



Online Media Framing of LGBT Issues in Guyana: January 2007 – July 2014

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Abbreviations

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|---------|---|
| CEDAW: | United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women |
| ERT: | Equal Rights Trust |
| GuyBow: | Guyana Rainbow Foundation |
| SOGI: | Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity |
| SASOD: | Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination - Guyana |
| LGBT: | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender |
| IGLHRC: | The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission |

Abstract

This research investigates whether or not online media coverage of LGBT issues is biased against LGBT people in Guyana. Using the non-random purposive sampling technique and the content analysis research method, it also examines the dominant sources of media frames in the context of negative, positive, and neutral framing.

Appreciation

Thank you Dr. Paloma Mohamed and Ms. Carolyn Walcott of the University of Guyana; Joel Simpson, and the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination – Guyana, and others for sharing your knowledge, expertise, and invaluable support in ensuring the completion of this research – and for reminding me that life is a learning process that requires renewed commitment and dedication to excellence.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

This statement is according to article one of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in which Guyana is a signatory since 1968 and has ratified in 1977.

Considering this statement and the current socio-political dialogue that are fueling the gay rights movement around the world, the researcher wonders: “What is Guyana’s position and ideology on the existence of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people and how they are portrayed in the media?” Additionally, in the wake of widespread violence and discrimination against LGBT people – what is the role of the media and other stakeholders in stemming this tide? (Carrico, 2012; SASOD, GuyBow, and IGLHRC, 2012; SASOD - Guyana: Information for Refugee Advocates, 2007; Kellner, 2003, p. 336; Plummer, 1998, p. 242).

According to section 351 – 353 of the Criminal Law (Offences) Act of Guyana, same-sex intimacy remains illegal in this country and is punishable by up to life imprisonment. As such, many LGBT people seek human rights organisations, as well as friends and associates for advocacy and recourse against injustices. The latter includes social and economic inequalities; unsolved crimes involving LGBT people; discrimination in healthcare and employment; unemployment and underemployment; verbal and sexual harassment; lack of redress from the judicial system; lack of a safe and secure environment; and physical violence (SASOD, GuyBow, and IGLHRC, 2012).

Aims and Objections

The main aim of this research is to remind media practitioners that LGBT people have rights as human beings, and therefore LGBT rights are human rights, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) issues must be treated with utmost sensitivity and impartiality. The objectives of the research are therefore as follows:

- i. Investigate whether or not “media reports” are biased against LGBT people in Guyana.
- ii. Identify sponsors/sources of frames – and the percentage of negative, positive, and neutral framing in the media’s coverage of LGBT issues.
- iii. Create a tool that can be used to identify or check for media bias.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- i. Is media reporting of homosexuality and transgenderism biased against LGBT people in Guyana?
- ii. What are the sources of biased reporting on LGBT people in Guyana?

Hypothesis

It is the contention of this research that media reporting of homosexuality and transgenderism is often biased against LGBT people in Guyana – and the sources are people’s moral and religious beliefs. In addition, this latent and manifest bias may negatively shape society’s perception of LGBT people.

Background

Based on previous research, it is agreed that traditionally, the media control what people say and what they do (Katz, 1987; Gaitlin, 1980; Gaitlin and Roefs, 2004 (p.216); Kellner, 1990; Tuchman, 1978; Castells, 2008; Scheufele, 1999; Tannen, 1993; Durant and Goodwin, 1992; Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Entman, 1993; Lee, 2004; Liebler, Schwarts and Harper, 2009; Riggs, 2006; Goffman, 1974, 1981; Carrico, 2012; CADRES, 2013).

From a sociological and human rights perspective, this study is significant because of the many documented cases of persecution against the LGBT community in Guyana, and the absence of social and legal justice prevailing in these cases (SASOD, GuyBow, and IGLHRC, 2012; CEDAW, 2013, p.5; Equal Rights Trust: Activity Report, May 2010 – May 2011, p. 31; SASOD - Guyana: Information for Refugee Advocates, 2007; CADRES, 2013, p. 25-36).

Resulting from this is burgeoning injustice against LGBT people and the need for mass media campaigns against homophobia and transphobia – and toward a re-education of society that promotes social justice, legal justice, and social order (SASOD, GuyBow, and IGLHRC, 2012, p. 9-12; Plummer, 1998, p.242; Hoffman, 1968).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A local study (CADRES, 2013) was conducted on people's "Attitudes Toward Homosexuals in Guyana" – however, omitting significant analysis on the way these attitudes and perceptions may be shaped by the media and other drivers. To date, this is the most significant and comparative study that has been conducted on people's perceptions of homosexuals in Guyana – and it discusses the underlying issues of this research, which are people's understanding of human rights; the meaning, origin, and nature of homosexuality; the perception of the laws governing

homosexuality; the meaning and causes of discrimination and homophobia, and how LGBT people should be treated by the State, the general public, etc.¹

CADRES (2013) has also assessed the findings and analyses of the “Collateral Damage: The Social Impact of Laws Affecting LGBT People in Guyana” report (Carrico, 2012), which, according to Carrico, “focused on the social effects of laws that criminalise lesbian, gay and bisexual orientations and transgender identities in Guyana.”² Other factors that contribute to people’s perception of LGBT people – as identified in this and other studies – are religion and conservatism; politics; social and cultural anthropology, etc.

