


Framing an LGBT organization and a movement: A critical qualitative analysis of GLAAD'S media releases

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Abstract

Combining the mass communication theories of agenda building and framing with a critical analysis of power, this study examined how an LGBT organization, GLAAD, used media releases to build and frame its message into public discourse. By analyzing 213 of GLAAD's media releases from 2011 through 2012, this study, applying queer theory, critically examined how the releases defined the organization and indicated levels of power within the LGBT rights movement and the greater society. Overall, GLAAD's releases indicated an emphasis on issues of violence and vulnerability against LGBT individuals and the promotion of LGBT celebrities and allies at media events. This showed the organization and the media's lack of attention in promoting or covering less sensational LGBT issues based in principles of equality or relating to non-famous LGBT individuals. While the releases demonstrated an overall lack of power for non-elite individuals within the movement, the inclusion of social media and online petitions created by LGBT activists indicated new forms of public relations models that moved away from two-way symmetrical or asymmetrical approaches and toward fluid and dynamic models, allowing individual LGBT stakeholders greater power within the LGBT rights movement.

Keywords

Agenda building, framing, critical public relations theory, GLAAD, power and public relations, queer theory

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Introduction

It seems a distant past that Ellen Degeneres came out on American television (1997) and *Will and Grace* (1998) became a cultural phenomenon. Now, the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy is gone, a sitting American president has openly supported same-sex marriage, and multiple states have publicly voted to support equal marriage rights for the first time. It is also a time when GLAAD, arguably the media arm of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights movement in the USA, recently reframed its purpose. In 1985, GLAAD (originally standing for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) started as a media watchdog organization in response to outrage over the media's homophobic news coverage of the AIDS epidemic (Gross, 2001). GLAAD later expanded its scope beyond news coverage to also examine portrayals of sexual minorities in entertainment and other areas of mass media (Gross, 2001). The organization long argued that 'words and images matter' as it focused its goals on 'promoting and ensuring fair, accurate and inclusive representation of people and events in the media as a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination' with an aim to 'grow acceptance, understanding and build support for equality' (GLAAD, 2013). These goals expanded in 2013 when, adjusting for new realities, the organization became known simply as GLAAD, dropping the original words behind its full name that indicated an organization that only covered issues of media portrayal of gays and lesbians to one that now changes culture through other means and also represents other sexual minorities, such as transgender individuals (Ferraro, 2013). GLAAD's redefinition epitomizes itself as the media relations arm of LGBT individuals as it works with news, entertainment, sports, and social media in an attempt to share LGBT stories in an aim to change society (GLAAD, 2013).

The purpose of this study is multi-fold. Critical work in public relations has been lacking, (Motion and Weaver, 2005) despite the need for minority organizations to build and frame messages in the mass media that are able to reach the majority community, creating a ripe area for a critical examination of inherent issues of power. By analyzing two years of GLAAD's media releases prior to its redefinition, this research fills a current gap in the literature by critically examining what these strategic decisions indicate about power within both the minority social movement and society at-large.

Literature review

Mass communication theoretical framework

Agenda building occurs when efforts 'increase the salience of certain topics over others in news media content' (Kiousis and Wu, 2008: 58–59). Public relations initiatives have been found to commonly and effectively set the media agenda (Curtin, 1999; Kiousis et al., 2007). This occurs as public relations practitioners act as *information subsidies*, communicating tailored information to journalists and newsmakers (Kiousis and Wu, 2008). Information subsidies commonly employ the use of media releases that inform the media about what topics to cover and how to cover them, especially in an age of newsroom cost-cutting and the need for more and more content (Kim and Kiousis, 2012).

News coverage has been shown to duplicate content from media releases, even verbatim, highlighting the continued importance and effectiveness of releases (Grimmer, 2010).

Agenda building has a second level of analysis that examines how the topics are *framed* by information subsidies. Framing 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, casual interpretation, more evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation of the item described' (Entman, 1993: 52). While agenda building tells newsmakers *what* to think about, framing tells them *how* to think about the salient issue (McCombs and Ghanem, 2001). This occurs as various attributes of the broader issue are highlighted, and these salient attributes thus frame how the receiver views the topic (McCombs and Ghanem, 2001). This 'selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes' (McCombs, 1997: 37) creates a 'central organizing idea' on how receivers then perceive an issue (Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 3). This is an argument of accessibility as receivers react to these framed attributes based on their prominence in coverage (Hester and Gibson, 2003).

Critical theory framework

As framing analysis can examine how a minority organization strategically tailored topic attributes in its agenda-building efforts, it is important to consider what these decisions indicate about the organization's placement within society as well as its standing with the minority community it represents. Public relations research has often avoided critically examining discourse despite that the very essentials of the 'practice itself might promote certain values ... but not others', indicating societal power dynamics (Motion and Weaver, 2005: 51). Motion and Weaver summarize the need for public relations scholars 'to investigate how public relations practice uses particular discursive strategies to advance the hegemonic power of particular groups and to examine how these groups attempt to gain public consent to pursue their organizational mission' (2005: 50). Practitioners use strategies that ultimately illustrate a 'struggle for and negotiation of power' as public relations are used to 'reproduce the status quo or transform society' (2005: 50). This study looks at a minority organization that was attempting to do the latter from arguably a lower position of power, allowing for a suitable application of queer theory, consistent with a recent call from public relations scholars to utilize more queer theory approaches to critical public relations work (Tindall and Waters, 2012).

