney campaign was reaching out to Evangelical Latino voters who "are upset with the president for endorsing same-sex marriage."

Although predominantly used to demonstrate opposition to LGBT-rights, the use of race and religion in an intersectional context varied across newspapers. In some

instances, the identity markers were used in the liberal newspapers to demonstrate communities' support of LGBT-rights. Interestingly, this was the case in a *New York Times* article discussing African-American Mormon's views on President Obama's endorsement of same-sex marriage. According to the article, the Mormon community in Salt Lake City "made a distinction between their own private religious beliefs and what they think is right for secular society" (Saulny, 2012).

## 5. Discussion

In the 2012 presidential elections, the discussion of LGBT-identities was largely limited to the representation of gay men and lesbian women, with bisexual and transgender individuals largely absent in the discourse. It is likely that the media marginalization of both communities feeds into societal invisibility as "non-representation maintains the powerless status of groups that do not possess significant or material or political power bases" (Gross, 1991, p. 21).

In a similar vein, the media discussion of LGBT-issues was largely centered on same-sex marriage, feeding into the notion of homonormativity, a framework contending that gay and lesbian individuals assimilate into society by adopting traditionally heterosexual ideals like marriage. Gaining access to traditionally heterosexual privileges, gay and lesbian individuals become dominant groups within the fragmented LGBT-community (Duggan, 2003). In addition to the concentration on dominant identities within the community, this thematic trend may be another reason for the exclusion of bisexual and transgender individuals. Research has shown that bisexual as well as transgender individuals are not considered relevant to that debate (Breno & Galupo, 2007; Hackl et al., 2012).

While race and religion of represented LGBT-identities remained largely invisible, both identity markers were used in the larger framework of LGBT-issues to make sense of opposed communities. Across all sources, African-American individuals were represented as fundamentally opposed to same-sex marriage. The more liberal newspapers the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* were more likely to leave room for the discussion of supportive racial and religious communities. In regards to race

and religion, there was also a difference between liberal and conservative newspapers whereas the former were more likely to draw similarities between the civil rights and the LGBT-movement.

The media representation of LGBT-individuals reflects larger patriarchal and heteronormative societal structures. This finding is not surprising as it is consistent with prior research on the media representation of other minority groups. An analysis of the media representations of African-American women through a feminist lens, for example, demonstrates how larger societal patriarchal and racist structures informed the discourse (Carpenter, 2012). In this context, Carpenter also comes to the conclusion that the media representations had a strong impact on the larger political discourse on African-American women's drug use. While the current study makes no predictions on how the media representations of LGBT-individuals impact the larger political discourse, it demonstrates how the media discourse perpetuates normative and stereotyped identities.

## 5.1. LGBT-Individuals in the 2012 Presidential Elections: A Discourse of the Privileged

The media representation of LGBT-identities in the 2012 presidential elections was primarily a monolithic discourse of the privileged. LGBT-identities who were given the space to voice their opinion were mostly upper-class men considered key players in the Obama campaign. Since the mass media play a central role in our understanding of the world and interpretation of political events (Graber, 2006), the representation of dominant groups is problematic as it creates and perpetuates "conditions for hegemony" (Lacey, 1998, p.143) Through a constructionist lens of media representations, stereotypical representations are expressions of power relations based on shared symbols

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and codes (Hall, 1997b; Lacey, 1998). In regards to the current study on media representation of LGBT-identities in the 2012 presidential elections, this assumption poses several critical issues. The focus on upper-class gay individuals, for example, may likely represent a picture of a privileged community that no longer needs political attention in regards to minority rights.

## 5.2. Bisexual and Transgender Individuals: Communities Without Political Needs?

In regards to sexual orientation and gender identity, all sources demonstrated a concerning lack of diversity. Mainly centered on the experiences of gay men and lesbian women, bisexual and transgender individuals remained largely absent in the discourse. If represented, bisexual and transgender individuals were limited to be mentioned under the umbrella term LGBT. The American Psychological Association (APA) (1991) considers the lack of bisexuality in language problematic as this omission feeds into stereotypes of the non-existence of bisexuality. Of equal concern is the limited discussion of the needs of the transgender community. In the context of language, sociolinguists argue that the use of simplistic sexual identity labels do not only create hierarchies most likely impacting societal understanding of identities, but also render invisible communities' history and struggles (Petechsky, 2009).

