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Gay Marriage in the Utah and California Media:

A Content Analysis of Newspaper Frames

Used in the Coverage of Proposition 8

M. Todd Hollingshead

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Gay Marriage in the Utah and California Media: A Content Analysis of Newspaper Frames Used in the Coverage of Proposition 8

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This study is a content analysis of news frames used in the coverage of Proposition 8 by newspapers in Utah and California, spanning the three months prior to its passage in November 2008, to the three months after its passage. A total of 401 news stories from five newspapers were analyzed to examine which of five news frames (attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality, and economic consequence) were used most predominantly and if the use of those frames varied by newspaper. Conflict was the most predominantly used frame, followed by attribution of responsibility, morality, economic consequence and human interest. The use of news frames did vary by newspaper. The newspapers in Utah used the morality frame more often in their coverage of Proposition 8 than the newspapers in California. Framing choices by the newspapers also changed over time. The use of the human interest frame decreased sharply after the November ballot vote, while the use of the responsibility frame and conflict frame showed a meaningful increase.

Keywords: framing, media, newspapers, media frames, Proposition 8, LDS Church, Mormon, gay marriage, gay rights, morality, bias, journalists, Utah, California

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Chapter I: Introduction

In the spring of 2008, California's Supreme Court ruled that the state's ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. This decision opened the door for gay and lesbian couples across California to marry. In the wake of this decision, California residents gathered enough signatures to put a proposition on the November 2008 state election ballot to add a constitutional amendment that declares "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California" (Egelko, 2008). This ballot measure was the eighth of 12 proposed laws to appear on the California state ballot in 2008 and was best known as Proposition 8.

Media coverage of Proposition 8 was extensive from June 2, 2008, the day it qualified for the November ballot, all the way through the election and months beyond the vote. Proposition 8 was covered on a near-daily basis through the summer, and then covered in-depth with multiple articles through the pre-election fall in all of California's newspapers. All 10 of California's largest newspapers carried editorials against Proposition 8 leading up to the election (*Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, *Orange County Register*, *The Sacramento Bee*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *Contra Costa Times*, *Press-Enterprise*, *Fresno Bee*, and the *Daily News*).

While it was expected that California media would provide constant coverage of the hot-button issue, the involvement of different religious groups also caused the ballot initiative to be covered intensely in other states. Outside of California, the state with perhaps the most coverage on the issue was Utah. This was due to the support given to Proposition 8 by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is headquartered in Utah and has 768,000 members in California (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012). The LDS Church joined the pro-Proposition 8 Coalition to Protect Marriage in June 2008 (Stack, 2008) and The First

Presidency of the LDS Church wrote a letter to every congregation in California encouraging members to “support the proposed constitutional amendment by donating of your means and time to assure that marriage in California is legally defined as being between a man and a woman” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2008). As Utah is home to the largest concentration of Mormons in the world, Utahns also participated in funding and supporting the pro-Proposition 8 campaign. A story in the *Los Angeles Times* reported that about 45% of out-of-state contributions to the pro-Proposition 8 Protect Marriage came from Utah (De Turenne, 2008). Additionally, members of the LDS Church living in Utah volunteered to help make calls in support of the California ballot measure throughout the summer and fall of 2008 (Stack, 2008).

This study examined the media coverage of Proposition 8 by a select group of major print media outlets in both California and Utah – the two states with the most intense media coverage. This study examined that coverage by determining how Proposition 8 was framed by Utah and the California media. Framing theory suggests that decisions by news media on which aspects of a story to emphasize and the manner by which media describe an event or issue can influence public perception and attitude (Entman, 1993). Research has also found that news frames of political topics can not only influence audiences’ perceptions of those issues and events, but also affect political attitudes and behaviors (Han, Chock, & Shoemaker, 2009).

The newspapers selected for this study were three major California print newspapers – *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The Sacramento Bee* – and two major Utah newspapers, *The Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News*. The three California media outlets listed were considered due to their proximity and prominence. The *San Francisco Chronicle* and *The Sacramento Bee* are located in major media markets that also happen to be at or near the

heart of the gay-marriage debate, while the *Los Angeles Times* is the largest paper in California. The Utah papers, *The Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News*, were chosen because they are the two largest papers in Utah. Each newspaper has the potential of presenting the information around any one issue differently, considering their location and readership, as well as their ownership. It is informative to note some of these factors for each of the five newspapers studied, especially as they relate to Proposition 8.

The *Deseret News* is owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a church very much at the center of the Proposition 8 debate for reasons detailed in the introduction. The *Deseret News* has a weekly circulation of 73,000 and a Sunday circulation just under 80,000 (Cortez, 2011). The LDS Church's ownership of this paper has an unmistakable influence on the editorial decisions of its staff and on the content presented daily. Even though the LDS Church is headquartered in Salt Lake City and is one of the largest employers in the state, the *Deseret News* rarely reports intensely negative news about the faith and does not carry out investigative reporting about the Church. The paper's stated mission is to "be a leading news brand for faith and family oriented audiences in Utah and around the world" (Deseret News, 2012). Its coverage appeals to an LDS readership, as evidenced by an entire subsection of the newspaper named the *Mormon Times*, which launched in 2008 during the heart of the Proposition 8 debate. The *Deseret News* also publishes the LDS Church News, a weekly tabloid sent to LDS Church members worldwide. In recent years, as financial challenges to the newspaper industry have forced staffs to cut jobs, reporters for the *Deseret News* have also been asked to contribute to the LDS Church News, and vice versa. Likewise, reporters employed by the paper produce articles for both the *Deseret News* and the *Mormon Times*.

Citing company policy, the *Deseret News* did not endorse or oppose any candidates or issues during the November 2008 elections (Robinson, 2008). Therefore, it did not officially oppose or support Proposition 8. However, the editorials of columnists and guests printed by the paper took an approach that was favorable to the LDS Church (Benson, 2008), which was in support of the ballot initiative to ban same-sex marriage. The paper often printed stories in the *Mormon Times* that provided links and information from the LDS Church on how to approach the Proposition 8 debate.

The Salt Lake Tribune is Utah's largest newspaper, with a weekly circulation of 113,000 and a Sunday circulation of more than 126,000 (Cortez, 2011). As previously mentioned, its coverage tends to skew toward a more liberal agenda in Utah, when compared to the *Deseret News*. The *Tribune* has long maintained that its major role is to be the competing voice in Utah news to that of the *Deseret News*, and its owner, the LDS Church. The *Tribune*, which touts itself as "Utah's Independent Voice Since 1871," was founded by men who disagreed with The LDS Church's economic and political positions. Early editorial content was strongly anti-Mormon, as evidenced by the paper calling one LDS Prophet Brigham Young a farce and a failure the day he passed away. Succeeding owners tried to eliminate the anti-Mormon sentiments, but the role of the *Tribune* to be a watchdog of the LDS Church, and report more critically on its actions, has never dissipated. In the 1950s, the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* entered into a joint operating agreement for printing purposes, creating the Newspaper Agency Corporation. This joint operating agreement was the source of confusion to many people, who believed both papers were owned by the same institution. This sentiment has perhaps fueled the *Salt Lake Tribune* editors and reporters to work harder to distinguish themselves from Utah's major religious population in their reporting and framing.

The editorial page of the *Tribune* traditionally takes a more liberal stance than the *Deseret News*. In covering Proposition 8, *The Salt Lake Tribune* reprinted an editorial from the *Los Angeles Times* that opposed the ballot initiative, as well as a handful of guest editorials critical of Proposition 8 – though with a more balanced view that targeted the Mormon audience (Compton, 2008). For example, the *Tribune* printed one guest editorial from a Mormon woman who transplanted from California. This woman was sympathetic to gays in California and talked about her family's friendship with a neighboring gay couple (Ashcraft, 2008). The *Tribune* also printed a staffer's column on Proposition 8 that, instead of endorsing or opposing the initiative, discussed how the LDS Church's role may affect the religion going forward (Walsh, 2008). However, the *Tribune* elected not to publish a house editorial on the Proposition 8 vote with their official view.

The three California newspapers selected cover the most readers across three areas of the state. Foremost, the *Los Angeles Times* is the largest newspaper in the state according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, with a circulation of 605,243 – good enough for the fourth largest newspaper in the country. The *Los Angeles Times* was selected to represent the southern part of the state as well as to represent a major national publication. The *Los Angeles Times* is the largest newspaper in the entire western United States – in fact, the paper itself even claims to be the largest metropolitan daily in the country – and its editorial content is framed for a national audience, though it is still keenly focused on California issues. The *Los Angeles Times* is owned by the Tribune Company, the parent company of the Chicago Tribune.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* was considered for this study as it is set at the heart of the gay-rights movement in California. It also happens to be one of the largest papers in California, with a circulation of 235,350. The *Chronicle* is San Francisco's major daily newspaper and is

owned by the Hearst Corporation, a media company based out of New York City. Despite, its East-coast owners, the *Chronicle* is a regional newspaper first and reports intensely on the news, culture and entertainment of San Francisco and the Bay Area. It is also the only paper analyzed in this study that has an entire section devoted to LGBT issues and individuals, who are a significant portion of the readership. Finally, *The Sacramento Bee* was chosen as a representative newspaper for the northern part of the state. *The Sacramento Bee* is the fifth largest English language newspaper in California, with a circulation of 210,925, and is the flagship paper of the McClatchy Company. McClatchy is based in Sacramento and operates 30 daily newspapers across 15 states. The *Bee*, like the *Chronicle*, is a regional paper and the largest newspaper in the greater Sacramento area. It does not have a special section for LGBT issues, but does have a subsection devoted to Proposition 8.

As mentioned previously, all three of the California papers analyzed in this study printed editorials opposing Proposition 8. In the *Los Angeles Times*' house editorial on Proposition 8, the board compared Proposition 8 supporters to magicians using sleight of hand to distract voters from the real issues:

Californians must cast a clear eye on Proposition 8's real intentions. It seeks to change the state constitution in a rare and terrible way, to impose a single moral belief on everyone and to deprive a targeted group of people of civil rights that are now guaranteed. This is something that no Californian, of any religious belief, should accept. Vote no to the bigotry of Proposition 8. (Los Angeles Times, November 2, 2008)

This research set out to investigate how these five newspapers, with their varying locations, owners, audiences and reporters, framed the coverage of Proposition 8. The research

focused specifically on how five previously established news frames (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999) were used by these five newspapers: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and attribution of responsibility. The broad research question that is studied here is whether these newspapers, with their diverse locations and owners, framed Proposition 8 differently than one another.

This research has value on several fronts: First, it is the first of its kind to quantitatively compare the news framing of media reports of Proposition 8, both in California and Utah. This analysis provides an additional informative layer to the literature already present on framing research, specifically media framing research. Though the expanse of framing research has a rich history, this study pries open the door on an area that has yet to be fully explored: media framing from media outlets across different states.

As Proposition 8 and the gay marriage issue continue to be hot-button topics in California and across the nation, this research can perhaps help inform future coverage of these issues. As of June 2012, Proposition 8 continued to be an unresolved matter. Following its passage in 2008, several lawsuits were filed to appeal its constitutionality. U.S. District Court Judge Vaughn R. Walker overturned the measure in August 2010 (Dolan, 2010), ruling it unconstitutional, and a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals panel affirmed that ruling in a 2-1 decision in February 2012. However, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals panel continued a stay on the ruling in light of additional appeals. Given its uncertain status, Proposition 8 will continue to be covered and framed by media outlets into the future, surely keeping the outcomes of this research relevant for years to come.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In the 21st century, the mission of most respected journalism operations is to seek and report news in a fair, balanced and unbiased fashion. However, all reporters bring their own biases to the table when they report on any story. Overcoming these biases in reporting is a standard ethical expectation of journalists. The *Los Angeles Times*' ethics guidelines summarize this universal ideal well: "A crucial goal of our news and feature reporting – apart from editorials, columns, criticism and other content that is expressly opinionated – is to be non-ideological. This is a tall order. It requires us to recognize our own biases and stand apart from them" (Los Angeles Times, 2012). Recognizing a reporter's, or an institution's own biases is one element of the challenge; successfully standing apart from them is where the challenge rises to a higher level.