Queer theory attempts to disrupt a power structure that has portrayed the hetero as the norm (Goldman, 1996). It critiques societal actions and discourses that create sexual categories and identities, be it lesbian, gay, or straight, rigid and non-fluid definitions of sexuality that force individuals into overly confined labels while further allowing for heteronormative power dynamics to develop and remain in place (Butler, 1990). Housed in the notion that individuals are composed of too many characteristics to be compartmentalized into one category, it is against the notion of queer theory to, for example, define and essentialize two lesbians into the same generic category as they may otherwise be extremely diverse in their habits, lifestyles, and backgrounds (Tindall and Waters, 2012).

From a strategic perspective, it has been argued that sexual minority tactics have relied on binaries, furthering the notion that sexual minorities are indeed a minority and thus different, allowing a core sexual identity to remain (Stein and Plummer, 1994). An analysis of LGBT advocacy organizations found that the groups used equality as a strategic frame in order to speak to majority audiences, highlighting the difficulty for minority organizations to be disruptive while also communicating to publics outside of the LGBT activist base (Mundy, 2010). As social movement and cultural change organizations such as GLAAD operate in a political and communication context, queer theory can be used to critically examine the goals, actions, and discourse employed by these minority organizations for issues of power.

Housed within a queer theory lens is a notion of strategic essentialism, a critical examination at how a group strategically decides to portray its members in a specific, or essentialized, manner in hopes of achieving its goals, even if it ignores certain realities or truths of the overall group (Spivak, 1990). This utilitarian approach is used to improve the image of the minority community within the eyes of the majority in hopes of changing society overall (Eide, 2010). The notion is that a hopefully *temporary* essentializing, what would amount to a positive stereotyping and branding of the group, may be necessary to accomplish this goal, even if there are other negatives created (Furniss, 1993). Consistent with queer theory, a core of criticism occurs as, even amongst small minority groups, great diversity occurs, and these framing techniques and strategies may create a stereotype of a group that misrepresents certain members who do not share some or all of the portrayed characteristics (Eide, 2010). This is complemented by public relations research that speaks to the difficulty of an organization to communicate and represent the 'diverse needs, values, and perspectives' of all of its stakeholders (Trujillo and Toth, 1987: 216).

As a minority organization has to conform to societal power structures, it becomes difficult to represent the interests of the group it supposedly serves. This process indicates a power dynamic within the minority group itself as more powerful members of the group are able to make strategic decisions that may exclude diverse characteristics of those who have less power within the subgroup (Spivak, 1990). Doyle's (2005) previous research on GLAAD found that the organization's power structure became dominated by more mainstream gay and lesbian media professionals while LGBT activists commonly became outsiders, regulated to criticizing GLAAD's actions as being too corporate and assimilated. Persons with organizational power can thus build and frame not only the organization's goals but also define the movement's members through strategically characterized representations, as created in part by the organization's public relations materials. Still, there are public relations tactics that may allow more power for lower level individual stakeholders in an attempt to 'counter or resist a dominance model', including a technique of 'build(ing) alliances with other(s)' (Berger, 2005: 18).

From a public relations perspective, analysis of communication models between an organization and its LGBT stakeholders allows for a critical examination of internal movement power dynamics. Two-way *asymmetrical* communication attempts to persuade and manipulate an audience to adopt the organization's viewpoint (Grunig, 1992) as the organization attempts to 'tailor their communication to allay the concerns of stakeholders' without changing the behavior of the organization (Roper, 2005: 69). In

contrast, two-way *symmetrical* communication ‘is characterized by a willingness of an organization to listen and respond to the concerns and interests of its key stakeholders’ as it utilizes a response to those concerns that is truly ‘substantive’ (Roper, 2005: 69). Still, some scholars have argued for conceptualizations of public relations that extend beyond these binaries that force a separation between internal or external publics (Durham, 2005). Durham has argued that a holistic view would appreciate that ‘all parties are affected by any (public relations) interaction’ (2005: 33), a necessary reality as power dynamics are ‘not stable’ or ‘permanently fixed’ (Berger, 2005: 16), arguments directly complementary to the core of queer theory that attempts to critique reality as not static but fluid. Thus, an organization is not operating in a vacuum and is instead ‘bound to’ those it affects ‘within a common social context’ (Durham, 2005: 35). Especially as scholars examine the impact of social media platforms on organizational communication models (Ciszek, 2013), an argument (Durham, 2005) that these models may be broader and more fluid than potentially outdated two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical models is strengthened.