Another study, the “Journal of Communication: Queer Tales of Morality” (Liebler, Schwartz, and Harper, 2009) provided useful information on the nature of media framing of LGBT issues, the nexus between Heteronormativity and Homosexuality, and the Media’s influence of social norms.³

Colvin Roddrick’s (2006) “Understanding Policy Adoption and Gay Rights: The role of the media and other factors. *The Innovation Journal*”⁴ was also considered as a significant source in understanding how the media and other factors can influence the adoption of Gay Rights Policies in the United States – which may prove to be groundbreaking, if this study were duplicated in Guyana. Other studies that were consulted for analysis in this review were, the “Mass Communication and Society Journals: Lying to Tell the Truth: Journalists and Social Context of Deception” (Lee, 2004); and “Children and Media: On Growth and Gaps” (Wartella, 1999).

¹ Caribbean Development Research Services Inc., (2013). Attitude Toward Homosexuals in Guyana (2013) CADRES

² Carrico, C., (2012) Collateral Damage: The Social Impact of Laws Affecting LGBT People in Guyana. Faculty of Law UWI Rights Advocacy Project

³ Liebler, C. M., Schwartz, J., & Harper, T. (2009). Queer Tales of Morality: The Press, Same-Sex Marriage, and Hegemonic Framing. *Journal of Communication*, 59(4), 653-675.

⁴ Colvin, R. A. (2006). Understanding Policy Adoption and Gay Rights: The role of the media and other factors. *The Innovation Journal*, 11(2), 3.

Misunderstanding of Laws Governing Homosexuality

According to Carico (2012), the media and other sources of information and education for slaves and indentured servants in 19th Century British Guiana were fully and autocratically engineered and supplied by the Colonial Masters, i.e. the Dutch, followed by the British and the Common Law. The Guyana Constitution (article 149), however, has since been amended to provide “human rights protections” for all Guyanese, in which the Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Act remains in conflict – according to an article by the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination - SASOD (2010).⁵

CADRES (2013) – unlike the Collateral Damage study – has proven that majority of the Guyanese populace are not privy to factual information about the laws governing homosexuality (such as the Buggery Laws), but hold opinions about homosexuals. This reality reflects a population that is ill-informed and ignorant of the issues surrounding homosexuality in Guyana.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework considered for this research are as follows:

- i. Media Effects and Framing Theories: Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1981, 1974
- ii. Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, Identity and Politics Theories: Kellner, 2003, 1995
- iii. Labelling and Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies : Plummer, 1998
- iv. Marxist Conflict Theory: Bennett, et al, 1982
- v. Social Learning Theory: Bandura, 1977
- vi. Scheufele’s Limited Effects paradigm, 1999
- vii. Emile Durkeim’s Functionalist perspective: 1864-1920

⁵ The Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD)., (2010) Guyana: Marking World Day of Social Justice. Transgender citizens, supported by SASOD, move to the courts to challenge Guyana’s law against ‘cross-dressing’ Sasod.Blogspot.com

According to these studies, it is widely agreed that, “[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” (Entman, 1993). In other words, to make the issues more visible, prominent, or significant – so that people can attach meaning and definition to what they have witnessed in the media, and are thus able to form opinions and behavior patterns – based on the information they have received.

These theorists have also agreed that “It is important to pursue a project of developing a critical media pedagogy and to teach ourselves and others how to critically decode media messages and to trace their complex range of effects. (Kellner, 2003, p. 335). In other words, it is crucial for the media and other stakeholders to be introspective and continuously review their content for biased reporting.

Additionally, it is said that “The media are thus expected to reflect a multifaceted reality, as truthfully and objectively as possible, free from any bias, especially the biases of the professionals engaged in recording and reporting events in the outside world. This view is based on the notion that facts may be separated from opinions and hence, that while comment is free, facts are sacred.” (Bennett, et al, 1982).

Conceptual Framework

In defining the situations that can be classified as “media bias” against LGBT people, the following are examples:

- i. The use of sensational headlines and graphic images such as: “Two gays killed by spurned lover” or “Gays stabbed to death; Juan Edghill's utterance blame,” etc. – including photographs of the deceased LGBT person(s) at the scene of the crime, bloodied, battered, etc.
- ii. The use of disparaging words or phrases to describe LGBT people, such as: anti-man, faggot, or using the words “gays” and “lesbian” in a negative context or for sensationalism. (Plummer, 1998, p. 242; Hoffman, 1980).

- iii. Lack of balance and objectivity in providing sources, and overall subjective reporting – measured by insufficient/or the absence of opposing views on an issue. (Carrico, 2012; Gitlin, 1980; Castells, 2008; Entman, 1993; Bennett, et al, 1982, p. 16).

Chapter 3

Methodology: Instrumentation and Sample

The Non-Random Systematic Sampling technique will be used for selecting online stories in Guyana, such as hard news and features, in the diaspora pieces, and satirical pieces - between January 2007 to July 2014.

In using the Content Analysis as a research method, this will follow an assessment of these articles from online news entities, such as Demerara Waves, Guyana Times, Guyana Chronicle, Stabroek News, and Kaieteur News. The stories will then be selected from each year (January, 2007 to July 2014), using a possible Lexis/Nexis database. However, in the absence of this database, the sample will be taken exclusively from the online archives – by entering specific search terms (e.g., lesbian; gay; bisexual; transgender; anti-man; LGBT, homophobia, and SASOD) into the search field of each entity’s website in order to populate the stories.

A spreadsheet will then be created to list the name of each news entity, their stories, the year published, and the dominant perspective(s) that can be found in each story. (*See table 3 in Appendix*).