Communications researchers have exhaustively visited the issue of bias in journalism. Bias has been defined as "any tendency in a news report to deviate from an accurate, neutral, balanced and impartial representation of 'reality' of events and social world" (McQuail, 2010, p. 549). In coverage of political issues, Covert and Washburn (2009) defined bias as a "consistent tendency to provide more support to one of the contending parties, politics or points of view in a sustained conflict over a social issue." Yet another definition of bias comes from Entman (2010), who said that bias occurs when slanted news coverage – or individual stories favoring one viewpoint or interest over another – happens in a regular pattern across many news stories. These and many other journalism scholars (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Hamilton, 2004) have echoed the same sentiment over the decades: Journalists and media institutions are all inherently biased, despite their aspirations to present news in fair, balanced and unbiased manner. Journalism students are taught early on that even the choice to report on a particular issue is evidence of

bias. Especially given today's shrinking media resources, reporters and editors must make decisions every day on which stories they are going to cover. Their biases inform those editorial decisions.

Bias occurs in the selection or omission of facts in a story, the choice of words used by a reporter, or even the credibility that is assigned to a particular source (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006). In other words, bias can determine the way in which a reporter frames a story. Or, in reverse, the way in which a media story is framed can provide evidence of bias, either on the part of the reporter or the media institution publishing the story. Tankard (2001) says that framing is a more sophisticated concept than bias. Media framing refers to the sources, issues, details, narratives, quotes, and every other news element that a reporter chooses to focus on to create a snapshot, an image of the overall issue being reported. No journalist can convey everything they have observed to their audience when they write a story, so they have to make choices in what values, facts and other bits of information they emphasize. Thus, the reader learns about a news event or issue through the frame of the reporter. Media framing theory is a popular system used by scholars to study and analyze the performance of news media.

The following sections will describe frame conceptualization and emerging definitions, and then move to an examination of the various framing genres. It will then continue with a look at the literature on the evolution of frame definitions. A review of the history of frame analysis and the theoretic development of frame analysis as an accepted method of study will then be presented. This will be followed by a discussion of the most common types of frame analysis, which should lend some insight to the current state of scholarship in framing research. Throughout this discussion, influential frame analysis communications research will be cited and explained when relevant. Finally, this chapter will introduce the media framing measurement

tool adopted for this study, originally created by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) in their analysis of the 1997 Amsterdam meetings of the European heads of state. In general, the review of the literature will rely heavily on the work of Goffman (1974), Gitlin (1980), Entman (1993), and Matthes (2007, 2008 & 2009), as well as many others who have developed some of the most extensive summaries of frame analysis to date.

Frames and Framing Definitions

Goffman (1974) first conceptualized frames by maintaining that individuals actively organize and make sense of the world around them by using “frames” to identify and label information. Hallahan (1999) said although framing is a theoretically rich and useful idea, it suffers from a clear definition. In his research, he found more than 1,000 citations about framing definitions in the literature. Citing Entman (1993), Hallahan (1999) called framing a “fractured paradigm that lacks clear conceptual definitions and a comprehensive statement to guide research” (p. 209) According to Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano (2009), framing definitions are generally broken down into two genres: Generic framing and specific framing. While generic framing refers more or less to a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, specific framing specifies what frames usually do – especially issue frames. These latter frames are pertinent only to specific topics or events while generic frames transcend thematic limitations (p. 175). Entman et al. say a frame “repeatedly invokes the same objects and traits, using identical or synonymous words and symbols in a series of similar communications that are concentrated in time” (p. 177). Furthermore, the authors say once a frame has appeared enough to cement itself in the schema systems of citizens, it need only a word or two to be summoned in one’s memory or schema (for example, 9/11, or the Berlin Wall). Additionally, these authors say that framing effects occur more widely throughout the

political process than is typically recognized. While Lippman (1922) may be the progenitor of framing theory, Goffman (1974), who cited Lippman much in his work, created perhaps one of the most widely cited definitions of frames. Goffman, an elder in the rank of modern frame analysis, defined frames thusly in his foundational 1974 book, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*: “I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify” (Goffman, 1974, p. 10).

Gitlin (1980) followed Goffman with this definition of the frame idea: “Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (p. 10). Gitlin gives further substance to framing, saying “we frame reality in order to negotiate it, manage it, comprehend it, and choose appropriate repertoires of cognition and action” (p. 6). Though these definitions give a starting point for media studies, Entman’s work is most distinctive in nailing down a working definition for frame analysis. In his 1993 foundational essay, Entman described frame analysis as one essentially involving selection and salience. “To 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 for the item described” (p. 52).

Entman (1993) argued that frames, then, “define problems; identify the forces creating the problem...evaluate causal agents and their effects and offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects” (p. 52). Further detailing this definition, Entman said that frames have four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the

receiver and the culture. By this, Entman meant that in each of these locations, frames are in place and playing a role in how information is communicated and how it is received, understood and, perhaps, acted upon. Later in his essay, Entman zeroed in on the power of framing in media studies, saying, “The frame in a news text is really the imprint of power – it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text” (p.55). Knight (1999) agreed with Entman on the idea of frames bringing power, arguing that frames are powerful mechanisms that can provide a number of functions in media, from helping to define and solve problems, to shaping public opinion.

Pan and Kosicki (1993) narrowed their definition of frames and framing to focus more on news media frames. They said a news media frame is a cognitive device used in “information encoding, interpreting, and retrieving; it is communicable; and it is related to journalistic professional routines and conventions” (p. 57). Essentially, these authors said framing could be studied as a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse. To this end, Pan and Kosicki created a model for the news media discourse process which shows a flow of discourse from institutions to media organizations to journalists – through rules, conventions and rituals – which gives way to news discourse that ultimately reaches audiences as publics. The cycle is completed when the audiences carry out collective actions that reach back to institutions. To be clear, these authors do not imply that audiences passively accept or absorb news discourse from media organizations, but rather, the “audiences interpret news presentations from media actively” (p. 58).

It should be mentioned that scholars have given most of their attention to two major pathways of studying framing effects. As Matthes (2007) pointed out, there is first the pathway termed equivalency framing, which examines how differently phrased but logically equivalent

situations impact individual decisions. This pathway was engineered mostly by Kahneman and Tversky in 1984. The second pathway is called emphasis framing, which analyzes real news stories, which differ in salience of several considerations. This second type of pathway, with its focus on news media frame analysis, is the frame analysis the current study follows. As such, the majority of the following chapter will dwell on the literature that has explored this side of frame analysis.

Evolution of Frame Analysis as a Tool to Study News Media Effects

Thanks to the work of Entman and others, studying the frames used by media in event and issue coverage has become a popular course of scholarship. Lippman (1922) argued this is because citizens acquire most of their information from the media rather than personal experience. Bateson (1954) and Goffman (1974) would agree, since they believed framing and frames are the primary means through which people make sense of a complicated world. Tuchman (1974) said that framing is a useful tool that journalists apply in order to cope with a tide of information. But frame analysis has not always enjoyed a respected place among the different paths available to communication scholars. A look at the theoretical development of frame analysis shows that initially, this methodology was predicted to become only a niche method at best.

Scholars have doubted the rigor and usefulness of frame analysis ever since it began trickling into mainstream communication research in the mid-1970s, when Goffman's influential book, *Frame Analysis*, was published. Scholars have called framing methodology cumbersome to read while others have doubted if frame analysis could ever be fully developed into an adequate system of research. Of course, frame analysis has only grown in popularity over the last 30 years – especially in the field of media studies. A major reason for this popularity is the

finding of many scholars that framing heavily influences the responses to communications of people, who, for the most part, are not generally so well-informed and cognitively active (Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1993). Likewise, Valkenburg et al. (1999) found that the way in which a news story was framed had a significant effect on readers' thoughts on the issues covered. For example, in their particular study, respondents who read a story framed in terms of human interest emphasized emotions and individual implications in their post-reading responses. The authors also found framing had a significant effect on respondent recall of the facts of a story.

Kahneman and Tversky (1984) hinted at how important news frames can be with their work in developing prospect theory, where they found people made choices based on how a question was framed and based on what gains were implied in the question. They found that “the framing of outcomes often induces decision values that have no counterpart in actual experience” (p. 350). To this, they gave the example that the framing of lung cancer therapy outcomes in terms of mortality or survival is unlikely to affect experience, although it can have a major influence on the choice. Applying this to news, Iyengar (1991) said that framing “should be particularly significant as a determinant of choice when the choice problem involves politics...If language variations are capable of influencing opinion responses so powerfully, it seems likely that alternate forms of televisions news presentations should also evoke similar variability in political choices an preferences” (p. 13).

Gitlin (1980) said frames used in news discourse enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely and to package the information for efficient relay to their audiences (p.7). However, Entman (1993) pointed out that because journalists “lack a common understanding of framing, they frequently allow the most skillful media manipulators to impose their dominant frames on news” (p. 56-57). Han et al. (2009) found that news frames of

political topics can not only influence audiences' perceptions of those issues and events, but also affect political attitudes and behaviors. That said, Han et al. (2009) also acknowledged Iyengar's (1991) findings that one's prior knowledge and attitudes and the personal relevance of a news story can moderate the impact of news frames. Han et al. (2009) went on to say that "where information is limited, audiences' perceptions of events may be more dependent upon specific news frames" (p. 740). Price and Tewksbury (1997) found that news frame processing doesn't operate in a vacuum, but rather that the message can direct, but not control, the ideas and feelings activated when people process news stories. In other words, news frames compete with other information drawn from human experience. Likewise, familiarity is a factor in framing analysis. In their conclusion, Han et al. (2009) found that especially in a global environment, understanding the impact of familiarity in the framing process is of major importance to the theoretical development and study of framing effects.

Pan and Kosicki (1993), meanwhile, stated that framing analysis, as an approach to analyzing news discourse, "mainly deals with how public discourse about public policy issues is constructed and negotiated" (p.70). Thus, theoretical development in this area should combine research on news discourse, news production and news effects and comprehension (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). As one who doubted the underlying credibility and validity of frame analysis, Koenig (2005) argued that the methodological underpinnings of the empirical identification of frames lack systemization and have remained underdeveloped. Koenig acknowledged that frame analysis has become a popular path of study for looking at media and social movements, but he believed that frame analysis, nonetheless, is still an ill-defined concept. His work advocates for the acceptance of a more routine and systemized methodology of frame analysis that relies

heavily on computer assistance. This will be discussed more at length in the following section on approaches to frame analysis.

The popularity of frame analysis as a methodology was alluded to in a previous section. Media framing studies have been used extensively over the past three decades and have covered a wide range of social problems. In Hallahan's (1999) research on the seven models of framing, he identified some of the most influential areas researched using news media framing methodologies. The list of subject material cited by Hallahan includes social problems – abortion, America's drug problem, Cold War criminals, child mistreatment, fathers' rights, labor strikes, and welfare – portrayals of groups such as artists, ethnic minorities, gay athletes, and specific news events, such as sexual harassment and the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court nomination, charges of wife beating involving boxer Sugar Ray Leonard, and women's issues. (p. 222). Other notable study topics mentioned by Hallahan include politics and war, the Persian Gulf War, the Iraq War, presidential campaigns (both in the United States and foreign), protests, and scientific issues such as biotechnology, climate change, cold fusion, and ozone depletion. The current study considers a topic, Proposition 8, that has social, legal, political, religious and moral implications.