Applying this theoretical framework to GLAAD, following an inductive thematic review of the topics the organization attempted to build and frame into the public agenda, a critical analysis was applied to examine what these strategic decisions indicated about: (a) power between the organization and society; (b) power between the organization and its stakeholders; and (c) disruptions to perceived notions of two-way public relations models. The research questions were:

RQ1. What topics did GLAAD attempt to make salient in the media agenda and public discourse, and what do these decisions tell us about power within the organization and society?

RQ2. What did GLAAD’s framing decisions, as seen in the discourse created by their media release language, tell us about power within the organization and society?

RQ3. What did these media releases indicate about potential disruptive stakeholder power over the figurehead organization, and what theoretical implications does this have for traditionally binary two-way public relations communications models?

Following a description of this study’s methods, this article will explain the findings applicable to each of these RQs. It will then offer an analysis and discussion synthesizing each of these RQs to illustrate what theoretical implications were gained from the findings.

Methods

To answer these questions, a qualitative analysis of GLAAD’s media releases was used to gain a rich understanding of the texts, allowing for a critical examination of issues of power.

Sample

All of GLAAD’s media releases from 2011 and 2012 were qualitatively coded for the study. The releases were retrieved from GLAAD’s publicly accessible online archive.

This dataset included 213 press releases, 200 of which were in English and 13 in Spanish. Twelve of the Spanish releases were duplicative of the English press releases and were merely translations. These two years were selected as they: (a) were the most current releases at the time of research; (b) offered ample research as the volume of data was arguably much larger than many qualitative analyses that are forced to limit their sample because of the special attention required for each document; and (c) allowed for a chronological approach to see how media releases progressed during a linear period.

Procedure and data analysis

To ultimately facilitate a critical textual and discourse analysis, a rigorous coding process ensued by using an inductive grounded theory approach. The analysis began with a 'preliminary soak' (Hall, 1975: 15) of the documents. This initial level of analysis documented all of the releases into a manually created codebook in search of initial topic categories and themes. Thematic categories were created during this process by using a constant comparative method (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998) of reading and rereading all of the media releases in search of patterns, both at the topic level of the release as well as the frame level within each release, the latter allowing for more specific abilities to examine specific language and discourse. For example, thematic categories became apparent, such as advocacy (e.g. articles advancing equal marriage rights), media watchdog (e.g. articles critiquing media coverage of LGBT individuals), internal announcements (e.g. announcements of staff changes), etc. These broader level categories were required to answer the initial social science research questions and allow for an in-depth critical analysis to proceed. Releases then went through more rounds of coding to scrutinize the documents for a deeper level of critical analysis to examine these frames and the specific language of the discourse. This inductive process thus aimed to capture discourse that 'reproduce(d) power and inequalities in society' (Perakyla and Ruusuvaori, 2011: 531).

Findings

Building a public agenda

Before examining issues of strategically used language and frames within the releases, RQ 1 required a broader level analysis of what topics GLAAD was attempting to build into the public agenda and discourse. These findings also describe what type of organization GLAAD had become as part of the greater LGBT-rights movement. The findings were that GLAAD had expanded beyond just being media watchdog as it also acted as the communications arm of the movement on issues such as youth bullying, violence against the LGBT community, and advocacy for issues such as marriage equality.

Portrayals in the media. The findings showed GLAAD continued to criticize media it did not think provided a 'fair, accurate, and inclusive portrayal' of LGBT individuals. GLAAD attempted to build these criticisms into the public agenda by commonly using releases that highlighted the offensive content and describing why the content was

offensive (GLAAD, 2011). While many forms of content were criticized, a few trends appeared, highlighting specific areas that GLAAD found problematic as it was attempting to change public discourse by ridding certain negative portrayals of LGBT persons from the media.

First, the organization attempted critical attacks on traditional media including talk radio ('GLAAD taking action against Adam Carolla's anti-LGBT remarks')(GLAAD, 2011p), television talk shows ('GLAAD, National Hispanic Media Coalition launch FCC complaint against Liberman Broadcasting for obscene Spanish-Language program')(GLAAD, 2011), and narrative programs. For example, in a release criticizing *Work It*, an ABC show about men dressing as women to get a job, the headline read, 'GLAAD and HRC tell ABC that 'Work It' will harm transgender people' (GLAAD, 2011b). From a news perspective, releases requested that stories not include speakers GLAAD argued were communicators of defamatory speech. The organization called this an abstention from presenting 'Hitler's view' by arguing that two sides of a story do not always need to be presented as 'hate speech is not an expert opinion' (GLAAD, 2012k). GLAAD also brought attention to negative and stereotypical portrayals, including a release criticizing an article in *The Huffington Post* that chronicled young gay male college students who promiscuously used older 'sugar daddies' to help get themselves through college (GLAAD, 2011h). Beyond traditional media, several releases suggested reprimands and demanded apologies from members of professional sports organizations, their own form of popular culture figures, who used hateful language, most commonly the derogatory slur 'faggot' ('GLAAD statement on Kobe Bryant's use of anti-gay slur') (GLAAD, 2011o) ('GLAAD calls for action from NBA')(GLAAD, 2011f).