Primarily discussed under the umbrella term LGBT, the newspapers also collapse any differences between sexual orientation and gender identity (Petechsky, 2009). This trend is concerning in so far as the unique needs of the transgender community remain unaddressed. Critical issues like adequate healthcare and anti-discriminatory protections in housing and the workplace, for instance, are swept under the rug to make room for the discussion on the cultural war over same-sex marriage. Moreover, the term fails to

acknowledge the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity. Pansexual and queer identities, for example, remain largely invisible under the umbrella term (Parent et. al, 2013). Hence, further research from an intersectional perspective is needed to fully explore diversity within the community.

**5.3. Towards a More Intersectional Approach: Implications for Future Research**

The current study considers the intersections of race, class, gender and religion in the newspaper representation of LGBT-individuals. Building a bridge between communication research and feminist theory, results aim to come to a deeper understanding of identity representations. Analyzing the representation of LGBT-identities during the presidential elections poses both possibilities and limitations for the study's results. On the one hand, times of political change likely may lead to increased media attention for controversial issues, allowing for comparably richer data sets. On the other hand, the analysis of LGBT-issues in different time periods would allow for the investigation of changes in media coverage.

If resources allow for a broader analysis, future research could investigate the representation of LGBT-identities across different time frames. Moreover, audience analyses could investigate whether the newspaper discourse affects readers' understanding of LGBT-identities. Given the growing significance of new media forms like blogs, the current study's results could also be compared to the media representation in these media channels. It could also be investigated whether social media targeting LGBT-audiences are more likely to represent issues outside the mainstream of the same-sex marriage debate.

For the field of communication research in general, the study has both theoretical

and methodological implications. Regarding theoretical concepts, communication

research needs to break out of the canon that has informed the discipline during the last

decades and start a discourse "around power, identities and subjectivities that have been

erased, ignored, and under- and inappropriately theorized" (Griffin & Chavez, 2012, p.2).

Methodologically, communication research needs to move beyond a simplistic approach

to reach a better understanding of the complexity of intersecting identities. Only through

a creative and mixed-methods approach will communication research be able to

investigate the intersections of race, class, gender as well as other identity markers in

more detail (McCall, 2005). Both in regards to theoretical framework and methodological

approach, different disciplines need to be integrated to inform the understanding of media

representations. Disciplines like sociolinguistics and psychology, for example, provide

rich insights into how media representation and language may impact societal

understanding of identities.

## 5.4. The Future Discourse on LGBT-Identities

On November 6, 2012, Barack Obama was reelected as President of the United

States of America. Given the social significance of same-sex marriage and other issues,

LGBT-rights are likely to remain on both the political and the media agenda. Again,

LGBT-identities will be utilized in the media discourse to make sense of the larger

cultural phenomenon of LGBT-issues. Likely, LGBT-individuals continue to be

represented in monolithic way, ignoring the diversity of the community regarding race,

class and gender. In a similar vein, media representations are likely to continue to

marginalize those not identifying with a gay or lesbian orientation and fail to differentiate

between sexual orientation and gender identity. Again, bisexual and transgender

individuals will remain largely absent in the discourse, with their unique needs at the backburner of mainstream issues like same-sex marriage.

Acknowledging the importance of the intersectional framework for different academic disciplines, more research in Communication Studies and beyond needs to highlight the lack of diversity in media representation of minorities in general and LGBT-individuals in particular. The current study emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinarity and intersectionality in regards to theoretical framework as well as methodology in the analysis of media representations. By drawing attention to (mis-) representations of identities, the discipline can contribute to the crucial discourse on why more comprehensive representations may lead to better societal understanding of minorities.