Approaches to Frame Analysis: The Good, the Bad and the Future

Knowing that the study of media frames is a popular path – Matthes & Kohring (2008) said media and news frames take up the lion's share of frame analysis research – and that this approach will be followed for this research, it is necessary to review the most common approaches to frame analysis. There are several different scholarly approaches to breaking down frame analysis, many of which will be outlined below. Hallahan (1999) broke down framing analysis and came up with seven models. In his work, he identified seven major things that are

framed: situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility and news. Of course, Hallahan's final model, that of news framing, is most relevant to this current exploration of the layers of media framing. In this model, Hallahan says that media reports use "familiar, culturally resonating themes to relay information about events" and that sources "vie for their preferred framing to be featured through frame enterprise and frame sponsorship" (p. 210). To look more closely at the approaches within the larger category of news media framing, one should begin with Matthes (2007; 2008), who outlined different approaches in multiple works. In his 2008 publication, he outlined five common framing analysis methods: a hermeneutic approach, a linguistic approach, a manual holistic approach, a computer-assisted approach, and a deductive approach. However, a year later, with the help of lead author Entman and coauthor Pellicano, Matthes refined those five approaches down to four: qualitative approach, manual-holistic approach, computer-assisted approach, and manual-clustering approach. Each of these frame analysis approaches will be explained in detail below, including examples of each type of approach in relevant literature on media frame studies.

The first approach to frame analysis identified by Entman et al. (2009) is the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach blends ideas from the hermeneutic and linguistic approaches previously outlined by Matthes (2007, 2008). This approach provides an interpretive account of media texts and is based on relatively small samples. With this approach, frames are described in depth and there is little or no quantification. The basic idea here is that specific words are the building blocks of frames. Pan and Kosicki (1993), who identified frames by analyzing the selection, placement and structure of specific words and sentences in a media text, take an approach to frame analysis that can be considered a part of this qualitative arena. In this approach, the unit of analysis is not the article itself, but rather the paragraph. Entman (1993)

said the idea here is that words are the building blocks of frames. Entman et al. (2009) said that Reese and Buckalew (1995) used this type of approach with their study on local television coverage of the Persian Gulf War, wherein they found that local television news occupies a unique place of ideological influence. Another noteworthy study that was carried out using this style of frame analysis was Tucker's (1998) research on the media coverage of a controversial Calvin Klein jeans campaign wherein Tucker looked at 31 articles that covered the issue and gave life to the "kiddie-porn frame." Like Entman et al. (2009), Tankard (2001) has concerns about this approach because the creation and identification of frames is done by one individual who may set them up arbitrarily. To counter the concern, Downs (2002) said perhaps the only thing that can be done is extremely careful description of frames.

The next approach highlighted by Entman et al. (2009) is the manual-holistic approach wherein frames are manually coded as holistic variables in a quantitative content analysis. This approach can be inductive or deductive. Like the qualitative approach, Matthes and Kohring (2008) said the reliability and validity of this approach depends strongly on the "transparency exhibited by authors who extract the frames" (p. 260). Again, the concern here is that the coding of frames depends greatly on how the individual researcher perceives the issue. Simon and Xenos' (2000) analysis of a sample of newspaper articles and Husselbee and Elliott's (2002) coding of several frames in their study about hate crime coverage fit into this category. The latter set of authors identified two sets of four dominant frames by reading the newspaper accounts of two brutal hate-crime murders in two small American towns. On identifying the frames, the authors stated: "These frames seemed to reflect the issues that journalists believed were most compelling in their coverage of the two communities and their people" (Husselbee & Elliott, 2002, p.838).

A third approach outlined by Entman et al. (2009) is the computer-assisted content analysis method – or, to some, “frame mapping.” In this approach, preferred by the likes of Koenig (2005), as mentioned previously, there is no manual coding and the researcher seeks to identify frames by examining specific vocabularies in texts. Ultimately, the words that tend to occur together in texts are identified with the help of a computer. For example, help, aid, serve, service, welfare and humanitarian could all form the “humanitarian frame.” This approach grew out of scholarly concern to find more objective and reliable methods to carry out framing analysis. In this approach, frames are computed instead of created by an individual researcher (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). However, like other approaches, the computer-assisted model is not without its problems. The main challenge to this methodology is that computer technology, as advanced as it is, still cannot understand completely the complexity and subtlety of the human language.

The fourth and final approach posited by Entman et al. (2009) is the manual-clustering content analysis method. In this approach, researchers manually code single variables or frame elements in standard quantitative content analyses. From there, variables are then factor or cluster analyzed and the frame is split into separate variables or elements. This approach grew in part from Entman’s (1993) earlier concern that content analysis coders “neglect to measure the salience of elements in a text and fail to gauge the relationships of the most salient clusters of messages – the frames – to the audience’s schemata” (p. 57). The concern was that without the framing paradigm, content analyses would end up with data that misrepresented the media messages people were actually getting. One specific method under this approach is called the Ward method, wherein a hierarchical cluster analysis is employed. In this, the number of clusters is determined by using what researchers call elbow criterion, which is similar to a scree test in

exploratory factor analysis. Matthes and Kohring (2008) employed aspects of a manual-clustering approach to study the framing of biotechnology in the coverage of *The New York Times* between two short eras, 1992-1996 and 1997-2001. The two eras carried very different debates since Scottish scientists successfully cloned an adult sheep in 1997.

The authors note that all four of these models, despite their individual strengths, have not sufficiently appeased critics who continue to pledge the methodological concerns of validity and reliability. Matthes and Kohring (2008) attempted to alleviate some of these concerns with their study of biotechnology coverage in *The New York Times* by combining elements of both the manual-clustering approach and the computer-assisted approach. Their approach, in their own words, added complexity to frame analysis by introducing a clustering procedure instead of directly coding frames (Matthes & Kohring, 2008).

Though Entman et al. (2009) have laid out the four most commonly used approaches to frame analyses, other methods have been used. In Chyi and McCombs' (2004) study looking at how media can build a news event's salience by emphasizing different aspects of the event during its life span, the researchers deployed a two-dimensional measurement scheme. The authors, who carried out this process on a study of coverage of the Columbine shootings in *The New York Times*, proposed this methodology as an acceptable systematic way of examining media frames. In this methodology, they coded for three variables: date of publication, the space frame and the time frame. Coding categories in the space variable were: individual, community, regional, societal and international. Those in the time variable were: past, present and future. What they found was that the most common space frames changed over time. Specifically, the amount of personal frames used in the *Times* coverage decreased over time while the usage of societal frames increased over time. Chyi and McCombs (2004) said the purpose of their study

was to apply their two-dimensional measurement to frame analysis to exhibit the methodology as a useful practice.

The current study used the fourth framing approach outlined by Entman et al. (2009): a quantitative content analysis with manual clustering of variables. It employs a time variable element from Chyi and McCombs (2004), but relies most heavily on a seminal media framing study by frame analysis researchers Semetko and Valkenburg (2000).

The Five Dominant News Frames

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) used a content analysis with a manual-clustering approach for their study of Dutch media coverage of the 1997 Amsterdam meetings of top European leaders. These authors investigated five dominant news frames they and others had identified in earlier studies (Valkenburg et al., 1999) on framing effects: attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality. These authors relied on a handful of other researchers (Neuman et al., 1992; Patterson, 1993; Bennett, 1995; Graber, 1993) to flesh out the justification for each of these frames and the context of their use. Operational definitions of these frames come largely from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and are as follows:

Responsibility frame: Media use this frame to take a problem and assign the responsibility for causing it, or, perhaps solving it, to some sort of person, group or institution (p. 96). Often times, the group attributed the responsibility is the government. An example of this frame is the long-term media reporting on Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans wherein the reports focused on assigning blame and responsibility to government agencies for not warning people appropriately, not having appropriate infrastructure and not responding to the disaster appropriately.

Conflict frame: A frame that “emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest” (p.95). According to Neuman et al. (1992), the conflict frame was the most common frame in U.S. news they identified. Researchers such as Patterson (1993) found conflict to play a large part in political news reporting – particularly in presidential election campaign news.

Human interest frame: This frame uses a human face or an emotional angle to present an issue, problem or event (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This framing attempts to personalize or emotionalize news to capture readers’ attention. Others have described this as the human impact frame and have found it to be the most common frame used by news media after the conflict frame (Neuman et al., 1992).

Economic consequence frame: Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) define this news frame “reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequence it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region, or country” (p. 96). An example of this frame would be the news stories on the controversial Arizona immigration law that focused on Californians pledging to boycott Arizona businesses.

Morality frame: This final frame is one that reports an event or issue by putting it in the context of religion or moral prescriptions (p. 96). Neuman et al. (1992) said journalists often let voices or sources in their stories do this type of framing for them so they can maintain objectivity. An example of this would be a newspaper using the views of an interest group to raise questions about gay marriage or sexuality. Given the subject of the news coverage to be studied in this research, the morality frame was expected to be a major frame in play, even though Neuman et al. found this frame to be more common in readers’ minds than in the actual news content.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) built a 20-question tool to measure the existence of these five frames in media coverage, clustering four- and five-question sets that measured the existence of elements of each of these frames. As this study used the same frame measurement tool developed by these authors, this tool will be described in full in the methods section. Using this tool, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) found the attribution of responsibility frame was the most commonly used in the 4,100-plus news stories they analyzed, followed by conflict, economic consequence, human interest and morality frames. Specifically, they found that stories about politics (in this case, European politics) were framed in terms of responsibility, conflict and economic consequence. In summary, the authors report, “the way politics and issues are framed in the news can have important implications for public understanding and evaluations of issues (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 107).

There has been additional significant news framing analysis completed since this seminal study. A sampling of the most relevant works from this recent literature helps inform the construction of research questions for this study.

Relevant Recent Frame Research

Models for effective frame research are abundant, as noted by Riffe (2004) in an editorial for *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*: “One of the most fertile areas of current research in journalism and mass communication involves the concept of framing.” Given the wealth of frame research available to reference here, this portion of the literature review will focus on only the most relevant and recent frame research. As such, this review makes no promises to be exhaustive in its presentation of the literature. Instead, each of the following studies helped develop considerations and implications that influenced and shaped the research questions accompanying this study on Proposition 8.

Kothari (2010) used a multi-method study to examine how the *New York Times* reported the Darfur conflict in Sudan from 2003 to 2006. Kothari used a combination of textual analysis and in-depth interviews with *New York Times* reporters to analyze the role of sources in the frame-building process. While he found that his textual analysis supported results from previous studies on news framing in Africa, the interviews revealed that “individual biases and motives of journalists and their sources significantly influenced the coverage” (p. 209). Though not a surprising finding, this research considered the influence of journalist and source bias and motive as it applied to the news coverage of Proposition 8. This included the awareness that both the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* have reporters that are members of the LDS Church, a prominent figure in this discussion.

Another piece of research that may have implications for this research comes from Danis and Sthol’s (2008) study on media framing of terrorist incidents in the United States and the United Kingdom. These researchers found that on issues of terrorism, the press provides a significant voice for government positions and even frames that voice in the way it is put forth by government. In other words, the coverage “seems to ‘err’ on the side of the government” (p.19). Alexseev and Bennett (1995) also found that media coverage tends to voice the side of government in matters of national security. In addition to these terrorism and government studies, Li, Lindsay and Mogensen (2002) found in the early coverage of 9/11 that human interest was not a dominant frame even though the crisis involved massive human casualties. Proposition 8 is not a matter of national security or terrorism, but it does have crisis elements, especially in the wake of its passage. So, as opposed to the finding of Li et al. (2002), was Proposition 8 more likely to have human interest as a dominant news frame because of the number of individuals affected?

Another study looking at politics and news framing came from Luther and Zhou (2005), who wanted to examine the frames used by media in China and the United States in their coverage of the SARS epidemic. The authors found that both media in China and the U.S. covered a set of similar frames – such as economic consequences, conflict, leadership and human interest – but they also found that each newspaper’s country of origin influenced the degree to which each frame was used. The findings of this study are certainly relevant to the current undertaking as the researcher specifically sought to determine whether the newspapers in question were influenced by their state of origin in terms of what frames were used to cover Proposition 8, and to what degree they used those frames.