Pressure and power. Of all of the media content that was criticized, in all but one example, GLAAD saw swift results, often within a single day or two, as: advertisers pulled support ('AT&T, Time Warner Cable pull advertising from "Jose Luis Sin Censura"')(GLAAD, 2011a), individuals or media organizations apologized ('Tracy Morgan to GLAAD: 'Parents should support and love their kids no matter what')(GLAAD, 2011w), or partnerships with GLAAD were formed ('Los Angeles Lakers, NBA [National Basketball Association] to work with GLAAD to address anti-gay slurs in basketball')(GLAAD, 2011s). GLAAD also used releases to publicize pressure on supporters of non-media anti-LGBT entities, such as two releases that critiqued Intel's corporate donations to the Boy Scouts of America following the Boy Scouts' continued ban on LGBT scouts ('Intel donates \$700k to Boy Scouts, GLAAD & Zach Wahls call for action' (GLAAD, 2012q); 'Intel announces they are no longer funding Boy Scouts of America troops that ban gay scouts and leaders'(GLAAD, 2012p)). The organization would then follow with releases announcing success of these efforts, allowing for self-promotion that illustrated the organization's importance and effectiveness, validating itself with internal LGBT stakeholders (GLAAD, 2011a).

Media supporter – GLAAD media awards. Despite its critical focus, GLAAD also attempted to change culture through the promotion of media that the organization perceived to positively portray LGBT individuals. This was primarily done through the GLAAD Media Awards, annual honors of media that portray LGBT stories and individuals that

champion LGBT issues. These events included major celebrities, media executives, and influential political figures, and the importance of these events was evident as over 30 releases promoted them (GLAAD, 2011d). Post-event releases publicized the speeches made by these famous recipients and focused on quotes in which the recipient spoke of the great work GLAAD was doing. For example, a release highlighted this quote from Chaz Bono:

I think I learned everything that I value and that I do now as an activist from the time I spent at GLAAD. I learned here to use the greatest activist tool that we have at our disposal, and that is the media. (GLAAD, 2012c)

Thus, these award events offered GLAAD event publicity that continued for weeks, allowing media coverage that promoted the organization while also offering free promotion to positive LGBT-themed media content.

Beyond the media: Social change and advocacy. Furthering its non-media role, GLAAD advanced social advocacy issues aimed at changing culture. For example, criticism of the anti-LGBT policies of the Boy Scouts of America dominated GLAAD's releases. Nineteen releases were spent publicizing the issue, making it the most covered topic in the two-year span (other than the self-promotion releases relating to the GLAAD Media Awards). GLAAD also used at least 15 releases promoting Spirit Day, an annual event created to 'memorialize those who lost their lives to bullying' (GLAAD, 2012s). To aid in awareness promotion, the organization promoted and relied on support from corporations, government bodies, and celebrities ('The White House joins GLAAD, celebrities, corporations, landmarks and millions of Americans in 'Going Purple' to Support LGBT youth on Spirit Day, October 20')(GLAAD, 2012v), a tactic seen in promotions of related issues such as the advancement of other anti-bullying campaigns by using Shaquille O'Neal as a spokesperson ('NBA Legend Shaquille O'Neal speaks out against anti-gay bullying in new public service announcement')(GLAAD, 2011t). The ongoing promotion of Boy Scout criticism and Spirit Day awareness greatly summarized GLAAD's non-media agenda-building goals that focused on issues of violence and vulnerability, especially concerning LGBT youth. This indicated GLAAD was acting as a mass media communicator for the LGBT population as, for example, the organization was not the creator of Spirit Day (GLAAD, 2012s) yet spent great effort building awareness for it. Similarly, GLAAD attempted to draw attention to non-youth topics of violence, such as chronic issues of violence against transgender individuals ('GLAAD observes Transgender Day of Remembrance')(GLAAD, 2012l).

GLAAD's releases also significantly covered same-sex marriage, garnering prominent attention in 12 releases with additional embedded discussion in others. For example, a release criticized the media's coverage of North Carolina's Amendment One, a constitutional amendment that was passed banning same-sex marriage (GLAAD, 2012t). The organization also promoted media kits, speakers and talking points for the media to use when discussing same-sex marriage ('GLAAD urges media to share stories of gay and lesbian couples in anticipation of vote on marriage equality in New York')(GLAAD, 2011q). While the organization involved itself with these social movement campaigns, it

generally remained non-partisan, avoiding almost all reference to party politics, even during an election year. Still, GLAAD did announce support for Vice President Joe Biden's and President Barack Obama's statements in support of same-sex marriage ('In historic move, President Barack Obama joins a majority of Americans in support of marriage equality')(GLAAD, 2012o), and, the day after President Barack Obama's re-election, sent another approving release commenting on the nation re-electing the first US president in history to publicly support equal marriage rights ('Historic wins for marriage equality in Maryland and Maine and President Barack Obama wins re-election')(GLAAD, 2012n). The only mention of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney came about in the Boy Scouts of America debate as GLAAD, in multiple releases, publicized a Romney statement made two decades earlier in which he supported gays in the Boy Scouts ('Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney: Gay people should be able to serve in Boy Scouts')(GLAAD, 2012u).

