

COVERAGE OF THE GAY GAMES FROM 1980-2012 IN U.S. NEWSPAPERS: AN ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE FRAMING

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Many members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community have viewed the Gay Games as an opportunity to challenge dominant ideologies concerning sexuality and sport participation. Members of the mass media, however, play a potentially important role in how the event is perceived by the general public. In conjunction with the growth of LGBT social movements, media coverage of LGBT individuals and issues has increased substantially in recent decades, and sport is no exception (Li & Liu, 2010). However, the ways in which an event such as the Gay Games might impact public perceptions can depend upon how the event and its participants are portrayed in mass media coverage (Shah, Kwak, Schmierbach, & Zubric, 2004).

A substantial body of mass media research has utilized the concept of framing, demonstrating that mass media play an important role in influencing people's beliefs and values by presenting stories in a particular way (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). Specifically, mass media frames are "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Framing theory involves a focus on the packages that members of the mass media use to characterize a particular issue. These packages encompass arguments, information, symbols, metaphors, and images (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). Through framing strategies, media members often seek to turn complex issues into topics that are more easily intelligible for a mass audience. In making decisions about what elements of a story to highlight or omit, mass media entities have important power to influence how audience members interpret and react to events and issues (Entman, 2007; Iyengar, 1991; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009; de Vreese, 2005). Ultimately, by selecting how to frame the stories that are presented to the public, mass media may play a key role in structuring and defining reality as well as the interpretation and evaluation of issues and events (de Vreese, 2005; Kang, Gearhart, & Bae, 2010; Papacharissi & Fatima Oliveira, 2008).

The primary purpose of the current study was to examine how the Gay Games have been framed in newspaper coverage. Using the LexisNexis Academic database, the investigators collected articles about the Gay Games published between August 28, 1980 and August 6, 2012 in U.S. newspapers. These dates were selected because they encompassed two years prior to the first Gay Games (held August 28-September 2, 1982) and two years after the most recent Gay Games (held July 31-August 6, 2010). After limiting the LexisNexis search utility parameters to U.S. newspapers, the search term "Gay Games" retrieved a total of 646 articles published in the United States covering the eight Gay Games events held during the 32-year period of 1980 to 2012. The current study examined three aspects of framing: (1) the types of issues highlighted, (2) the sources of information cited, and (3) the manner in which either episodic or thematic narratives were employed.

The results of the current study revealed that issues of identity and optimism were most commonly highlighted, LGBT participants were most frequently cited as sources of information, and thematic framing was most commonly employed in newspaper coverage of the Gay Games. While the current analysis of issues, sources, and episodic/thematic framing in newspaper articles was an empirical approach to examining coverage of the Gay Games, the findings of this study are not broadly generalizable due to its limitations. Thus, there is significant room for such an approach to be expanded in the field of sport management, and several possibilities for future research were also discussed.

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