Luther and Zhou’s competing international news framing study was preceded by one by Kim and Lee (2003) that developed even more distinct difference in the coverage of media in two different countries. Kim and Lee looked at the news coverage in the United States and in South Korea following the crash of Korean Air Flight 801 in Guam, U.S. territory, on Aug. 6, 1997. The crash killed 228 passengers and crew, but during the 16-day coverage of the disaster, media from the United States and South Korea covered the cause of the crash differently. While the Korean journalists said it was a combination of bad weather, faulty devices and negligence on the part of the Guam air traffic controllers, American journalists focused on pilot error as the major cause. The researchers used a textual analysis of the stories in the above-mentioned media as well as interviews with the journalists to find the root of the differing news frames. Kim and Lee ultimately found that the Korean and U.S. media failed to represent both sides in due proportion. As such, the readers in Korea ended up with a different understanding of what caused the crash than readers in the U.S. The authors concluded that news framing driven by national interest and personal bias causes truth to be the first casualty. Kim and Lee’s finding is similar to

that of Kothari (2010), which implicates journalist bias in resulting news frames used to cover events or issues. Again, this literature informed the researcher in his consideration of how this issue might be in play in the coverage of the Proposition 8 debate.

The findings of the studies listed in this section lead to the research questions needed to carry out this research. Again, Kim and Lee (2003) as well as Kothari (2010) found that individual biases and motives of journalists and their sources significantly influenced the media frames used in coverage, sometimes even causing the facts to be somewhat comprised. Li et al. (2008) found that coverage of one major crisis event (9/11) did not emerge with human interest as a dominant frame. Finally, Luther and Zhou (2005) found that each newspaper's country of origin influenced the degree to which each frame was used. The research questions for this study are thus:

Research Questions

RQ1: What were the dominant frames used in media coverage of Proposition 8?

RQ2: Were the frames used to cover Proposition 8 by media outlets in California different than the frames used by Utah media outlets?

RQ3: Was there a difference in the frames used among the media outlets within each state? (i.e. Did the *Deseret News* frame stories differently than *The Salt Lake Tribune*, or was the *Sacramento Bee* coverage framed differently than the *Los Angeles Times*?)

RQ4: Did the news frames used in the coverage prior to the vote differ from the frames used after the vote?

Chapter III: Method

This study employed a quantitative content analysis of six months' worth of news articles that covered Proposition 8 and gay marriage in five newspapers across Utah and California. Each article was independently coded to measure the existence of five dominant news frames: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic consequence appeared in each story. This was done using Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) frame measurement tool, a 20-item questionnaire that measures the existence and strength of five frames based on the yes (1) and no (0) responses to clusters of three- and four-question sets.. Articles from three newspapers across three different parts of California were coded (*Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Sacramento Bee*) and articles from the two major newspapers in Utah were coded (*Deseret News, Salt Lake Tribune*). Each of these newspapers were selected purposefully.

The two Utah newspapers were selected because they are the two largest newspapers in Utah and essentially the only two read and distributed state-wide. Traditionally, the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* have operated as direct competitors for readership and circulation. The *Deseret News* is considered the "conservative" paper in the state and the *Salt Lake Tribune* is the "liberal" paper – though it may not necessarily qualify for that designation when viewed from a more liberal sector of the country. As described in the introduction, each has a unique view or bias on this particular issue.

It is informative to have an understanding of the editorial biases for or against Proposition 8 of each newspaper analyzed in this study. In fact, it is the assumption of individual voice and bias among these publications that lead the researcher to examine whether or not different publications framed the issue differently. While the three California papers editorialized against

the ballot initiative, the *Deseret News* carried editorial content favorable toward Proposition 8 and *The Salt Lake Tribune* chose instead a more neutral path, printing a selection of guest editorials mostly in opposition to the gay marriage ban, but stopping short of publishing a house editorial for or against the issue.

The unit of analysis for this study was the news article text. No images, graphics, or additional art elements were considered in the content analysis. All articles related to the Proposition 8 campaign, vote and aftermath published in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Sacramento Bee*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Salt Lake Tribune* and *Deseret News* from August 2008 through February 2009, were retrieved from the ProQuest Newspaper database by searching for the key words “Proposition 8,” and “gay marriage.” This period was chosen as it represents the time of the highest news coverage surrounding the issues. Likewise, this period was chosen as it was necessary to answer research question four, which asked if there was a difference in the news frames used before and after the vote.

Duplicates, op-ed pieces and letters to the editors were deleted from each newspaper’s census of articles. After a secondary review of the listed results, a small group of articles were additionally disqualified as they did not cover the issue of Proposition 8 outside the singular mention of the ballot measure. (For example, one story simply talked about the upcoming election and listed each ballot item with a one-line explanation.) A final census of articles were formatted and prepared for analysis for the *Los Angeles Times* (N=79), *Sacramento Bee* (N=83), *San Francisco Chronicle* (N=88), *Deseret News* (N=69) and *Salt Lake Tribune* (N=82). The combined final census of articles was 401.

Framing Measurement Tool

This study used the framing instrument created by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The first five questions of the tool measured the existence of a responsibility frame. As an example, one question in this set asks: “Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?” The second set of five questions measured the human interest frame. (Example: Does the story provide a human example or human face on the issue?). The following set of four questions measured conflict (Example: “Does the article reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups/countries?) while the last two sets of questions measured the morality frame (Example: “Does the story contain any moral messages?) and the economic consequence frame (Example: “Is there mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?). The morality frame and economic consequence frame had only three questions each. The complete 20-question framing scale is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

News Framing Measurement Tool, Developed by Semetko and Valkenburg

Attribution of responsibility frame

1. Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?
2. Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?
3. Does the story suggest solutions to the problem/issue?
4. Does the story suggest that an individual or group of people is responsible for the issue?
5. Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?

Human interest frame

6. Does the story provide a human example or human face on the issue?
7. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy or compassion?
8. Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?
9. Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?
10. Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy or compassion?

Conflict frame

11. Does the story reflect disagreement between parties, individuals, groups or countries?
12. Does one party, individual, group or country reproach another?
13. Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?
14. Does the story emphasize an aspect of violence that takes place from one party towards another party?

Morality frame

15. Does the story contain any moral messages?
16. Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets?
17. Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

Economic frame

18. Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?
 19. Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?
 20. Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?
-

Note: questions 5 and 10 were eliminated for this study. See text for explanation.

In creating this scale, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) conducted a principal component analysis with varimax rotation on the 20 questions and found that the questions clustered into five distinguishable frames (p. 99). In their analysis, the fifth item from the responsibility frame (“Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?”) was eliminated as it did not have a high enough factor loading and was too distant from the other items in the set, both empirically and conceptually. This analysis, therefore, eliminated the same question. The fifth question from the human interest frame set (“Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?”) was also eliminated from the current study because no visual images were considered in this content analysis. The elimination of these questions left a total of 18 questions that were then coded for each of the 401 articles.

Though Semetko and Valkenburg had previously run a reliability test on their coding scheme, this study also used Cronbach alpha tests on each of the set of questions to ensure reliability. Alpha values confirmed reliability of the coding scheme: Responsibility (.82), human interest (.89), conflict (.74), morality (.84) and economic consequence (.87). Other variables included in the coding for each article were: specific media outlet, state where the newspaper was located (Utah or California) and article publication date.

Only one coder was used for this analysis. Given the importance of consistent coding over time through a handful of outside influences (fatigue, mood, noise, carefulness), it was important to confirm reliability of the coding. After the census was finalized and coded using the 18-question scale (entering a 1 for a yes response and a 0 for no response) the coder recoded a sample of 40 stories approximately one month later to test intra-coder reliability. An intra-coder reliability calculation was run using Holsti’s method, producing an intra-coder reliability score of .89, which is an acceptable score for establishing the reliability.

Chapter IV: Results

The results for this thesis are organized by the four research questions posed herein. Each section will list the question, outline what analyses were used to answer that question and explain the results of those analyses in relation to the research questions.

RQ1: What were the Dominant Frames used in Media Coverage of Proposition 8?

To answer this research question, two measurement analyses were carried out. The first of which incorporated a simple frequency analysis to determine the mean scores of the sum of each cluster of questions. The values for each set of questions were summed to indicate the presence and strength of a given frame. For example, if a particular news story was coded with a yes (1) for each of the four responsibility questions, the total score for that story would be 4 in the responsibility category. Scores for responsibility, human interest and conflict ranged from 0 to 4, while scores for morality and economic consequence ranged from 0 to 3, since there were only three questions each for those to clusters. Mean scores for each frame group across all 401 articles were then calculated to produce a final measure of the strength of each frame. This is similar to how Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) calculated their results.

Given that the morality and economic consequence frame groups consisted of only three questions, the means were standardized to better reflect the strength of each score compared to the other frames. This was done by dividing the calculated mean score by the maximum possible score for each category; thus, responsibility, human interest and conflict frames were divided by four while the other two were divided by three. Standardizing the mean scores did not change the order of the most dominant frames, but it did provide a clearer picture of the relative strength of each frame to its counterparts.

Table 2 shows the mean scores as well as the standardized mean scores for each of the five dominant news frames analyzed.

Table 2

Mean Scores for Each Framing Measure, Across all Newspapers (N=401)

	Mean	(Max)	Standardized Mean	(Max)	Standard deviation
Responsibility	1.20	(4.0)	.30	(1.0)	1.47
Human Interest	.68	(4.0)	.17	(1.0)	1.30
Conflict	1.63	(4.0)	.41	(1.0)	1.40
Morality	.83	(3.0)	.27	(1.0)	1.15
Econ. Consequence	.74	(3.0)	.25	(1.0)	1.15

According to this analysis, the conflict frame was firmly the most commonly used news frame in the coverage of Proposition 8 among the five newspapers. Conflict was followed by attribution of responsibility, morality, economic consequence and finally, human interest. It was apparent during coding that the conflict frame was the most dominant frame and the statistical analysis confirmed that assumption, with responsibility being the second most dominant frame.

The second measurement approach used to answer the first research question confirmed that the conflict frame and the responsibility frame were the most prominent frames in Proposition 8 coverage. This second approach was done by summing the total number of stories with at least a value of 1 for any particular frame, and then calculating the percentage of these stories using a crosstab analysis. Overall, 67% of all stories had at least one element of the conflict frame, 51% of all stories had an element of the responsibility frame, 40% had an element of the morality frame score, 35% had an economic consequence frame score of at least 1, and 28% had an element of the human interest frame.

Table 3

Stories With at Least a Score of 1 for Each Framing Category

	Responsibility	Human Interest	Conflict	Morality	Economic
Count	204	111	267	162	139
Percent	51%	28%	67%	40%	35%
<i>Stories with a score of 0 for each framing category</i>					
Count	197	290	134	239	262
Percent	49%	72%	33%	60%	65%

RQ2: Were the Frames used to Cover Proposition 8 by Media Outlets in California Different from the Frames used by Utah Media Outlets?

The first step in answering this question was the aforementioned calculation to sum the total number of stories in each publication with at least a score of 1 for all of the five given frames. A crosstab examination of this data showed varying percentages in which the newspapers used given frames. Though this tabulation did not determine clearly where there were differences between the frames used by media in Utah and California, it did provide a starting point for more investigation. Table 3 presents the percentage of stories for each newspaper that recorded at least a score of 1 for each listed frame category. One relevant item in this table showed that 76% of *Los Angeles Times* stories included an element of the conflict frame compared to only 61% of stories in the *Salt Lake Tribune*. Likewise, nearly 40% of *Sacramento Bee* articles included an element of the human interest frame while the *Salt Lake Tribune* had only 21% of its stories with that frame. While 51% of *Deseret News* stories contained a morality frame, only 30% of *San Francisco Chronicle* stories did.