Moreover, the list of frames identified will be categorized as either negative, positive, or neutral – and then further classified according to their origin, such as religious, news organisation, human rights organisation, or “in the diaspora” column. (*See table 2 Appendix*).

It should be noted that in addition to the primary researcher, two other coders will be employed to duplicate the content analysis in order to achieve a greater degree of reliability and validity in the study.

Upon completion, the data gathered from the research (i.e., the number of frames relating to media bias and their sponsors) will be counted to determine their frequency, then further

calculated to derive statistics for the percentage of negative, positive, and neutral frames in each entity's stories, etc.

Chapter 4

Findings

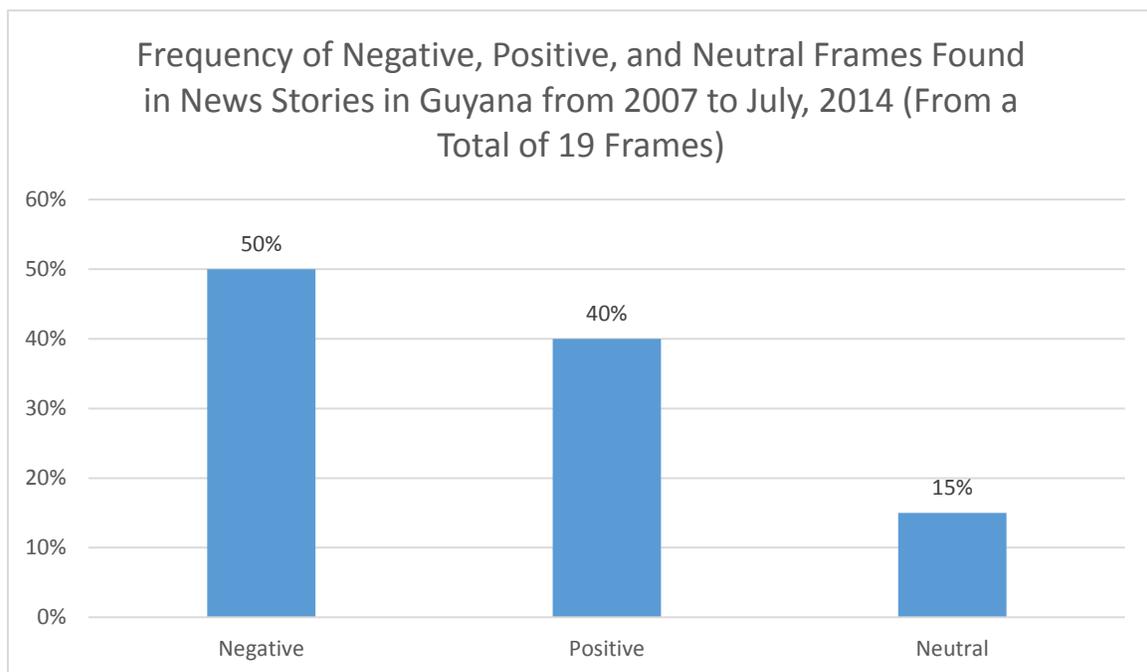
Based on data collected from the online archives of various news entities, the findings were derived from the assessment of nineteen frames that appeared one hundred and eighty eight (188) times, and were found in seventy three (73) news stories. The findings – which will be discussed, are as follows:

1. Media reporting of LGBT issues in Guyana contained some bias and subjectivity against LGBT people from January 2007 to July 2014. Nineteen frames were found and stories were largely influenced by religious bodies at 31%; news organisations at 30%, and human rights organisations at 30%. However, negative framing was largely influenced by religious bodies at 92%.
2. Kaieteur News and Guyana Times published the highest negative framing at 61% and 53%, respectively. The least negative were the Stabroek News and Guyana Chronicle, at 40% each.
3. Stabroek News was also the least neutral entity at 1%, compared to the Guyana Times and Kaieteur News, at 24% each.
4. The most frequent positive frames were published by Stabroek News at 60%. However, this did not translate into “diversity” in the types of stories published.
5. LGBT stories were least influenced by political organisations and persons in the diaspora at 0.4% each.

6. There was a lack of diverse perspectives, positive reporting, and success stories about LGBT people within the seven years period.
7. The “non-discrimination” and “human rights” frames were used more often than any other frames in the media.

Analysis and Discussion

Figure 1: Types and Frequency of Framing in Guyana’s Online News Stories: 2007-2014



Negative, Positive, and Neutral Framing in Online News Stories

In reference to objective one of this study, it has been found that media coverage in Guyana possessed some bias and subjectivity against LGBT people from January 2007 to July 2014 – and

this was either directly or indirectly influenced by religious bodies, news organisations, and political parties.

Based on the 50% negative framing and 40% positive, it may appear as though news entities were almost as open to properly addressing the issues of homosexuality and transgenderism in Guyana as they were in condemning LGBT people. However, based on this high percentage of negative framing – as well as anecdotal and prima facie evidence, one cannot ignore the frequency of misinformation, bias, and “glaring” innuendos that are disseminated by the media against LGBT people.

Moreover, based on previous research, it is possible that this lack of objectivity can fuel society’s already negative perception, guilt, fear, and hatred towards LGBT people (Carrico, 2012) – which is perpetrating more harm than good. Furthermore, with only 15% of neutral framing – based on anecdotal evidence, this has the potential of damaging the relationship between LGBT people and other members of society, if goes unchecked.