Undoubtedly, journalists and other media professionals will play a large role in the media representations of minority identities. Critical in the work of media professionals are media style guides that provide standards on news reporting ranging from grammatical principles to language guidelines on sensitive topics. The most recent edition of GLAAD's (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 2010) Media Reference Guide, for example, makes recommendations for journalists and other media professionals on how to ensure an inclusive media discourse on LGBT-issues. The guide ranges from a glossary of inclusive terms to defamatory language that should be avoided in media language. Further, GLAAD's reference guide points out that the Associated Press as well as the style manuals of *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* provide limited editorial guidance in regards to LGBT-language. To ensure fair and inclusive media rhetoric in the context of LGBT-issues and individuals, style manuals

need to provide stricter and more detailed guidelines on journalistic language.

A more comprehensive representation of LGBT-individuals, however, will also depend on actors outside the media environment. Political figures, for example, will decide whether issues like adequate healthcare services for transgender individuals will finally be put on the political agenda. Most importantly, however, it will depend on the work of the LGBT-community to challenge misrepresentation in the political as well as media sphere. Only by starting a more inclusive discourse will the community prompt the media to provide more inclusive representations, finally bringing the needs of bisexual and transgender individuals into the mainstream.

# 6. Appendices

## Appendix A – Coding Sheets

Month:_____
Newspaper:_____

Coding Sheet – Scheme 1

|         | Marriage | Adoption | Health | Military | Bullying | Other |
|---------|----------|----------|--------|----------|----------|-------|
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |
| Article |          |          |        |          |          |       |

Coding Sheet – Scheme 2

| | Religion | Race | Class | Gender | Sexual Orientation, m/f | Sexual Orientation, heterosexual/same-sex | LGBT-inclusive | Transgender inclusive |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Article | | | | | | | | |
| Article | | | | | | | | |
| Article | | | | | | | | |
| Article | | | | | | | | |
| Article | | | | | | | | |
| Article | | | | | | | | |
| Article | | | | | | | | |

Religion – Article discusses different religious affiliations of LGBT-individuals or the opposition to LGBT-rights by a religious community.

Race – Article discusses racial diversity within the LGBT-community or racial differences in attitudes towards LGBT-issues.

Class – Article discusses class differences within the LGBT-community or class differences in attitudes toward LGBT-issues.

Gender – Article discusses differences in male/female attitudes toward LGBT-issues.

Sexual orientation f/m – Article discusses differences in attitudes of heterosexual and LGB-individuals.

Sexual orientation heterosexual – same-sex – Article discusses differences in attitudes of heterosexual and LGB-individuals.

LGB-inclusive – Article uses at least one sexual orientation label other than gay.

Transgender-inclusive – Article uses the gender identity label transgender

**Appendix B - Tables**

Table 1

*Number of articles discussing LGBT-Issues during the 2012 presidential elections per newspaper title*

|  | New York Times | Washington Post | Wall Street Journal | New York Post |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Articles | 128 | 144 | 88 | 29 |
| Number of Articles Inclusive of Race, Class and Gender | 70 (54.69%) | 77 (53.47%) | 39 (44.31%) | 17 (58.62%) |

Table 2

*Same-sex marriage as dominant theme in the 2012 presidential elections in all four newspapers*

| | New York Times (n=176) | Washington Post ( n =214) | Wall Street Journal ( n =111) | New York Post ( n =36) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Marriage | 56.25 | 54.21 | 62.16 | 77.78 |
| Adoption | 3.98 | 3.27 | 2.70 | - |
| Health | 0.57 | 1.87 | 1.80 | - |
| Military | 9.09 | 13.08 | 6.31 | 8.33 |
| Bullying/Hate-Crimes | 2.84 | 5.61 | 0.90 | 5.56 |
| Other | 27.27 | 21.96 | 26.13 | 8.33 |

*Note. Values according to percentages. Because several LGBT-related could be discussed in one article, percentages can exceed 100%.*