Table 4

Newspapers by Stories With at Least a Score of 1 in Each Framing Category

	Responsibility	Human Interest	Conflict	Morality	Economic Consequence
LATimes (N=79)					
Count	34	22	60	33	31
% Within Paper	40%	28%	76%	42%	39%
SL Tribune (N=82)					
Count	38	17	50	39	28
% Within Paper	42%	21%	61%	48%	35%
Sacramento Bee (N=83)					
Count	39	33	51	29	24
% Within Paper	42%	40%	61%	35%	29%
SF Chronicle (N=88)					
Count	51	21	59	26	33
% Within Paper	45%	24%	67%	30%	38%
Deseret News (N=69)					
Count	42	18	47	35	23
% Within Paper	35%	26%	68%	51%	33%

To further explore this question, the average mean scores of each frame for the five newspapers were calculated. This descriptive test provided clues for where meaningful differences could be found between Utah and California newspapers. As seen in Table 5, the *Los Angeles Times* recorded the highest mean score for the conflict frame (1.95), which also happened to be the highest mean score across all framing categories. Meanwhile, the *Deseret News* recorded the lowest mean score in all categories with its mean score in the human interest frame (.46).



Table 5
Mean Scores for Each Frame by Newspaper

Frame	Newspaper	N	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max
Responsibility	LA Times	79	1.19	1.61	0.18	0	4
	SL Trib	82	1.21	1.55	0.17	0	4
	Sac Bee	83	1.01	1.35	0.15	0	4
	SF Chron	88	1.30	1.44	0.15	0	4
	DesNews	69	1.29	1.38	0.17	0	4
	Total	401	1.20	1.47	0.07	0	4
Human	LA Times	79	0.77	1.45	0.16	0	4
	SL Trib	82	0.63	1.36	0.15	0	4
	Sac Bee	83	0.95	1.46	0.16	0	4
	SF Chron	88	0.55	1.13	0.12	0	4
	DesNews	69	0.46	0.95	0.11	0	4
	Total	401	0.68	1.30	0.07	0	4
Conflict	LA Times	79	1.95	1.40	0.16	0	4
	SL Trib	82	1.60	1.47	0.16	0	4
	Sac Bee	83	1.40	1.35	0.15	0	4
	SF Chron	88	1.50	1.29	0.14	0	4
	DesNews	69	1.72	1.48	0.18	0	4
	Total	401	1.63	1.40	0.07	0	4
Morality	LA Times	79	0.97	1.28	0.14	0	3
	SL Trib	82	0.94	1.15	0.13	0	3
	Sac Bee	83	0.70	1.08	0.12	0	3
	SF Chron	88	0.49	0.90	0.10	0	3
	DesNews	69	1.12	1.25	0.15	0	3
	Total	401	0.83	1.15	0.06	0	3
Economic	LA Times	79	0.92	1.28	0.14	0	3
	SL Trib	82	0.73	1.14	0.13	0	3
	Sac Bee	83	0.63	1.10	0.12	0	3
	SF Chron	88	0.76	1.14	0.12	0	3
	DesNews	69	0.65	1.05	0.13	0	3
	Total	401	0.74	1.15	0.06	0	3

Table 5 indicates some clear differences between average mean scores of frames across different-state newspapers in certain frame categories. Within the human interest frame, the *Sacramento Bee*'s average mean score (.95) is more than twice that of the *Deseret News* (.46). Likewise, there was a major difference within the morality frame, with the *Deseret News*

recording an average mean score of 1.12, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* recording a .49.

There was very little variation among the mean scores in the responsibility frame and the economic consequence frame. Though there was a noticeable difference between scores in the conflict frame, it was between same-state media (*Los Angeles Times* vs. *Sacramento Bee*).

To further answer this question, average mean scores were also calculated for each frame with news outlets grouped by states. The scores are presented in Table 6 immediately below.

Table 6

Average Mean Scores for Utah and California Papers by Frame

		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	MD
Responsibility	California	250	1.168	1.466	
	Utah	151	1.245	1.470	.077
Human Interest	California	250	.7520	1.354	
	Utah	151	.5563	1.187	.196
Conflict	California	250	1.608	1.359	
	Utah	151	1.656	1.474	.048
Morality	California	250	.7120	1.104	
	Utah	151	1.020	1.197	.308
Economic	California	250	.7680	1.176	
	Utah	151	.6954	1.101	.073

California newspapers include the Sacramento Bee, San Francisco Chronicle and Los Angeles Times. Utah Papers include the Deseret News and Salt Lake Tribune.

A post-hoc Bonferroni adjustment was run simply to more clearly tease out mean differences in frame usage across different-state media. (Inferential statistics reported in this analysis were not considered as the study was comparing census data.) These statistics revealed a number of meaningful differences in mean scores. Newspapers whose mean scores for a frame differentiated by at least .400 were considered meaningful scores.

Table 7

Mean Difference Between Frames Used by Different Newspapers

		SL Trib	Sac Bee	SF Chron	DesNews	LA Times
Salt Lake Tribune	Responsibility	----	.195	-.088	-.083	.017
	Human int.	----	-.318	.089	.170	-.138
	Conflict	----	.200	.098	-.127	-.352
	Morality	----	.240	.450*	-.177	-.036
	Economic	----	.105	-.030	.080	-.192
Sacramento Bee	Responsibility	-.195	----	-.283	.278	-.178
	Human int.	.318	----	.406*	.488*	.180
	Conflict	-.200	----	-.102	-.327	-.552*
	Morality	-.240	----	.210	.417*	-.276
	Economic	-.105	----	.135	-.026	-.298
SF Chronicle	Responsibility	.088	.283	----	.006	.106
	Human int.	-.089	-.406*	----	.082	-.227
	Conflict	-.098	.102	----	-.225	-.449*
	Morality	-.450*	-.210	----	-.627*	-.486*
	Economic	.030	.135	----	.109	-.163
Deseret News	Responsibility	.083	.278	-.006	----	.100
	Human int.	-.170	-.488*	-.082	----	-.308
	Conflict	.127	.327	.225	----	-.225
	Morality	.177	.417*	.627*	----	.141
	Economic	-.080	.026	-.109	----	-.272
Los Angeles Times	Responsibility	-.017	.178	1.106	-.100	----
	Human int.	.138	-.180	.227	.308	----
	Conflict	.352	.552*	.449*	.225	----
	Morality	.036	.276	.486*	-.141	----
	Economic	.192	.298	.163	.272	----

*A meaningful difference of at least +/- .400 between average mean scores.

These statistics showed meaningful differences between Utah and California outlets across several frames. The *Sacramento Bee* had a distinctly higher usage of the human interest frame than the *Deseret News* (MD = .488). The *San Francisco Chronicle* had a meaningfully lower usage of the morality frame than both *The Salt Lake Tribune* (MD = -.450) and the *Deseret News* (MD = -.627). Finally, the *Deseret News* also used the morality frame meaningfully more than the *Sacramento Bee* (MD = .417).

RQ3: Was there a Difference in the Coverage Frames used Among Media Outlets within the Same State?

The mean differences reported in Table 7 also provide data to answer this question. Again, the threshold of +/- .400 was used to determine if there was a meaningful difference between mean scores. According to these frequencies, *The Sacramento Bee* exhibited a higher usage of the human interest frame than the *San Francisco Chronicle* (MD = .406). Within the conflict frame category, *The Los Angeles Times* scored significantly higher than its two California counterparts, the *Sacramento Bee* (MD = .552) and the *San Francisco Chronicle* (MD = .450). Finally, within the morality frame, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported a distinctly lower usage of this frame than *The Los Angeles Times* (MD = -.486).

No meaningful differences were detected in any of the frame categories of the two Utah papers, *The Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News*. These two papers were most aligned in their usage of the economic frame (MD= .080) and the responsibility frame (MD= .083). It is worth noting that even though none of the difference in means between the two Utah papers reached the .200 level, the highest mark was in the morality frame (MD = .177).

RQ4: Did the News Frames used in the Coverage Prior to the Vote Differ from the Frames used After the Vote?

Research question four asked if the news frames used in the coverage prior to the vote differentiated from the frames used in coverage after the election. Of the 401 articles analyzed approximately two-thirds came after the proposition vote date (N=271) with the remaining one third coming prior to the vote (N=130). To answer RQ4, mean scores were calculated for each frame category prior to and after the vote. The mean scores across three of the frame categories indicated a shift in usage between the two time periods, with the responsibility frame

demonstrating the most visible change, nearly tripling by going from a mean score of .57 pre-vote to a mean of 1.49 post-vote. The human interest category saw the next strongest shift, moving down from a .95 pre-vote mean to a .55 post-vote score, with the conflict frame also showing a shift (pre-vote mean = 1.38, post-vote mean = 1.75). These results indicate that media outlets used the responsibility frame to cover Proposition 8 much more frequently after the vote, while also indicating a significant uptick in the use of the conflict frame following the November election. On the other hand, they show that the human interest frame was used less after the proposition vote. Media framed their coverage around morality and economic consequences similarly in both pre-vote and post-vote articles. Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics, including the mean scores for each frame prior to and after the vote.

Table 8

Average Mean Scores by Frame Pre and Post Vote

		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	MD
Responsibility	Pre vote	130	0.57	1.13	
	Post vote	271	1.49	1.52	0.92
Human Interest	Pre vote	130	0.95	1.47	
	Post vote	271	0.54	1.19	-0.41
Conflict	Pre vote	130	1.37	1.25	
	Post vote	271	1.75	1.45	0.38
Morality	Pre vote	130	0.97	1.21	
	Post vote	271	0.76	1.11	-0.21
Economic	Pre vote	130	0.64	1.03	
	Post vote	271	0.79	1.20	0.15

Pre vote were all articles published from Aug. 1, 2008 to Nov. 4, 2008. Post vote were all articles published between Nov. 5, 2008, and Feb. 28, 2009

Chapter V: Discussion

This study set out to determine how the media framed coverage of Proposition 8, a closely-watched ballot initiative that would ban gay marriage in the bellwether state of California. It also set out to determine if media outlets in California and Utah, framed their coverage differently than other media outlets, both within and outside their respective states. Assumptions about the readership, ownership and journalist bias of the selected newspapers – such as the heavily Mormon subscribers of the *Deseret News*, which is owned and operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint, and the historically gay-friendly community which makes up a large portion of *The San Francisco Chronicle's* audience – triggered research questions that would determine if there were, in fact, meaningful differences in the way these papers covered Proposition 8. The study leaned heavily on the frame measurement tool developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and applied by others (An & Gower, 2009), which detected the presence and strength of five frames: responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality, and economic consequence. This research found that there were a few frames from this list that dominated the coverage of Proposition 8, namely the conflict frame and the responsibility frame. This was partially consistent with Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) research, which found that the most dominant frames used in news coverage are the responsibility frame and conflict frame.

This study detected meaningful differences in framing choices between the selected newspapers – both across state lines and within same-state newspapers. It also found that there were meaningful differences in how the newspapers framed their coverage of Proposition 8 before and after the November vote. Frame analysis researchers have found that media frames

influence the perceptions, beliefs and understanding of issues (Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1993; Valkenburg et al. 1999). This is something that will be considered in this discussion.