Figure 2: Sources/ Sponsors of Negative Frames in Guyana’s Online Media: 2007-2014

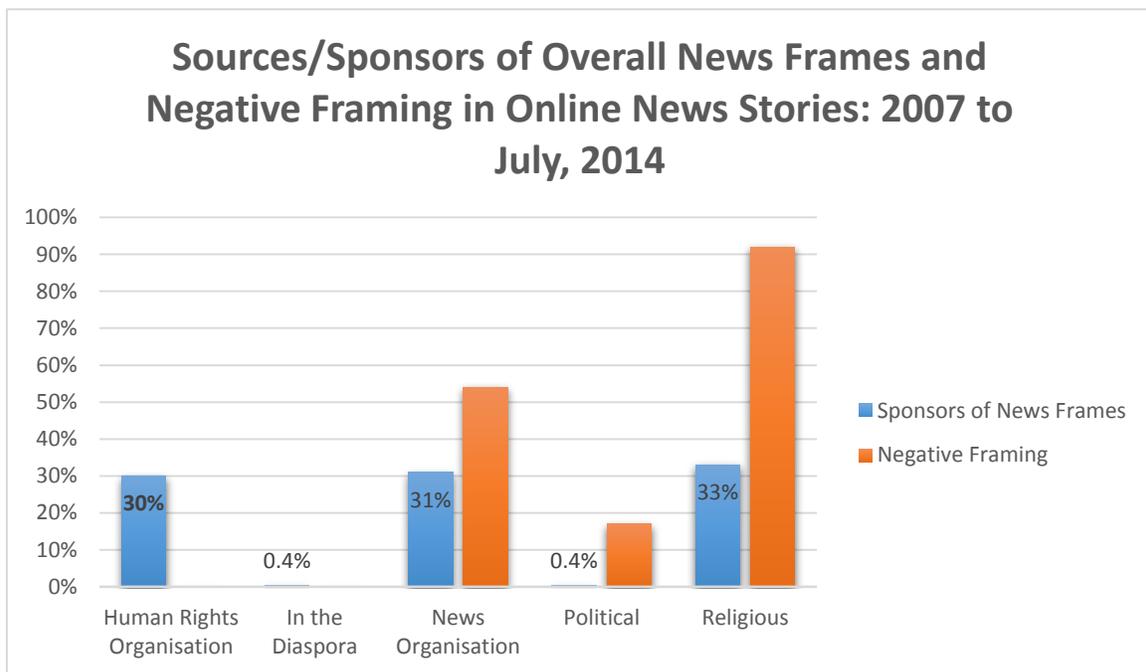
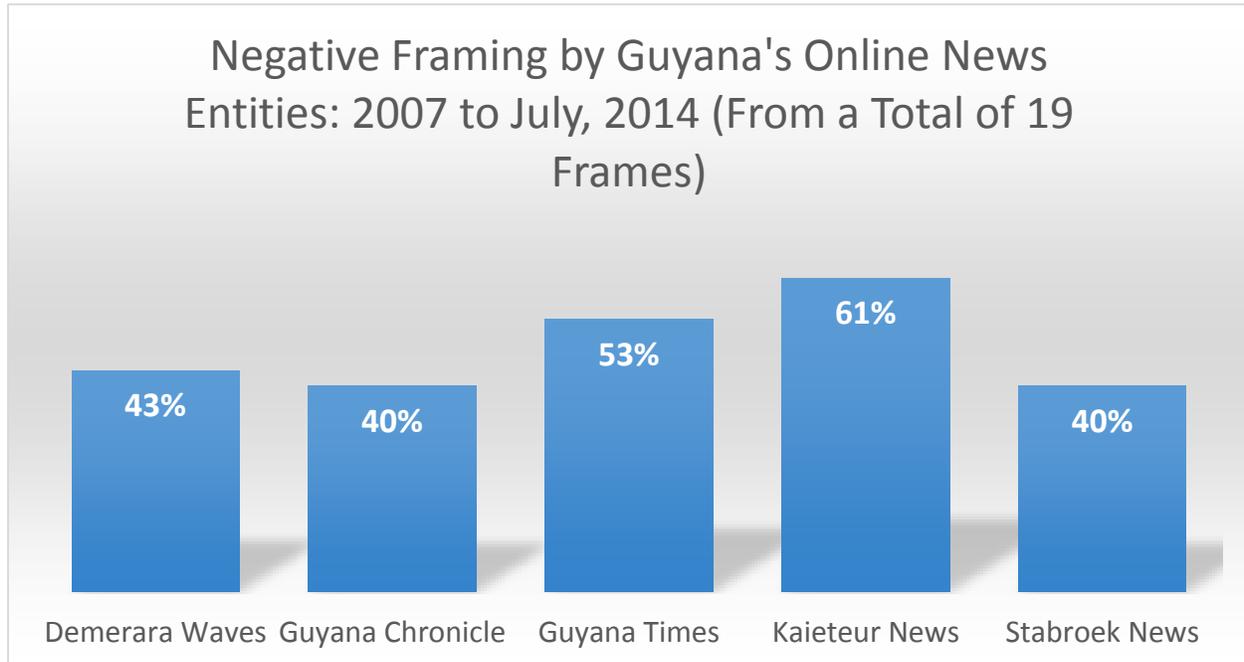


Figure 3: Percentage of Negative Framing by Online News Entities in Guyana: 2007-2014



Sponsors of Media Framing on LGBT Issues in Guyana

Based on the statistics in figure two, negative framing in news stories about LGBT issues in Guyana were largely influenced by religious bodies at 92%. The ensuing power dynamics shows that the dominant negative perspectives published by the media were 61% high (figure 3). This reveals that negative framing was largely prescribed by news organisations and religious bodies combined. Hence, it is submitted that, though the media play a very important role in educating the public about LGBT issues, much of that education is mired by biased and subjective reporting, and people's religion seems to be the dominant factor in deciding whether or not to accept (i.e., speak favorably of) or reject (promote bias of) LGBT people. Thus, partially confirming the hypothesis of this research.