Table 3

*The usage and frequency of identity categories varied across newspapers*

|  | New York Times (*n* =128) | Washington Post (*n* =144) | Wall Street Journal (*n* =88) | New York Post (*n* =29) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Race | 15.63 | 18.75 | 17.05 | 35.29 |
| Class | 13.28 | 12.5 | 5.68 | 41.18 |
| Gender | 3.31 | 2.78 | - | - |
| Religion | 32.02 | 27.78 | 19.32 | 58.23 |
| Sexual Orientation Male/Female | - | 0.69 | 1.14 | - |
| Sexual Orientation Heterosexual/LGB | 0.78 | 6.25 | 1.14 | 11.76 |
| LGB-inclusive | 23.44 | 25.69 | 15.91 | 23.53 |
| Transgender-inclusive | 3.31 | 11.81 | 5.68 | - |

*Note. Values according to percentages. Because articles could use more than one identity category or none at all, percentages may not add up to 100%.*

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## Education

**Towson University**                                                                           Towson, Maryland
**Women's & Gender Studies  - Master's Program**                    *August 2011 – May 2013*
*Women, Leadership & Public Policy*

**University of Salzburg**                                                                      Salzburg, Austria
**Communication Studies - Master's Program**         *October 2008 – November 2010*

**San Francisco State University**                                        San Francisco, California
*Independent Research*                                                    *August 2009 – October 2009*

**Bowling Green State University**                                              Bowling Green, Ohio
**Communication Studies - Non-Degree Seeking Graduate Exchange Student**    *August 2007 - May 2008*

**University of Salzburg**                                                                      Salzburg, Austria
**Communication Studies – Bachelor's Program**                   *October 2004 - July 2007*

## Research & Work Experience

**Contributor**
**ABC-CLIO**                                                                               *January 2013 – Current*
Proud Heritage: People, Issues, and Documents of the LGBT Experience, Encyclopedia
- Research and write 3,500-4,000 words entry on Massachusetts' LGBT history
- Research and write 1,000-3,000 words entry on Mormon Anti-Same-Sex Marriage Efforts in California

**Lab Member**                                                                             Towson, Maryland
**Towson University**                                                             *February 2012 – Current*
Masculinity, Femininity, and the Gendered Presentation of Egg and Sperm Donors
- Gender & Sexual Identity Lab, Dr. M. Paz Galupo
- Research egg and donor websites
- Code items based on Femininity-Masculinity measures

**Graduate Assistant**                                                                 Towson, Maryland
**Towson University – Office of Diversity & Equal Opportunity**    *January 2012 – Current*
- Research issues and policies in regards to diversity and multiculturalism
- Prepare SpeakUp! sessions on campus, a training educating about everyday bigotry
- Independently assemble reports of Hate/Bias incidents on campusAssist in processing Faculty searches in accordance with Towson University's affirmative action goals

**Marketing Assistant** <span style="float:right">Vienna, Austria</span>
**Gfk Austria** <span style="float:right">*February 2011 – July 2011*</span>
- Organized research proposals and analyses for Central and Eastern European research panels
- Translated (German-English) research proposals and analyses
- Assistance of presentation and events organization

**Communications & Administration Intern** <span style="float:right">San Francisco, California</span>
**Equality California** <span style="float:right">*February 2010 – May 2010*</span>
- Independently synthesized and analyzed data of Let California Ring's 2010 Marriage Messaging survey
- Assisted in planning and executing endorsement of politicians for EQCA's Political Action Committee
- Assisted with the production of an organizational video on Equality California's history

**Communications Intern** <span style="float:right">Berlin, Germany</span>
**Institute for Cultural Diplomacy** <span style="float:right">*July 2008 – September 2008*</span>
- Contacted and maintained relationships with international academics and scholars
- Maintained Cultural Diplomacy News homepage using php content management system
- Assisted Cultural Diplomacy Academy participants

## Teaching Experience

**Teaching Assistant** <span style="float:right">Towson, Maryland</span>
**Towson University, Department of Psychology** <span style="float:right">*May – June 2012*</span>
*PSYCH 447/557: Sex Differences – Psychological Perspectives*
- Created and graded multiple choice exams
- Graded daily journal writing assignments and extra credit assignments
- Facilitated small group discussions and observed group dynamics
- Provided administrative assistance and uploaded course material on Blackboard