Dominant Frame Usage

It was not surprising that the conflict frame was the most dominant of those measured in this study. Even before Proposition 8 was born, the issue of gay marriage had already become a controversial and emotional issue in the state of California. After Proposition 8 was put on the ballot, it immediately became a controversial issue in California and quickly spread to other states, such as Utah, where residents were highly interested in its passage or failure. It stands to reason that any time there is an issue in the public square that is supported and opposed at the same time with equal amounts of passionate, zealous and sometimes religious vigor, there will be conflict. Exactly two-thirds of all 401 stories analyzed had an element of conflict framing, with no paper having less than 61% of its stories containing this frame, and the highest conflict-frame-using newspaper, *The Los Angeles Times*, topping out at 76%. Even a sampling of headlines from *The Los Angeles Times* coverage shows a consistent reliance on words that depict conflict, such as split, fight or battle:

- “Prop. 8 splits priest and church” (Oct. 13, 2008)
- “A Prop. 8 fight over schools...foes cry foul” (Oct. 19, 2008)
- “Prop. 8 battle raised hostility, gay pair say” (Nov. 9, 2008)
- “Prop. 8 foes, backers still in thick of it (Nov. 22, 2008)
- “In the thick of Prop. 8 fight... (Dec. 21, 2008)
- “Proposition 8 supporters fight back (Jan. 6, 2009)

The question that can't be answered with this data is what caused the media to call so often on the conflict frame. Was it born of necessity? Was it merely the result of covering such a

controversial, emotional and personal issue with two equally zealous sides? More likely, it was the result of seasoned journalists applying one of the news values taught to them in journalism school and proven in their journalism careers. Even before they are reporters, young writers are taught in journalism courses a list of criteria that inform what is news worthy. The list of news values varies slightly based on who is teaching them, but there are generally about seven of them: impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, human interest, the bizarre, and conflict. Where there is conflict, there is news. Thus, applying their sense of news judgment, the reporters covering Proposition 8 could easily sense the conflict and use that to frame their stories. This appears to be what happened the highest percentage of the time.

Proposition 8 offered a perfect issue for which conflict between sides could be easily framed. Within the news stories themselves, the conflict was chiefly framed between those who opposed the ban, commonly referred to as “foes,” and those who supported the ban, “backers.” Both sides produced vocal leaders who pulled few punches, such as oft-quoted Yes on Proposition 8 campaign manager Frank Schubert. Schubert was outspoken prior to the vote (“This is an issue that involves one of the fundamental understandings in civilization -- that marriage has always been between a man and a woman,”), during the vote (“They can protest all they like, and it doesn't change the fact that Prop. 8 has passed and the election is now over.”) and after the vote (“It's unfortunate that the 'No on 8' campaign has devolved into personal attacks and statements of religious bigotry. If they think this is going to help their cause long term, they might want to consider a new strategy.”) On the other side of the spectrum, there was No on 8 manager Steve Smith fighting back: “I like the fact that the ‘Yes’ side is stuck in the mid-40s. The other side is clearly having trouble crossing the 50 percent barrier.” Smith even

traded punches with Schubert in the media: “If this campaign is about eliminating marriage as a right, Schubert loses. That's why he has to change the subject.”

Another approach to the conflict framing pitted people of faith against each other. An Oct. 26, 2008, story in the *Los Angeles Times* headlined, “Clergy vocalize stance on Prop. 8,” contrasted clergy that came out publicly opposed to the proposition – Lutheran ministers, Presbyterian ministers and 40% of California’s Jewish rabbis – to those who supported the measure, including Catholic, Baptist and Episcopalian church leaders. In that article, pro-Proposition 8 clergyman Rev. Lou Engle said, “We believe it is a religious issue as well as a political issue. And that’s where we feel the Church must have a word.” Part of the conflict framing was also done within particular faiths, especially that Catholic Church. One *Los Angeles Times* piece prior to the election concentrated on the conflict within a Fresno parish where the pastor (Father Geoffrey Farrow) was removed from his position after publicly preaching against Proposition 8 in defiance of the church’s stance on the issue. An excerpt from that article is illustrative of the conflict:

Farrow's comments at the end of the Oct. 5 Mass have left his congregation bitterly divided. On Sunday, some parishioners praised Farrow's courage for defending the rights of gays and lesbians, while others condemned him for challenging church doctrine without giving warning. "It upsets me that we are allowing a ballot proposition to come into our church and divide us," said Teresa Huerta, who teaches at Cal State Fresno. "We are going through changes right now in society and the church needs to recognize that." Frank Gallegos, a parishioner for 24 years, said he was dismayed that Farrow used the pulpit to deliver his message. "He ambushed us," Gallegos, 44, said while leaving the

white concrete-block church with his wife and two children. "I don't wish him ill. I just wish he hadn't done it during Mass." (LA Times, Oct. 13, 2008)

In addition to religious groups and religious individuals, and opposing campaign organizers, the conflict narrative was told generously through the lens of the "man on the street." From gay-activists to firefighters to businessmen and stay-at-home mothers, just about every person who appeared in the newspaper coverage came down on one side of the issue and there was always someone there to balance the other side. Entman (1993) suggested that in some cases, skillful media manipulators impose their dominant frames on journalists who lack a common understanding of framing. This does not appear to be the case in the coverage of Proposition 8. Instead, it seems apparent that the journalists observed that conflict was at the core of the issues, and, knowing the strength of controversy and conflict as a news value, they chose to frame it thusly in an effort to package the issue in a form easily consumable for readers.

It is also worth noting the slight discrepancy in the use of conflict framing between the newspapers analyzed – especially given that the actual events covered by each newspaper were essentially the same. There must be an explanation as to why the *Los Angeles Times* used an element of conflict framing 76% of the time when the *Sacramento Bee* used it 61% of the time. Kothari (2010) did find that biases of journalists and sources influences coverage; so perhaps this could explain the variation described herein. Maybe there is a significant difference in the way people six hours down the I-5 consume and understand media issues. Or perhaps it has nothing to do with journalist and source bias but everything to do with size of paper. It is possible the *Los Angeles Times*' national circulation of just under 1 million people (it was the second-largest metropolitan newspaper in circulation in the U.S. in 2008) caused editors there to lean more heavily on the conflict frame to cater to a more diverse audience than the *Bee*'s more local

readership of 250,000. In a major media market like Los Angeles, the competition for readership and relevance is much more intense than a regional city like Sacramento. Not only does the *Los Angeles Times* have to compete with myriad media outlets in Los Angeles, it is competing for eyeballs across the country. This is a likely explanation for the *Times*' heavy reliance on the conflict frame, and a likely explanation for why the *Times* outpaced every other newspaper studied in this treatment in use of this frame – it is the only major media market publication.

The second most frequently used frame was the responsibility frame. Overall, at least one element of this frame was used in 51% of stories. The range of usage across the five newspapers was fairly tight, with the *Deseret News* maxing out at 61% and the *Los Angeles Times* at 43%. It was also unsurprising that this frame was used so frequently, given the political nature of the issue and the accompanying legal and judicial elements that set the proposition in motion. The responsibility frame is mostly commonly used when there is a branch of government to be blamed for things not going as planned (An & Gower, 2009). Proposition 8 had just about every level of government involved, from the California Supreme Court that struck down the previous gay marriage ban, to local mayors, councilmembers and state politicians politicking for or against the proposition. Some headlines from the *San Francisco Chronicle* show this theme throughout the time period:

- “Judge refuses to order change in Prop. 8 title (Aug. 12, 2008)
- “State high court shows interest in Prop. 8 suits (Nov. 14, 2008)
- “Gay rights lobbyists target legislators (Feb. 15, 2009)

Proposition 8 even saw the national executive branch of government step into the storyline as stories often discussed the stance of both Republican nominee John McCain and Democratic nominee Barack Obama. Again from the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

- “Same sex marriage vote could tip balance in presidential race (Sept. 18, 2008)
- “Gays, lesbians hope clouded by Obama’s choice of pastor (Jan. 21, 2009).

In Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) model study, the authors surmise that a “predominance of the responsibility frame ... suggests the importance and potential influence of political culture and context on the framing of problems and topics in the news” (p. 106). This certainly seemed applicable in the coverage of Proposition 8. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) also found that the responsibility frame was used especially by the more serious news outlets that they studied. Unfortunately, this study made no attempt to measure or categorize the five newspapers according to their level of seriousness. An and Gower found that when reporting on crises, news media “tend to assign specific blame to the individual or organization and to attribute responsibility for the crisis to one or the other” (An & Gower, 2009, p. 5). This is interesting to consider seeing how the passage of Proposition 8 or failure of passage of Proposition 8 could be considered a crisis to the respective sides of the ballot issue. This study seems to support An & Gower’s (2009) finding in that in the wake of the passage of Proposition 8, the use of the responsibility frame shot up rapidly. It may be that those opposed to the gay marriage ban treated the situation as a crisis once the initiative was passed – one activist said “it took a catastrophe like this to really wake people up” – thus driving up the news media’s usage of responsibility attribution. The “assignment of blame” described by An and Gower (2009) was a major theme uncovered in this study. The blame fell to both individuals and groups, from religious organizations who worked to pass Proposition 8 to politicians who either didn’t do enough or did too much during the campaign.

Religious organizations were some of the most commonly blamed groups – especially The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or more commonly referred to as the Mormon

Church. No on 8 spokesman Steve Smith pointed his finger straight at Mormons even before the vote: “I don’t think we have ever seen a single religion in the state so significantly participate in one political campaign.” A *Deseret News* story with the headline, “Why Mormons are the Prop. 8 villains,” quoted a political expert as saying: “It was clear that the LDS Church was a key spearhead in terms of organizing and supporting the Proposition 8 effort.” Another story addressing the blame put on the LDS Church carried one of myriad comments directing anger at Mormons: “At a fundamental level, the Utah Mormons crossed the line on this one,” said gay-rights activist John Aravosis, an influential blogger in Washington, D.C. “They just took marriage away from 20,000 couples and made their children bastards. You don’t do that and get away with it.” A significant number of stories framed Proposition 8 as an issue of responsibility, with the LDS Church as the responsible institution:

- “Utah boycott likely after LDS Prop. 8 push” (*Deseret News*, Nov. 11, 2008)
- “Leaders of gay Mormon group criticize church” (*Deseret News*, Oct. 12, 2008)
- “Mormons feel the backlash over their support of Prop. 8:” (*LA Times*, Nov. 17, 2008)
- “A year of scrutiny for the LDS Church” (*Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec. 26, 2008)
- “Prop. 8 involvement a P.R. fiasco for LDS Church (*Salt Lake Tribune*, Nov. 21, 2008)

Joining the LDS Church in receiving the blame was the Catholic Church. In a *San Francisco Chronicle* article dated Nov. 11, 2008, headlined, “Catholics, Mormons joined to pass Prop. 8,” the author wrote: “By bringing together Mormons and Catholics, Archbishop George Neiderauer would align the two most powerful religious institutions in the Prop. 8 battle.” Other headlines from the *San Francisco Chronicle* addressed the Catholic Church’s involvement:

- “Catholics played a pivotal role in the success of Proposition 8” (Nov. 22, 2008)
- “Clergy’s role a wedge for many Catholics” (Nov. 22, 2008)

- “To pass measure, Catholics and Mormons allied” (Nov. 11, 2008)

Another group held responsible for the passage of Proposition 8 was African Americans.

A *Los Angeles Times* story published two days after the vote addressed the issue directly:

“California voters showed that black voters sided in favor of the measure by margins of more than 2 to 1. Not only was the black vote weighted heavily in favor of Proposition 8, but black turnout -- spurred by Barack Obama's campaign for president -- was unusually large, making up roughly 10% of the voters.” Likewise, a story from the *San Francisco Chronicle* that published two days after the vote attributed a portion of the responsibility for Proposition 8’s passage to African Americans: “African American voters had no trouble voting overwhelmingly for [Obama, who opposed Proposition 8], who will be the nation’s first black president, and then voting 70 percent in favor of Prop. 8, exit polls showed.”

Still, other gay marriage opponents blamed friendly fire, such as San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, who, famously (or infamously) celebrated the California Supreme Court’s May 2008 ruling that the gay-marriage ban was unconstitutional by declaring, “This door is wide open now! It's going to happen -- whether you like it or not!” The line was used against gay marriage proponents in television commercials and other campaign materials by the Yes on Proposition 8 campaign over and over. In light of Newsom’s involvement, many news articles addressed his role in the blame game, such as the Nov. 6, 2008, *Los Angeles Times* story that said, “Some political figures have criticized Newsom for pushing the issue too fast. But he rejected that idea. ‘I don't regret anything,’ he said. ‘I don't regret standing up for people.’” Upset gay marriage advocates also pointed the finger at No on 8 campaign manager Steve Smith, who was pushed out of his position three weeks prior to the vote for being too “slow to counter TV ads in which

the measure's supporters claimed that same-sex marriage would be promoted in schools if the measure failed," reported the *Sacramento Bee* on Nov. 13, 2008.