Framing minority concerns to a mass audience

In answering RQ 2, three patterns of framing techniques spoke directly to issues of power: (a) GLAAD's framing of its ultimate goals that spoke directly to questions such as disruption versus assimilation (i.e. 'awareness, equality,' etc.); (b) a constant frame of violence, frequently housed in discussions of family or youth; and (c) a perceived requirement to partner with other minority groups and corporations to build strength and reach a mass audience.

Framed goals of the movement. Crucial to queer theory analysis, it was important to determine whether the organization's language was of a disruptive nature or whether it struck more of an assimilation based tone. The findings indicated that both were occurring, though frames rooted in the latter dominated the releases.

Seen throughout the releases were frames indicating that GLAAD aimed to ultimately 'build acceptance and advance equality' (GLAAD, 2011d) by promoting 'fair, accurate, and inclusive' portrayals of LGBT individuals (GLAAD, 2011k). Consistent with its nature of changing culture through media, frames commonly repeated into the public discourse were quotes such as the following from then GLAAD President Jarrett Barrios, 'When moviegoers see lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and characters on film, they come to understand the common ground we all share' (GLAAD, 2011c). This frame of promoting 'common ground' with non-LGBT individuals was often repeated, as seen in another release again quoting Barrios, 'Fair-minded Americans are tuning in by the millions to inclusive shows ... because they don't care whether someone is straight or gay – what they care about is seeing characters they can relate to' (GLAAD, 2011g). As an example that fully encapsulates this theme, a release quoting an ally stated, 'Media play a vital role in helping Americans understand gay and lesbian people are *just like them*' (emphasis added, GLAAD, 2011r). Beyond promoting 'equality', 'awareness', 'visibility', 'acceptance', and 'understanding,' this language did not attempt disruption but instead could be deduced to a frame advancing the notion that LGBT persons are 'just like' or relatable to the majority population. Further minimizing a separation of LGBT persons from the majority, GLAAD's releases on same-sex marriage commonly

adopted a similar frame by stating that a ‘majority of Americans’ supported the cause. For example, one release stated, ‘Today, Vice President Biden took an important step toward joining former Presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter, former Vice Presidents Al Gore and Dick Cheney, and a growing majority Americans who support marriage equality ...’ (GLAAD, 2012w).

While many of the releases used these types of mainstreaming or assimilatory tones, a limited amount of frames did move beyond mere ‘acceptance’ by highlighting the importance for LGBT individuals to know that it is okay to ‘be who they are’ (GLAAD, 2012c). This was coupled by an additional frame of pride when GLAAD President, in honoring a GLAAD ally, stated that an award was given because the ally’s work and support ‘encouraged countless gay and transgender people of color to be proud of who they are’ (GLAAD, 2011v). Additionally, a few releases adopted a frame stating that the goal of the organization was to ‘empower’ members of the community, striking a more disruptive tone. Still, some of these frames were coupled by the previously stated default goal of acceptance, even within the same sentence. For example, quoting a member of a partnership organization, a release stated:

By providing a place for transgender people, family members and our allies to share their stories, we hope to empower our community and the general public to advocate for transgender equality and move the culture towards acceptance of transgender youth and adults. (GLAAD, 2012h)

Frames of violence, family, and youth. Releases commonly adopted a frame of vulnerability, defining LGBT individuals in terms of violence and safety issues, especially from the perspective of harm to children and families. In the long series of releases highlighting discrimination within the Boy Scouts of America, GLAAD framed the issue with statements such as, it is ‘unfair policies like this that contribute to a climate of bullying in our schools and community’ (GLAAD, 2012a). This frame was similarly adopted in other topics, such as a release covering a ‘kiss-in protest’ aimed at Chik-Fil-A after the company offered corporate sponsorship to The Family Research Council (a group GLAAD has called a hate organization). GLAAD framed the release in regards to LGBT youth being ‘victims of bullying’ even though the Chik-Fil-A incident was not inherently about bullying or violence. In the release, GLAAD highlighted a quote stating, ‘I hope that visibility of the kiss-in helps LGBT youth who feel isolated and are victims of bullying’ (GLAAD, 2012f). This theme also framed releases covering professional sports as, often relating to sport figures using the term ‘faggot’, the organization responded by emphasizing the need for ‘safe spaces for LGBT young people in the world of sports’ (GLAAD, 2012i). Another release stated, ‘professional sporting events should be an environment that all fans and families can enjoy, not a place where children are exposed to violent threats and discriminatory language’ (GLAAD, 2011i).