The statistics in figure two also shows that, like religion, political views are a microcosm of the attitudes and culture of political parties in Guyana, as it relates to publicly addressing same-sex relationships, human rights, and the needs of LGBT people. As such, only a minute 0.4% of the frames represented a political piece, political framing, or political perspective – a percentage

that is equal only to that which was published by writers and contributors of “In the Diaspora” column in the Stabroek News. This seems to be in keeping with Kellner’s perspective, which stated, “Cultural studies shows how media culture articulates the dominant values, political ideologies, and social developments and novelties of the era” (Kellner, 1995, p.2).

Additionally, though the existing 0.4% of political frames were mainly positive and advocated human rights for all Guyanese and non-discrimination towards LGBT people, the overarching perspective remained uncommitted to law reform or the repeal of discriminatory laws against LGBT people. This research therefore submits that LGBT issues may not have been a top priority for the Government of Guyana during the period January 2007 to July 2014 – much less the need for law reform to protect LGBT people. Instead, the opposite occurred among government officials and other stakeholders.

For example, iNews Guyana, which was not featured for analysis in this research, stated in a sensational headline, “*Gays Knifed to Death in Georgetown*” (iNews Guyana, 2014). As a result, this story was widely shared on social media, such as Facebook, websites, etc. – and one of the comments from a reader stated:

“The way the Guyanese media- some of whom are supposed to be 'friends' of the LGBT community- is reporting the recent murders of two transgender individuals is reprehensible. once again, sensationalism- the lowest common journalistic denominator- wins out; forget empathy and responsibility to shaping public opinion/ not encouraging further bigotry. even more sickeningly, these are people who have participated in media sensitization training and workshops put on by local lgbt organizations. #beyonddisgusted Demerara Waves- Guyana's source for Breaking News, Inews Guyana, News Source Guyana.”

In reference to the same story, another comment read, “*The newspaper also helps to promote stagnant thinking by sensationalizing the crime with a head line that reads "Gays knifed to Death in Georgetown." A more appropriate caption would be "Men knifed to death in Georgetown." "Two citizens knifed to death in Georgetown." "Two people knifed to death in Georgetown." The insertion of the word Gays, not only sensationalizes the crime, but helps to further promote homophobia.*”

Three other readers (the first being a reader of the same story, but different sensational headline published by News Source Guyana) offered a vastly different response to the story by stating the following:

- a) *“What sad about that, murderer a male commercial workers dead. Thats wat we want our children passing by one of our landmark Site and seeing these ppl plying their trade. Good riddance. I agree with the pastor and the minister these ppl need to live by an island by themselves cuz tragedies gonna get us all.”*
- b) *“See why these dutty creatures need to be put on an island by themselves! I hope one day all of them can get angry & kill each other!”*
- c) *“The killer could do us all a favor and kill some more of them and when he gets fed up take his own life....*disgusting and nasty* sunday morning you people looking to say gays have a life too, well you guys pool your resources purchase an island take them there and you can also go live with them.”*

Moreover, it was Gitlin (1980) who said that, “Shock is more than a cognitive expression. Imagine living your life and discovering that many people who have never met you think they know a great deal about you... wherever you go, your classification precedes you.” He also said, “Stereotypes are inevitable.”

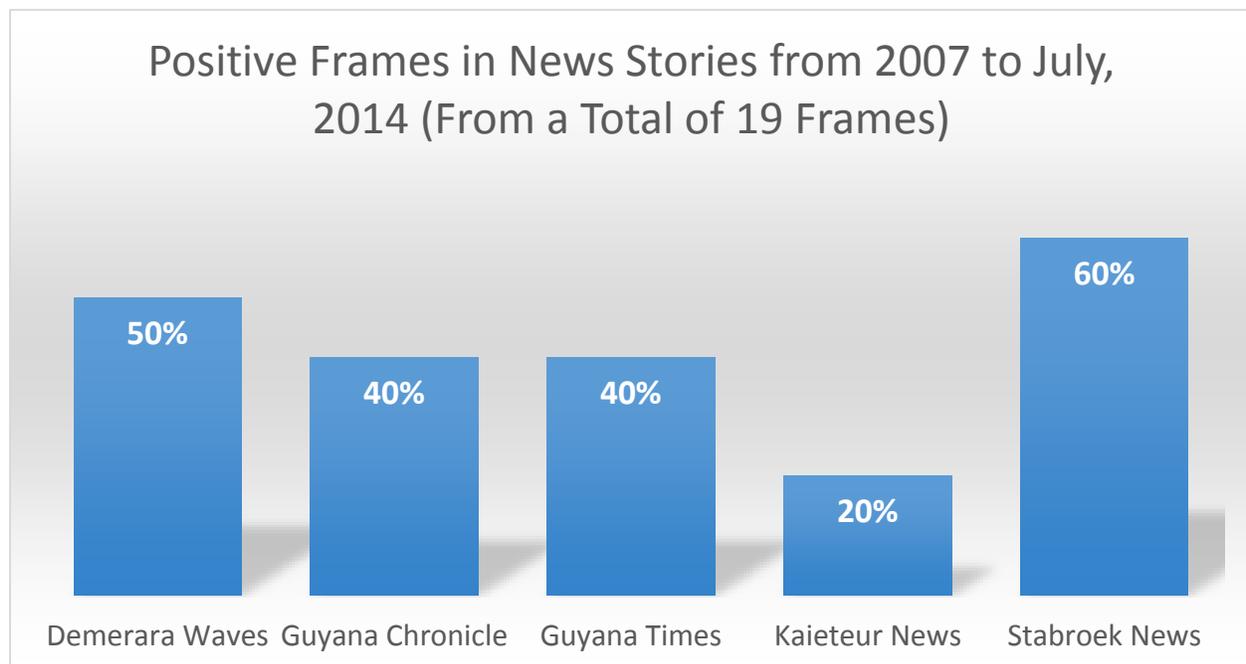
Furthermore, what is evident from comments “b” and “c” above is that – as the media used the words “gay, homosexual, transgender, or sex workers” in their gruesome headlines, it sensationalized the story, reinforced biased reporting, and it dehumanized the individuals or victims whom the story was about. As a result, this almost instantly attracted critical comments against LGBT people – as much as it aroused responses from advocates.