Given the complicated layers of Proposition 8, it is not surprising that the next most-commonly used frame, morality, was only used slightly less than the conflict and responsibility frames. Proposition 8 was, after all, a ballot initiative that was very much a moral issue for many individuals, meaning that people's religious and personal values were closely tied to their support or opposition to the measure. The *Deseret News* used the morality frame more than the other media in this study, which confirmed assumptions prior to the study that the heavily Mormon readership and the LDS Church ownership of that outlet may influence how the issue was framed. This will be discussed in depth in the following section, but it was expected that owners, reporters and readers of the *Deseret News* were likely to think of Proposition 8 as a moral issue because of their religious influence and religious background.

Since Proposition 8 was an item on the ballot of a state's general election, and given the important role money plays in elections, there was an expectation that economic consequences would be a natural frame used by the media. Money certainly was a significant factor in Proposition 8, yet the economic consequences frame was not frequently used, perhaps because the other frames analyzed in this study more closely fit the specific nature of Proposition 8. It was surprising that the human interest frame scored so low in its usage, since the passage or failure of Proposition 8 also carried with it a very personal outcome in the lives of many California residents.

Varying Media Framing Choices

The results of the analysis showed some meaningful difference in the frames chosen by media in Utah and those of California in their coverage of Proposition 8. The most meaningful

difference, the one that reported the strongest mean difference score among all of the categories was surrounding the usage of the morality frame. The data revealed that the *Deseret News* used elements of the morality frame more than twice as much as the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Throughout the time period studied herein – and especially in the weeks prior to the vote – the *Deseret News* carried stories heavily focused on the moral nature of gay marriage, following closely the LDS Church and members of the LDS Church and their statements on the issue. An article dated Aug. 23, 2008, is completely dedicated to what one LDS professor says are the moral pitfalls of same-sex marriage. One quote from this professor, Lynn Wardle, is illustrative of this framing: “Making same-sex marriage legal will harm you and your family the same way polygamous marriage to 14 year olds will harm you. It will transform the meaning, expectations and practices of marriage as a social institution and affects everyone who has a stake in marriage.” Another quote later in the same story is even more poignant:

Traditional marriage contributes much more to society than any other form of adult intimate relationship, and is the bedrock of society's cultural infrastructure. It is the instrument of the most important moral transformation of individuals, who enjoy the most healthy, satisfying and socially beneficial sexual relations. Gay sex differs in critical ways, from that between husband and wife, he said, beyond the lack of offspring. The major transmission method for the AIDS virus is through sex between men in every area of the world other than sub-Saharan Africa.

Though the *San Francisco Chronicle* was careful to present both sides of the gay-marriage issue throughout the campaign, it steered clear of sources such as Wardle that spoke so strongly on the predicted moral implications of gay marriage. Meanwhile, stories with headlines

focused on morality and the LDS Church appeared frequently in the *Deseret News* in the time leading up to the vote:

- “Gay marriage criticized” (Aug. 23, 2008)
- “LDS Church issues statement on same-sex marriage (Sept. 10, 2008)
- “LDS Church affirms its right to speak out, urges voting (Sept. 22, 2008)
- “Proposition 8 gains interfaith support” (Oct. 25, 2008)
- “It’s not odd if churches back Prop. 8 (Nov. 2, 2008)

During that same time frame, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published stories focused largely on poll numbers, campaign tactics and the financial aspect of the proposition. When mention of the LDS Church did appear in its stories, it was framed around conflict and not around a message of morality. A simple comparison of headlines from the *San Francisco Chronicle* that ran on similar dates to the *Deseret News* stories listed above shows a stark contrast in the approaches of these two newspapers:

- “Ban on gay marriages trailing in state poll” (Aug. 28, 2008)
- “Same-sex marriage vote could tip balance in presidential race” (Sept. 9, 2008)
- “Same-sex marriage ban failing to win over voters (Sept. 25, 2008)
- “Money pours into effort to defeat Proposition 8 (Oct. 25, 2008)
- “Mormons denounced over Prop. 8 (Oct. 27, 2008)

Han et al. (2009) found that media framing of political topics – which Proposition 8 certainly is – can both influence reader perceptions of the issues and influence political attitudes and behaviors. The difference in framing between these two newspapers therefore suggests that the attitudes and political behaviors of *Deseret News* readers and *San Francisco Chronicle* readers may have been affected differently surrounding Proposition 8. Specifically, that readers

of the *Deseret News* may have been more likely to see the ballot initiative as a moral issue, while those of the *San Francisco Chronicle* did not see it as such. Certainly, however, readers bring their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviors to the table prior to consuming a framed media story. This research did not set out to determine the effect of the media framing, but merely the presence and variation of those frames across media. Why these two newspaper outlets chose to frame the issue differently is, however worthy of inspection.

This contrast may be the result of any number of factors, though this treatment will focus on the most plausible factor affecting the media framing choices of these two papers. The *Deseret News* is owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a Christian faith that was publicly in favor of Proposition 8 (The Church of Jesus Christ, 2009). Though the editorial board of the *Deseret News* had in years past kept a certain distance from its church ownership, that distance had been trimmed significantly around the time of Proposition 8, as evidenced by the production of *The Mormon Times*, a section of the paper dedicated to its Latter-day Saint readership, reported on by the same journalists filling the pages of the regular paper. In fact, the majority of readers of the *Deseret News* are members of the LDS faith, and, whether or not they agreed with Proposition 8, they most likely saw the issue as a moral issue, given their church had come out in support of the proposition and had explicitly explained it as a moral issue. The *San Francisco Chronicle*, on the other hand, is not owned by a church, and is based in the city most closely associated with the gay-rights movement. San Francisco has the highest percentage of residents who are gay, estimated at more than 15%, and is home to the Castro, one of North America's first and best-known gay villages (Gates, 2006). Likewise, San Francisco is the top ranked U.S. city in number of same-sex couples, with more than 30 couples for every 1,000 household (Gates & Cooke, 2011). Gay-rights advocates did not see Proposition 8 as a moral

issue, but rather as a civil rights issue. Thus, it stands to logic that the newspaper covering Proposition 8 for a heavily LGBT-friendly population would choose not to frame the issue with a morality frame.

Utah's other newspaper, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, also used the morality frame quite a bit more than the *San Francisco Chronicle*, but not nearly as much as the *Deseret News*. It is interesting to note that, based on this finding, the *Salt Lake Tribune* appears to take up a spot somewhere between the two extremes of the *Chronicle* and the *Deseret News*: the *Tribune* was at least in some part more likely to use the morality frame than the *Chronicle*, but not as likely as the *Deseret News*. Certainly its being located in the same city as the headquarters of the LDS Church influenced the *Tribune* to cover Proposition 8 more along moral lines than its San Francisco counterpart. Though not analyzed in this study, it would be expected that the *Tribune*'s stories mentioned the LDS Church more often than those in the *Chronicle*. Additionally, a significant portion of the *Tribune*'s readership are LDS, and, like the *Deseret News*, this fact likely caused *Tribune* reporters to frame stories in ways they believed were more relevant to their readers; in this case, framed around morality.

Still within the morality frame, the statistics also revealed meaningful differences between the *Deseret News* and the *Sacramento Bee*, but to a much lesser degree than the two relationships examined in the previous two paragraphs (*Deseret News* vs. *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Salt Lake Tribune* vs. *San Francisco Chronicle*). The *Bee* is located in a city with far fewer members of the LDS Church than Salt Lake City (Pew, 2009), but also fewer gay-rights advocates than San Francisco (Gates, 2006). There was no meaningful difference between the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Sacramento Bee*, but there was a difference between the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Los Angeles Times* in the data set. In answering this question, the

research basically created a continuum for the usage of the morality frame, with the *Deseret News* at one extreme, the *San Francisco Chronicle* on the other extreme, and the other three newspapers in line, closest to their sister publications in state:

MOST MORALITY FRAME USAGE -----> LESS MORALITY FRAME USAGE
Deseret News→*Salt Lake Tribune*→*L.A. Times*→*Sacramento Bee*→*San Francisco Chronicle*

This simple diagram helps inform more clearly an emerging picture of how location and the cultural/religious influence of ownerships and its readership played a role in how that newspaper framed Proposition 8. The two papers closest to the LDS Church’s headquarters, and the majority of its members, used the morality frame most frequently, with the Church-owned paper being the extreme, while those closest to the gay-rights movement used the morality frame least frequently. It is worth mentioning that Sacramento is only about 85 miles from San Francisco (a 1.5-hour drive) while Los Angeles is nearly 400 miles away (a 6.5-hour drive). The *Los Angeles Times*’ place in the middle of this continuum may also be explained by its larger, more national readership, which may have caused editors to select more stories with moral framing as opposed to the more regional papers in Sacramento and San Francisco.

The other result worth mentioning here is the meaningful difference in usage of the human interest frame between the *Sacramento Bee* and the *Deseret News*. While the *Bee* continued to frame its Proposition 8 coverage around individuals affected by the vote long after November – such as Torie Osborn, a rookie at a gay and lesbian campaign boot camp, or Bill Camp, the executive secretary of the Sacramento Central Labor Council who has a gay son who married before Proposition 8 passed, or even LDS member Scott Eckern who felt pressure to

resign as the director of the California Musical Theatre after his donation to Proposition 8 brought threats of a boycott – the *Deseret News* reported using frames of morality and conflict. The coverage of Scott Eckern is particularly informative. While the *Sacramento Bee* devoted an entire story of more than 40 inches to Eckern’s personal fallout from Proposition 8, the *Deseret News* gave it only two short paragraphs in a story focused more on conflict and protests following the vote. This was particularly telling, given Eckern’s LDS faith and the *Deseret News*’ heavy interest in covering LDS issues. Despite the story seemingly being one of human interest, the *Deseret News* chose not to use that frame – as it did in many cases, as evidenced by the paper having the lowest mean score across all categories, in the human interest category (.46).

As mentioned previously, it was expected that the human interest frame would be used more liberally because of the specific effect Proposition 8 would have on individuals – especially gay and lesbian couples in California who would be banned from marrying. Valkenburg et al. (1999) said the human interest frame is used to “personalize, dramatize and, emotionalize the news” (p. 551) – approaches that would seem to prove convenient to cover the issue at hand. It was assumed that the newspapers with higher gay-friendly readerships, or the California papers, would use this frame even more so.

As it turned out, this frame was not only the least used of all the frames (just more than 25% of articles had an element of human interest), but it was only used somewhat significantly by the *Sacramento Bee*. More surprisingly, the *Bee* used this frame substantially more than the *San Francisco Chronicle* as well, which was assumed would not be the case given the gay-rights advocacy of the area. This research provides no adequate reason for this result. It would seem to make sense that the paper most closely associated with a church in favor of Proposition 8 would

not be telling stories of possible victims of the measure, complete with personal vignettes that spark emotions of sympathy or anger. But for the *Deseret News* and the *Chronicle* to use this frame so similarly when they were extreme opposites on usage of the morality frame is puzzling. In fact, by sheer percentages, the *Deseret News* actually had a larger percentage of its stories carry an element of this frame (26.1%) than the *Chronicle* (23.9%). The only reasonable explanation this researcher can suggest is that the editorial approach of the *Sacramento Bee* simply relies more heavily on the use of human interest frames than the other papers analyzed herein. The only way to test this assumption accurately would be to carry out an additional extensive analysis on a sample of articles from the *Bee* that covered varying subjects outside of the Proposition 8 debate. This study did not approach this additional analysis. It should be noted that the higher use of the human interest frame may have had, however, a negative impact on the readers of the *Bee*. Previous research has found that use of the human interest frame had a negative impact on reader recall (Valkenburg et al., 1999).