Beyond relating issues of discrimination and slurs back to youth, this frame of violence and safety was also used to frame trans issues. For example, in addressing trans-discrimination, frames referenced ‘[t]he history of violence that follows trans people’ (GLAAD, 2012j). This was further seen in promotion of trans topics that were not inherently about violence, such as a release about the Miss Universe pageant’s inclusion of a

trans woman that mentioned one of the factors transgender women still faced was '(un)equal opportunities for ... safety' (GLAAD, 2012m).

Partnership with minority groups and corporations. Strategic partnership with other groups, commonly other minority organizations, was seen throughout the releases, creating a 'strength in numbers' type frame that attempted to portray issues as more than just concerns of the LGBT community. For example, in the ongoing series of releases relating to the *Jose Luis* program, GLAAD partnered with the National Hispanic Media Coalition (GLAAD, 2011i). Similarly, GLAAD joined the Oklahoma state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (and a few other organizations) to condemn a local state senator who had a history of anti-LGBT and anti-African American comments and positions (GLAAD, 2011j). Beyond other civil rights organizations, GLAAD also framed its message through other powerful spokespersons, such as celebrities and professional sports associations (as seen above with Shaquille O'Neal and the NBA, respectfully), perhaps the most common of which was the promotion of the GLAAD Media Awards, as the releases for such honors utilized the celebrity's name in the release's title, such as 'Ricky Martin, Kristin Chenoweth to be honored at 22nd Annual GLAAD Media Awards presented by Rokk Vodka' (GLAAD, 2011u). The latter part of the title also reflected another partnership phenomena: corporate sponsorship. These sponsors were often included at the end of releases announcing a GLAAD publicity event (GLAAD, 2011n) but were also included in the titles of releases, as seen in the previous example.

New media, communication models, and activist power

In answering RQ 3, while many of the previously discussed topics and frames indicated a more mainstreamed and professional organization, there were still indications of activist power within the press materials. Specifically, new media and social media tools were frequently being promoted throughout the releases, indicating a potentially new paradigm of power within the hands of everyday LGBT stakeholders. For example, while GLAAD created its own Change.org (a social media website allowing the creation of petitions designed to create social change) petition for the *Jose Luis* program (GLAAD, 2012r), most of GLAAD's releases emphasized Change.org petitions created by other persons, often everyday members of the LGBT movement. For example, many of the releases related to discrimination in the Boy Scouts were driven by promoting a Change.org petition created by an Ohio Scout mother (GLAAD, 2012e). In this occurrence and others, GLAAD was acting as a promotional and communication tool for the movement-at-large, not the original creator of the issue. Similar releases promoted other Change.org campaigns created by non-GLAAD individuals, campaigns that resulted in hundreds of thousands of online signatures (GLAAD, 2012b, 2012d, 2012q).

Additionally, after announcing its support for a merger between wireless carriers AT&T and T-Mobile, GLAAD soon followed up with another release (GLAAD, 2011m) indicating a retraction of the endorsement, amidst attacks from stakeholders criticizing that the action had little to do with GLAAD's purpose and instead implied close

corporate ties for an organization that was supposed to be working for its LGBT stakeholders. The release stated:

A rigorous review process considered GLAAD's unique mission and concluded that while AT&T has a strong record of support for the LGBT community, the explanation used to support this particular merger was not sufficiently consistent with GLAAD's work to advocate for positive and culture-changing LGBT stories and images in the media. (GLAAD, 2011m)

This retraction, accompanied by a resignation of GLAAD's president (GLAAD, 2011e), further indicated stakeholder power.

Discussion and conclusion

Power and building public discourse

In answering RQ 1, the findings relating to GLAAD's agenda-building strategies indicated that while the organization was in a position of power in certain regards, it more often spoke from a lower position. While GLAAD's shift away from exclusively acting as a media watchdog organization would indicate some level of past success in changing the media landscape through its public relations efforts, its continued focus on needing press materials to criticize all media venues, be it radio, television, or the internet, indicated an ongoing struggle for the organization's media relations communicators. While GLAAD used these materials to criticize the media, it also needed the media to build these critiques into the public discourse, inherently creating potential relationship-building conflicts between the organization and news entities. Thus, if the organization was indeed the actor with less power in such a relationship, strategic decisions would likely have to be made that would limit disruptive abilities. It is this partnership with mass media organizations, as well as GLAAD's numerous corporate financial sponsors, that has led to the criticism that minority organizations such as GLAAD become mainstreamed (Doyle, 2005). While GLAAD needed to criticize these organizations when appropriate to fulfill its purpose, it also wanted to maintain positive relationships with these organizations, be it to obtain financial sponsorship or to achieve news coverage. This complemented Doyle's (2005) previous findings that demonstrated the difficulty of an activist organization straddling corporate relationship building and satisfying its activist purpose. Considerations of relationship-management between minority organizations, news media relations, and corporate sponsors should be further examined in future research.