Additionally, in the reader’s or responder’s use of the word “island” in its context – this had a striking resemblance to the public utterance of the Vice-Chair of the Inter-Religious

Organisation, Pastor Ronald Mcgarrell, who in a statement to the press said that, “Gays should live on an island by themselves” (Stabroek News, 2014).⁶

The pastor later said that he was making a lighthearted joke. However, with his original comments (and supported comments by Junior Finance Minister, Bishop Juan Edghill⁷) widely shared online and circulated in Guyana and overseas, the story seemed to have played a significant role in “reiterating” and “reinforcing” biased reporting and hatred for LGBT people (Carrico, 2012). However, like many other cultural issues, this would be worth exploring more in-depth in a qualitative study on the effects of the media in shaping society’s perception of LGBT people in Guyana.

Figure 4: Percentage of Positive Frames in Guyana’s Online News Stories: 2007 - 2014



⁶ Stabroek News (2014). *Gays should live on an island by themselves -Inter-Religious Organisation vice-chair says.* Stabroek News

⁷ Stabroek News (2014). *Gay rights groups urge gov't to fire Juan Edghill after anti-gay remarks.* Stabroek News

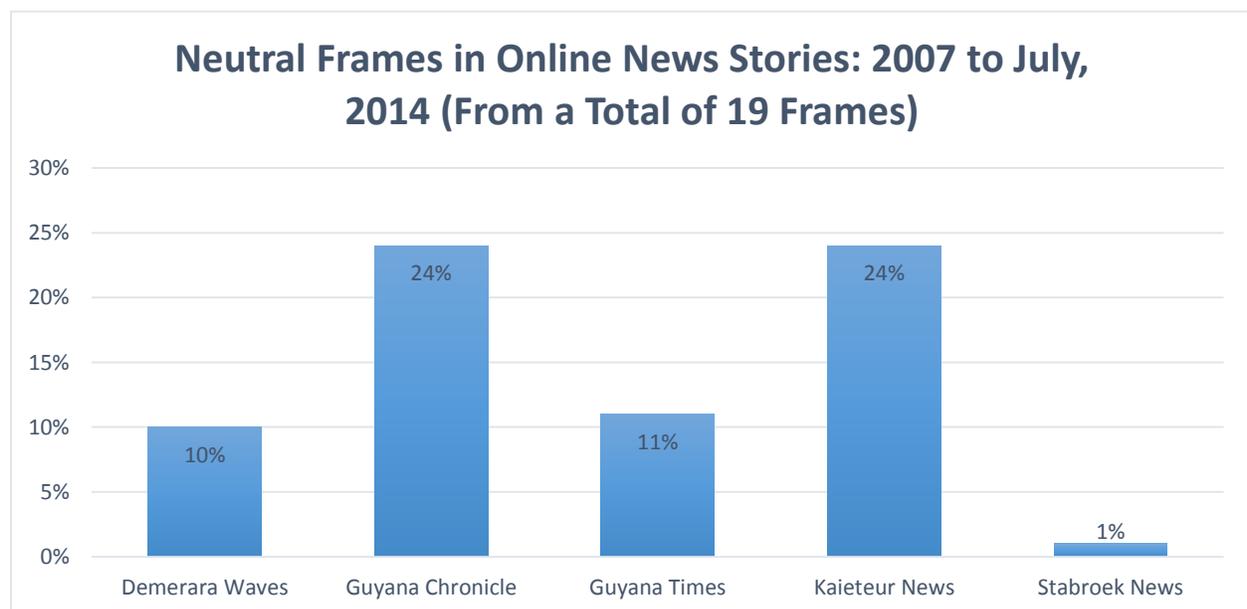
Positive Framing of LGBT Issues in Guyana’s Online Media

The highest positive framing of LGBT issues was published by Stabroek News at 60% in figure four. On the other hand, Kaieteur News, which published the most negative frames at 61%, also published the least positive at 20%. Additionally, in the face of an overall 15% neutral framing (see figure 1) among these entities, and only 1% from the Stabroek News, there appears to be a blurred line between this and other news entities’ impartiality.