Framing Choices within State Papers

As has been established, there were a handful of meaningful differences in framing choices between same-state papers discovered in the data mined in this study. The previous section of this chapter already addressed the varying levels of the human interest frame between the *Sacramento Bee* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, for which an adequate determination as to why this occurred requires further analysis outside the scope of this study. The other frame that was found to be used differently among the California newspapers was the conflict frame – and in this case, the *Los Angeles Times* was more closely aligned with the two Utah papers than its state sister papers. This was one of the more surprising revelations, especially since the three California papers covered similar events during the time frame. In fact, the counts of stories for

each of the California papers that used at least one element of the conflict frame were also quite similar – all between 60 and 51.

So why did the *Los Angeles Times* use elements of the conflict frame more often? One possibility is that the journalists there are trained to cater to a more national and international audience – a diverse audience with diverse beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. While the *Bee* and the *Chronicle* are considered more regional papers, the *Times* is the fourth largest newspaper in the country with a readership of nearly 1 million people on Sundays and serves a major media market. It seems plausible that, knowing the diversity of their audience, the *Times* consciously decided to use the frame they believed would be easiest for their wide audience in understanding Proposition 8. Furthermore, it could be the conflict frame was the most effective way for this paper to capture the attention of that diverse audience; an audience that has several other options when it comes to consuming media. It could simply come down to competition and an effort of making their journalistic product more enticing. After all, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) did find that more serious newspapers tended to use the conflict frame more often. Perhaps this means the *Los Angeles Times* was attempting to operate as a more serious paper than its two California neighbors. Or, maybe, the *Los Angeles Times*' national and international market simply forces it to be a more serious paper.

Whatever the reason for this framing choice, framing theory suggests that the readers of the *Los Angeles Times* were therefore more likely to think of Proposition 8 as a story of conflict, rather than a story of morality or human interest. Research has shown that when there is limited information, the perception of events or issues by readers may be more dependent upon specific news frames (Han et al., 2009). So while the regional audiences of the *Bee* and the *Chronicle* may have understood Proposition 8 with a more holistic view of its complicated layers of human

emotion, moral convictions and legal struggle, the national and international readers of the *Times* perhaps understood it simply as a conflict between two sides of a problem.

Time and its Influence on Framing

One of the strongest findings of this study was that the media framing changed substantially over time. The use of the responsibility frame and the conflict frame shot up dramatically following the November vote, while the application of the human interest frame dropped off precipitously. These findings were not totally unexpected.

When Proposition 8 passed, opponents immediately went on the offensive. They were not going to simply walk away and accept being on the losing side. Within days, legal challenges were filed to the gay marriage ban. At the same time, gay-marriage advocates started pointing fingers both at their own campaign leaders and at the opposition in general, trying to figure out who was to blame for the loss. Pro-gay groups targeted their anger and emotions to Proposition 8 supporters, singling out Mormons and African Americans for their role. For it was now the fault of these individuals and groups that gay and lesbian couples could not marry. And journalists were ready to amplify that message with the complementing frames of conflict and responsibility.

Having assumed incorrectly that they would come out on the winning side, gay-marriage advocates entered into a crisis mode following the vote. An and Gower (2009) found that in crisis coverage, the attribution of responsibility frame is the most predominantly used frame. This research supports that finding; when Proposition 8 went from a political issue to a crisis, the media both in California and Utah predominantly used the responsibility frame.

Meanwhile, the human interest frame dropped off dramatically. This is also consistent with An and Gower's (2009) research, which found that human interest is not a frame

predominantly used in crises coverage. As mentioned previously, there was no significant change in the use of morality and economic consequence before and after the vote.

If academics are to believe framing theory, then this sharp uptick in responsibility and conflict framing, combined with the decline of human interest framing, means that audiences also had a shift in their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about Proposition 8 before and after the vote. This suggests that in the aftermath of the election, audiences were less likely to be concerned about the individuals affected (human interest) by the vote results, and more likely to see the issue as a problem that needed to be fixed – or at least blamed on someone. The shift away from human interest framing likely had little positive or negative effect on either side of the issue since this frame wasn't used heavily to begin with. No longer were media writing about the human interest element of the issue, but they weren't really using the morality or economic consequence frame either; they were writing about what went wrong or right in the election. And almost always, the things that went wrong tend to take the lion's share of the media coverage. Therefore, this transition in framing by the media perhaps favored the gay-marriage advocates, giving them momentum in future legal fights. It is impossible to know. Of course, two years later, U.S. District Court Judge Vaughn R. Walker overturned the gay-marriage ban (Dolan, 2010), ruling it unconstitutional. And in February 2012 a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals panel affirmed that ruling in a 2-1 decision. It would be informative for additional research to study the media framing of Proposition 8 in the four years since its passage.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This purpose of this study was to determine how the media in Utah and California framed their coverage of Proposition 8, and to determine if that coverage varied between outlets. This research revealed that in the coverage of this particular political issue, the stories were framed predominantly with the conflict frame and the attribution of responsibility frame. This finding is mostly consistent with previous content analyses of media framing on political topics, which found that attribution of responsibility is generally the most dominant frame (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; An & Gower, 2009; Li & Mogensen, 2002). The fact that conflict was the most predominantly used news frame, however, is not consistent with previous studies. Since Proposition 8 was such a divisive political issue that spanned many layers of human involvement and emotion, as well as religious and moral beliefs, it was not surprising that conflict was the frame that carried the message most often. As the old journalistic saying goes, “If it bleeds, it leads.” The research shows that perhaps the most controversial political issue of 2008 was, in fact, presented to audiences by media as a story of conflict more than any other frame.

The time analysis of the research produced a finding also consistent with previous research: that in crises coverage, media tend to frame issues with the responsibility frame (An & Gower, 2009). When Proposition 8 passed, opponents went into crisis mode, and subsequently, the coverage shifted strongly toward the responsibility frame. This research supports the modern notion that when things go wrong, everybody involved is looking to find out who is responsible for the failure – especially the journalists. To this end, then, this small bit of research deserves to be added to the field of literature that supports this argument that crisis coverage is framed by news media with the responsibility frame.

The most relevant finding of this study, and perhaps the finding that is most worthy to be added to the body of literature on framing is this: newspapers from one state framed the same story and same issues substantially different. Specifically, Utah papers the *Deseret News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* were more likely to cover Proposition 8 from a morality standpoint than the California papers. In fact, the further the media outlet was from the epicenter of the story, and the closer it was to the LDS Church's headquarters, the more likely it was to use the morality frame. The data showed a near perfect alignment with use of the morality frame and the distance from San Francisco. The *San Francisco Chronicle* used very little of the moral frame, and, the *Sacramento Bee* used it slightly more, the *Los Angeles Times* more so again, and then on to the *Salt Lake Tribune* and finally the *Deseret News*. The results of this study support Kothari's (2010) research, which determined that the biases and motives of journalists and their sources significantly influence coverage, and in this case, the way in which media frame a story. The *Deseret News*' strong LDS readership – not to mention its ties and its journalists' ties to the Church – influenced the way those reporters framed their Proposition 8 coverage. The reporters used morality to frame the story more often than every other paper analyzed. To a lesser degree, the LDS readership of the *Salt Lake Tribune* also influenced its framing of the story along the usage of the morality frame. In the same vein, the non-LDS, gay-rights advocates that make up nearly a fifth of the San Francisco community, influenced the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s coverage of Proposition 8 in that the paper did not frame it as a moral issue. The argument of gay-marriage supporters throughout the ordeal has always been that Proposition 8 is not a moral issue, but a civil rights issue. That media from one country often frame an issue significantly different than media of another country has already been established by previous research (Danis & Stohl, 2008; Kim & Lee, 2003; Kothari, 2010). This research suggests that media in different

states also frame their coverage differently, presumably in attempts to resonate more closely with their readers.

Limitations of Research

This research was limited in its scope and analysis. Only five newspapers were selected for the analysis, two in Utah and three in California. A more comprehensive analysis would include all the major daily newspapers in both states, with a minimum circulation requirement to be satisfied. A content analysis of a wider sample of newspapers would not only provide more data, but also a clearer image of how the issue was covered throughout the states in question. The current treatment focused largely on three metropolitan areas of California – San Francisco, Sacramento and Los Angeles – and largely on the Wasatch Front area of Utah; Salt Lake City, Ogden and Provo. Thus, this study did not reflect coverage from several major populations in California, including, but not limited to San Diego, Fresno and Northern California, nor did it reflect coverage in the areas of Logan and St. George, Utah.

This study was also limited to only newspapers and did not seek to analyze the coverage of broadcast or online media outlets. A content analysis of the broadcast media coverage of Proposition 8 would allow for comparison between mediums as well as more depth of data across state lines. The current researcher chose to limit this content analysis to newspapers to more effectively use the research measurement tool adopted. A more expansive study of all broadcast, online and print media of Proposition 8 would also require a considerable increase of resources and manpower. This, however, would be a worthy effort if such a group of researchers were able to carry this out.

The study was also limited to a specific time frame – from three months prior to the November 2008 ballot vote to three months after the vote. There would be little benefit in

extending the time limitation back further since no coverage of “Proposition 8” existed prior to its arrival by petition on the state ballot. However, there would be benefit in extending the period of coverage to be analyzed out beyond the three months post vote. Given that the issue has continued to be reported on media as it has traveled through the legal system, there would be benefit in extending the coverage out to the current time. There would certainly be less news articles to analyze, but the extension by years would allow researchers to compare media frames over a period of years. This would certainly add rich value to the evolution of the issue itself and the evolution of media coverage in a time where news media are facing uncertain times.

Finally, this study was limited in that the content analysis observed only the presence of five specific media frames: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality, and economic consequence. A more comprehensive study could expand to consider additional frames emergent in the coverage. A few frames that surfaced during this research, but were not measured, included race/ethnicity, as well as a legal frame. Further research may also consider investigation of the nature of the framing, based on the theoretical framework of Iyengar (1991). Namely researchers may want to determine whether the framing of Proposition 8 was episodic (referring to specific events) or thematic (referring to more analytical, contextual or historical coverage).

Further Research Recommended

As mentioned previously, this research is not to be mistaken as a comprehensive analysis of the media treatment of Proposition 8. Further research should revisit this particular issue, with a more expansive effort that includes a larger sample of media outlets – including broadcast and online media – over a longer period of time. Value would also be added to this area of research by an element of audience survey and interview to obtain data on the experiences, beliefs,

perceptions and attitudes individuals had while consuming the media coverage of Proposition 8. This would allow testing that would provide a stronger connection between actual media framing choices and the recorded perceptions of media consumers.

This study helps open the door for research to a cornucopia of issues outside of Proposition 8 that also cross state lines in their scope. Additional research along the lines of media framing across state lines should be pursued. There appears to be insufficient research on the media framing of issues by news outlets in separate states. This research arena appears ripe for activity, especially given the diverse demographics of the United States and the regularity of issues that transcend state lines. Applying similar research to the media framing of issues such as presidential campaigns, immigration debates, healthcare reform and other national issues could paint a rich picture of both the media landscape and the audiences.

It is recommended that additional pursuit of studies that compare the media framing by competing types of media – broadcast, newspaper and online – be pursued. Such studies exist, but not in a great enough quantity to establish a strong foundation of literature about the differences in media behavior. This particular line of research is especially worthy of pursuit given the new and changing nature of online media production. Such research could help determine whether the literature on media framing holds up in describing news media outlets that operate drastically different than they did even five or 10 years ago. It is recommended that future media framing analyses address this aspect specifically by carrying out studies that compare the current coverage of one particular newspaper/media outlet of an issue with the coverage of that same newspaper/media outlet of a similar issue five, 10 or even 20 years prior. Perhaps Proposition 8 itself, which is still undecided four years after its introduction, will remain unresolved in future years, thus providing a suitable subject for this very recommended analysis.

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