**Teaching Assistant** <span style="float:right">Salzburg Austria</span>
**University of Salzburg, Department of Communication Studies** <span style="float:right">*October 2009 – January 2010*</span>
*641.051: Introducing Cultural Studies*
- Assisted group of cross-cultural students prepare in-class presentations and assignments
- Acted as a facilitator of in-class presentations and discussions
- Provided administrative assistance and uploaded course material on Blackboard

## Publications

**Andrea M. Hackl**, C. Reyn Boyer, & M. Paz Galupo (in press). From "Gay Marriage Controversy" (2004) to

"Endorsement of Same-Sex Marriage" (2012): Framing Bisexuality in the Marriage Equality Discourse. *Sexuality & Culture.*

## Conference & Poster Presentations

**Andrea M. Hackl.** Is it Getting Better? New Media as Sites of LGBT Activism. Gender Matters Conference, Chicago, IL, April 2013.

**Andrea M. Hackl**, Liz Cronin, & M. Paz Galupo. "At Least Gays and Lesbians Weren't Being Cast in A Negative Light" LGBT-Issues

  in the 2012 Presidential Elections. Student Research & Scholarship Expo, Towson University, Towson, MD. April 2013.

**Andrea M. Hackl,** C. Reyn Boyer & M. Paz Galupo. Bringing Us All Together?: Implications for Changing Language in the

Print Media Discourse of Same-Sex Marriage From 2004-2012. Transcending Boundaries Conference, Springfield, MA, October 2012.

**Andrea M. Hackl**. Social Media Changing the World: How the New Media Advocates LGBT Rights. Radically Gay. The Life

& Visionary Legacy of Harry Hay Conference, New York City, NY, September 2012.

**Andrea M. Hackl** & M. Paz Galupo. The Invisibility of Bisexuality in the Same Sex Marriage Print Media     Discourse. Student

Research & Scholarship Expo, Towson University, Towson, MD, April 2012.

Cherish Ardinger, Katherine R. Valliere, **Andrea M. Hackl**, C. Reyn Boyer, & M. Paz Galupo. Beauty and Passivity, now Let's Talk

Viability: Femininity and Gender Presentation of Egg Donors. Student Research & Scholarship Expo, Towson University, Towson,

MD, April 2012.

C. Reyn Boyer, **Andrea M. Hackl**, Katherine R. Valliere, Cherish Ardinger & M. Paz Galupo. Athletic Inclination and Mechanical

Ability, Now Let's Talk Fertility: Masculinity and Gender Presentation of Sperm Donors. Student Research & Scholarship Expo,

Towson University, Towson, MD. April 2012.

Katherine R. Valliere, C. Reyn Boyer, Cherish Ardinger, **Andrea M. Hackl**, & M. Paz Galupo. Masculinity, Femininity, and the

Gendered Presentation of Egg and Sperm Donors. Maryland Psychological Association for Graduate Students, Colombia, MD,

April 2012.

## Awards, Grants & Scholarships

**Graduate Student Travel Grant**
*Awarded by Towson University, Women's & Gender Studies Department*                                   *April 2013*

**Graduate Student Travel Grant**
*Awarded by Towson University, Institute for Teaching & Research on Women*                           *October 2012*

**Graduate Student Travel Grant**
*Awarded by Towson University, Women's & Gender Studies Department*                                 *October 2012*

**Graduate Student Travel Grant**
*Awarded by Towson University, Graduate Student Association*                                        *September 2012*

**Scholarship for Short-Term Thesis Research Abroad**
*Awarded by the University of Salzburg*                                           *August 2009 – October 2009*

**Certificate for Outstanding Performance**
*Awarded by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy*                                               *September 2008*

**Joint Study Scholarship**
*Awarded by the University of Salzburg*                                              *August 2007 – May 2008*