It is also submitted that, based on the statistics, many stakeholders may or may not be undecided about their views on homosexuality and transgenderism, and this transcends to uncertainty in reporting – and a contradiction in framing the news. This can be juxtaposed with a similar view from Entman (1993), which stated, “Journalist may follow the rules of “objective” reporting and yet convey a dominant framing of the news text that prevents most audience members from making a balanced assessment of the situation.”

Another logical conclusion is that, without balance, fairness and objectivity in reporting, all other factors are null and void (Lee, 2004; Entman, 1993, 1989) – resulting in an injustice to the subject and topic of discourse.

Figure 5: Percentage of Neutral Frames in Guyana’s Online News Stories: 2007- 2014



Neutral Framing in Guyana’s Online Media: 2007 – 2012

Neutrality, according to many scholars, is among the acceptable standards of journalistic integrity. However, according to Entman and others, “Because they lack a common understanding of framing, journalists frequently allow the most frequently media manipulators to impose their dominant frames on the news (Entman, 1989; Entman & Page, in press; Entman & Rojecki, 1993). Hence, based on the low percentage of neutral framing in Guyana’s online media during this period, Entman’s (1989; 1993) perspective appears to be correct – as “neutral” in this research was defined by the news entities’ ability to remain impartial to politics, religion, human rights, and LGBT law reform.

Table 1: The Dominance of Frames in Guyana’s Online News Stories: 2007 - 2014

| Frames | Sponsors | Category | Frequency of Frames | |
|-------------------------|---|----------|---------------------|-------|
| A threat to marriage | Religious | Negative | 4 | 0.02% |
| Abomination/Sin | Religious | Negative | 14 | 10.0% |
| Achievement | Human Rights Organisation | Positive | 3 | 0.02% |
| Anti-man/Homo | Religious | Negative | 5 | 0.04% |
| Culture & Entertainment | Human Rights Organisation / News Organisation | Positive | 3 | 0.02% |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|----|-------|
| | | | | |
| Human Interest | News Organisation | Negative/Positive/ Neutral | 17 | 10.0% |
| Human Rights | In The Diaspora/Human Rights Organisation | Neutral/Positive/ Negative | 37 | 20.0% |
| Immorality | Religious | Negative | 21 | 11.0% |
| Lawlessness | Religious | Negative | 11 | 6.0% |
| Non-committal on law reform | Political Organisation | Neutral | 2 | 0.1% |
| Non-Discrimination | Religious / Political Organisation / Human Right Organisation / In the Diaspora / News Organisation | Positive | 38 | 20.0% |
| One man, one woman | Religious | Negative | 3 | 0.02% |
| Pedophilia/Child Abuse/Incest | Religious | Negative | 5 | 0.30% |
| Political Gain | Political Organisation | Neutral | 1 | 0.00% |
| Sensational Headline | News Organisation | Negative | 16 | 10.0% |
| Sex Worker | Religious | Negative | 4 | 0.02% |

| | | | | |
|----------------|-----------|----------|---|-------|
| Slippery Slope | Religious | Negative | 4 | 0.02% |
|----------------|-----------|----------|---|-------|

Table one above shows the list of frames that were found and their frequency in online news stories from 2007 to July, 2014. It is easy to recognize that most of the frames identified were presented by the religious community, human rights organisations, and news agencies – once again confirming part of the hypothesis of this research, while adding news organisation as a major source of media framing.

It is equally discernible that the “non-discrimination” and “human rights” frames were promoted as often as sensational headlines were published by proponents of heterosexuality – in which the latter portrayed LGBT people as abominable, sinful, and immoral.

While it was outside of the scope of the research to examine the motive of sensational headlines and pejoratives against LGBT people, this was evidence of the modus operandi of a wide cross section of the online media in Guyana – and based on anecdotal evidence, it may or may not be used as a way of segregating LGBT people from their heterosexual counterparts. A wider perspective on the issue was articulated by Plummer (1998), stating, “In an environment where the cognitive category of homosexual does not exist or is presented in a negative manner, a person who is sexually attracted to persons of the same sex will probably be viewed and will probably view himself as sick, mentally ill, or queer” (Plummer, 1998, p.242).

Additionally, based on the extremely low frequency of “success stories” or articles about the achievements of LGBT people in the arts and entertainment field, or academia, etc., it appeared as though the media in Guyana decided that there was nothing to be lauded in the accolades of LGBT Guyanese. This lack of diverse reporting was the status quo – even though same sex couples were crossing barriers around the world by gaining marriage equality, raising children, ascending to higher office in politics and academia, etc. (The Economist, 2014)⁸ Instead, the existence of

⁸ The Economist (2014). *Marriage equality in America: So far, so fast*. The Economist

highly negative reporting on LGBT issues during this period seemed as though LGBT people were publicly tried, and sentenced to a life of ridicule.

Based on anecdotal evidence, it also appears as though the techniques used in covering the news in Guyana do very little to educate, inform, or boost the morale of LGBT youth and adults – and instead, serve as a mechanism to reinforce religious doctrines and empower the religious community from which a significant portion of the biased reporting stems.

Limitations

The gargantuan challenge of this research was in performing the logistical work online for data collection and testing for inter-coder reliability. The process of locating approximately two willing individuals – who were also proficient in excel – to duplicate the content analysis and data entry proved to be the crux of the research, and the requirements of which were not fulfilled.

The other challenges were as follows:

- i. Structuring the study.
- ii. Locating similar studies conducted in Guyana and the Caribbean Region.
- iii. Locating sufficient news stories for analysis, particularly within the period 2007 – 2012.