This said, GLAAD's media releases did indicate a sense of power within the organization, as seen by its success in pressuring corporations and individuals to respond to GLAAD's criticisms, such as the organization's ability to get advertisers to quickly pull their support from discriminatory content. Additionally, when celebrities were the parties responsible for issuing derogatory statements, be it Tracy Morgan or Hollywood film director Brett Ratner (GLAAD, 2012g), GLAAD was able to take advantage of the celebrity nature of these individuals to aid in obtaining media attention. Upon an apology and later partnership with these persons, GLAAD was able to build relationships with

apologetic celebrities who, by correcting their own image, also brought attention to LGBT concerns. Furthermore, GLAAD spent a significant amount of time promoting its own media awards, giving it another opportunity to use celebrities to gain media attention for positive LGBT media content in the process. Still, GLAAD's increased agenda-building abilities appear to have ended here.

The findings indicated GLAAD heavily relied on celebrities, many of who were non-LGBT celebrities, to build its agenda. From a perspective of power, this intense focus on obtaining news attention from releases that emphasized celebrity events indicated a lack of news media interest in ordinary LGBT citizens or issues. Awards releases utilized celebrities such as Ricky Martin, Josh Hutcherson, and Chaz Bono. Most other non-celebrity recipients were elite media executives, still persons of power in their own right, some of whom again were not members of the community itself. In contrast, individual LGBT persons were rarely featured in these releases or events, unless they were victims of violence or oppression. Even in the case of an exception, such as the inclusion of Jennifer Tyrrell, a lesbian mother of a boy scout who was featured at a GLAAD event, Tyrrell had already obtained great media attention, making her far more well known than if an event publicized a previously little recognized LGBT person or issue. This complemented the aforementioned findings that while the media would be interested in covering issues of violence or of LGBT celebrities, coverage of topics based only in principles of equality or of everyday non-famous LGBT citizens received little notice.

These releases also indicated how a social minority organization is able to select the media agenda goals for the movement it represents. GLAAD's efforts highlighted the organization's goal of promoting a 'fair' and 'accurate' portrayal of LGBT individuals, raising the question of what 'fair' and 'accurate' means. For a set reality of LGBT persons to exist, the organization essentialized LGBT persons so as to outwardly present the minority to a mass audience. For example, as referenced, this resulted in GLAAD attacking journalistic portrayals of promiscuous young gay males who used 'sugar daddies' to get through college (GLAAD, 2011h). This questions whether a negative portrayal of the community could still be 'fair' and 'accurate', two words that arguably could only be defined implicitly by looking at what portrayals the releases supported or criticized. Additionally, by criticizing negative or stereotyped portrayals, these mass communication efforts excluded potential truths that may still have existed within those portrayals or stereotypes. This could thus hide very real dangers or issues the community faces that were not receiving potentially helpful media attention out of fear of negative public perceptions or continued stereotypes. Additionally, such media relations objectives resulted in lumping members of the minority community into categories stereotyped by the minority organization itself, counter to the ideals of queer theory.

Power and framing public discourse

In answering RQ 2, GLAAD's strategically utilized frames further indicated GLAAD's position of power within society and its own movement. GLAAD often framed its messages in terms of a goal of equality. Still, other frames and goals included 'acceptance', 'awareness', and 'understanding', frames and goals that indicate a societal

structure that has placed the power within the heteronormative sexual majority who is then able to determine whether it wants to 'accept' or 'understand' minority communities. These goals also fall short of GLAAD's other goal of equality. Additionally, GLAAD's framing techniques included the utilization of attempting to assimilate with the majority, seen in the frames that portrayed LGBT persons as being 'just like', 'relatable', or sharing commonalities with heterosexuals. While these types of frames arguably strike down sexual binaries, they also negate GLAAD's other frames telling its own stakeholders that it is okay to be 'who they are' or different from the norm. Similarly, the organization's utilized frame of justifying its goals as being in step with the 'majority of Americans' deconstructs sexual binaries but also creates a frame where the minority community is attempting to adopt strength by coupling itself with a majority position, thus speaking to a societal construct of power that allows majority populations to control minority populations in the first place. This is also complemented by the findings of GLAAD's heavy use of a 'strength-in-numbers' frame, a requirement of the organization to partner with other minority groups to once again provide a frame that portends to rationalize that concerns hold more value if held by other groups as well.

Furthermore, the common frame highlighting concerns of violence, safety, bullying, and harms to children and families gave a strong indication that the organization was strategically including threats of violence as a universal theme for anyone, indicating frames of equality alone may not have been influential enough to obtain media coverage or change minds. This represents a great example of speaking from a lower position of power as it highlights the community's vulnerability to violence while also emphasizing that the organization felt it could best connect to a mass audience when speaking about violence toward another but not on an argument of promoting equality. By using this frame to such a strong degree as to apply it to LGBT issues that otherwise do not directly apply or relate to issues of violence and vulnerability also further reinforces a stereotype on sexual minorities as weak or powerless.