Implications of the Study

An Excel database was created to perform the data entry for the research. This was also used in partially analysing the data – while combining the many functions and formulas available in Microsoft Excel to assist in assessing the issues. The latter involved calculating the number of articles and the total negative, positive, and neutral frames within the stories, etc.

Per the objectives of the research, this database can be fully utilised or modified to duplicate the research (to ensure reliability), perform similar studies, or serve as an instrument for data entry for various issues about the media or LGBT people in Guyana. This is also intended to offer a richer insight on the media and how they report the news, while serving as a valuable archival tool.

Based on the findings presented in this study, some possible recommendations that may promote greater journalistic integrity in reporting LGBT issues in Guyana are as follows:

- i. The media should engage in continuous sensitization training and workshops on how to cover LGBT issues in Guyana and around the world.
- ii. The media should also utilize a scientific mechanism/tool to measure their objectivity, as it is said in previous studies that, “Cultural studies today should discuss how the media and culture can be transformed into instruments of social change” (Kellner, 2003, p. 336).
- iii. Media houses should diversify their coverage of LGBT people and issues, so as to educate, inform, and inspire greater respect for human beings. This should be done independently and continually, while publishing perspectives from multiple/opposing sources (Carragee and Roefs, 2004)).
- iv. The media in Guyana should report the news objectively, and without elements of religious or other slanting – while embodying the principles of journalistic integrity.

Conclusion

In partially confirming the hypothesis, this study concludes that online news stories in Guyana are often biased in their coverage of LGBT issues – and the sources of biased reporting are mainly religious bodies and news organisations.

Though the latter part of the hypothesis – regarding society’s perception of LGBT people – has not been proven, this research raises pertinent questions about the root of violence and discrimination against LGBT people and other marginalised groups in Guyana, which are complex issues that would require extensive qualitative research and analysis on the media, culture, and their effects on the Guyanese society (Kellner, 2003, p. 335-336; CADRES, 2013, p. 25-26).

As Gitlin (2004) rightfully said, “In the thick historical cross-currents, rare is the phenomenon that lacks its thick mesh of causes.”

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Appendix

Table 2: A List of Nineteen Frames/Concepts that were Found in Guyana’s Online News Stories (Liebler, et al, 2009)

| 19 | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------|---|
| Frames | Sponsors | Category | Definition |
| A threat to marriage | Religious | Negative | Homosexuality is a threat to traditional marriage. |
| Abomination/Sin | Religious | Negative | Homosexuality is a sin and disgrace to civil society. |
| Anti-man/Homo | Religious | Negative | A derogatory and demeaning phrase directed at LGBT people - name calling. |
| Immorality | Religious / News Organisation | Negative | Argues that same-sex relationships often lead to a break down in good /traditional morals and values. |
| Lawlessness | Religious / News Organisation | Negative | Argues that same-sex marriage/relationships are illegal and those who support it are criminals. Defines opponents to same-sex marriage as simply upholding the law. |
| One man, one woman | Religious | Negative | “Marriage is defined exclusively as a union between two people of the opposite sex.” [1] |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Pedophilia/Child Abuse/Incest | Religious | Negative | Homosexuality leads to an increase in pedophilia, child abuse, incest, polygamy, etc. –OR- LGBT people are pedophiles. |
| Sensational Headline | News Organisation | Negative | The focus is on classifying the person as a lesbian, gay, transgender, etc. instead of as a person or human being |
| Sex Worker | Religious | Negative | LGBT people engage mainly in sex work and deviant acts to earn a living. |
| Slippery Slope | Religious | Negative | “Defines same-sex marriage as the beginning and end of civilization... and the gateway to future moral atrocities.”[1] |
| Human Interest | News Organisation | Negative/Positive/Neutral | Highlights the life, work and achievements of famous LGBT Activists in Guyana and around the world. |
| Non-committal on law reform | Political Organisation | Neutral | Claims that society is not ready to embrace homosexuality and the country should wait until people are more accepting to change the laws. |
| Political Gain | Political Organisation | Neutral | Advocating that equal rights for LGBT people will assist a political party to win votes/gain political points. |
| Human Rights | In The Diaspora | Neutral/Positive/Negative | Contain personal stories, court cases and non-fictional stories of LGBT Guyanese in Guyana and residing abroad. |
| Culture & Entertainment | Human Rights Organisation | Positive | Acknowledges LGBT people, including Guyanese, who have contributed to the nation's culture and positive advancement. |

| | | | |
|--------------------|---|----------|--|
| Human Rights | Human Rights Organisation | Positive | Argues that criminalizing adult same-sex relationships is a violation of basic Human Rights (e.g., UDHR, UNCRC, etc.) |
| Non-Discrimination | Religious / Political Organisation / Human Right Organisation | Positive | Asserts that LGBT people should not be discriminated against while in search of employment, place of worship, etc. |
| Non-Discrimination | In The Diaspora | Positive | Advocating non-discrimination of LGBT people in Guyana and around the world. |
| Non-Discrimination | News Organisation | Positive | The inclusion of articles about famous LGBT people, their work and life experiences as a human interest piece - and is free from bias. |

Table 3: A Sample Spreadsheet/Tool that was created and used for the Content Analysis/Frame Analysis

| Year | Frames | Name of Article | Source/ News Organisation | Sponsor | Category | Dominant Perspectives/ Quotes |
|------|--------|-----------------|---------------------------|---------|----------|-------------------------------|
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