Finally, in answering RQ 3, these findings, in part, counter old models of two-way symmetric or asymmetric communication while supporting public relations models that are more fluid and may indicate more power within activist stakeholders than other literature has implied. While GLAAD may well be a more professionalized or mainstreamed organization, consistent with the literature on social movement organizations (Doyle, 2005), these findings indicate that such figurehead organizations may not hold all the power in the movement. Instead, the findings indicate that, especially with the use of social media, LGBT individuals and activists still hold power potential over their figurehead organizations, in this instance, by creating and joining petitions (which can be argued to be mini-movements within the movement). Then, stakeholders were able to use the figurehead organization to their benefit as, with the organization's now developed relationships with the mass media, it is then able to then better build and frame activist stakeholder goals to a broader audience. This was seen as GLAAD adopted initiatives already built by its stakeholders, acting instead as an additional agenda-building arm to the movement. Additionally, from a relationship-management perspective, GLAAD remained responsible to its activist base following its endorsement of a corporate merger that was inconsistent with the ideals of its own

stakeholders, causing the president of GLAAD to resign and the organization to retract its endorsement.

Theoretical developments

This research has furthered theoretical development in a few areas. These findings highlight how the use of a mass communication process, public relations, requires minority organizations to strategically build and frame their objectives to advance their positioning and change public perceptions. As the minority organization in this study, GLAAD has already empowered itself by being able to use a mass communication tool to build and frame its agenda with the assistance of the mass media. Still, it comes at the cost of having to define itself and its stakeholders in a way that excludes certain characteristics and truths of its members while also stereotyping and rigidly defining them. Furthermore, less appealing truths are avoided in an aim to strategically advance the organization's goals for an overall perceived greater good, even at the potential harm created by such avoidance. As other scholars have called for more application of critical and queer theory to the public relations profession (Tindall and Waters, 2012), this research fills that gap. This deeper critical theoretical analysis is able to complement social science theories such as agenda building and framing by demonstrating a finding that illustrates how, by building and framing topics into the public sphere, minority organizations, while attempting to counter socially constructed stereotypes and power dynamics, are actually creating new, or fortifying existing, stereotypes through these strategic decisions that in turn reinforce existing power structures.

Additionally, perhaps the most significant theoretical findings were found in RQ3. These findings further develop Staggenborg's (1988) social movement literature conclusions that find a more complex balance of power between social movement organizations and their stakeholders than other critical scholars may have previously acknowledged. These theoretical developments are consistent with Staggenborg's (1988) findings that highlight how a movement organization may still be beneficial in maintaining and continuing a movement by serving as a professional midpoint between stakeholder activists and the outside world while also remaining reliant on those activist stakeholders who continue to be incubators and developers of the movement's initiatives, goals, and tactics. As seen, GLAAD was arguably unable to *create* LGBT issues, but it was able to take already existing issues created by its stakeholders and build these concerns into a broader public discourse. Coupled with Ciszek's (2013) findings on the impacts digital media have on relationship-management and communication models between social movement organization and its activist stakeholder base, hypotheses are created that should be further tested to examine whether public relations relationship and communication models are becoming less binary and structured than previous research has indicated, a potentially disruptive finding consistent with queer theory. These developments would thus speak to more than just minority organizations but also to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other public interest organizations who must balance stakeholder interests with broader requirements of funding and relationship building and maintenance with professional organizations and media.

Future research

Future research should continue to examine how public relations can empower a minority social movement, as it gives them the ability to build and frame an agenda in hopes of disseminating a message through the mass media. This can lead to further theory building to explore how organizations in a place of less power are using public relations means to build their standing with the mass public. From a critical and cultural perspective, this can further lead us to examine how, by adopting this mass communication process, these minority movements are in turn essentializing themselves in hopes of a perceived utilitarian good. Finally, the notion of power of individual stakeholders within these movements should be further examined to see how new media tools can be used to give these stakeholders more power to hold their figurehead organizations accountable while also being able to use these organizations to their advantage, as the organization is better able to speak to a mass audience. Ultimately, this may lead to a continuing shift away from traditional theoretical models of varying symmetry and more toward fluid and dynamic communication and relationship models.

Limitations

While a qualitative study, basic categorical counting was used to create a broader portrayal of the findings. Still, as the study is rooted in a critical analysis, inter-coder requirements seen in quantitative content analyses were not used. Therefore, this is a limitation of the study for readers who attempt to generalize from the provided data. Additionally, the researcher is a gay individual, an issue documented for transparency relating to the subject matter. While GLAAD was chosen as the illustrative LGBT organization, its releases may not be indicative of other LGBT organizations, thus potentially limiting the study's findings. As seen, LGBT populations are diverse, and arguably no organization is truly representative of the overall movement. This is further highlighted by the sections of this article that offer critiques of GLAAD's corporate-like personality. Future researchers may wish to broaden the organizational subjects examined beyond LGBT organizations and additionally quantify their methods to further test these findings.

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