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Social Movements and the Journalistic Field:
A Multi-Institutional Approach to Tactical Dominance
In the LGBT Movement

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Social movements typically consist of several diverse organizations, with each using subtly different tactics to advance a similar, but not equivalent, vision of social change. The landscape of powerful social institutions in which a movement is situated affects which tactics become dominant among these organizations (and thus, within the movement) and which tactics are sidelined, discredited, or not even considered. The mainstream media is one example of a social institution that may have such a constitutive effect on social movements. When the mainstream news media – conceptualized here as a journalistic *field* – produce more substantial coverage of a given movement tactic, they may increase the tactic's legitimacy, permitting organizations that perform the tactic to occupy a more dominant position within the movement. In this paper, I analyze media coverage of LGBT movement activity in a sample of mainstream newspapers from 1985-2008 to examine whether, in its coverage of the movement for LGBT rights, the mainstream media have focused on the LGBT movement's legal tactics, organizations, and framing, and have downplayed other types of movement tactics and framing. This paper expands upon empirical studies from the communications and sociolegal literatures, which find that litigation often attracts publicity, whereas protest activity rarely receives any substantive news coverage. The data presented here will likely have implications for the new, multi-institutional approach to social movement theory. They should help to clarify the ways in which tactics, when amplified by media coverage, influence the ascendancy of specific strategies and organizations within a social movement.

"Climbing on top of buildings and spray-painting logos all over the streets turns Middle America against us…This isn't Haight-Ashbury, 1969."

Larry Paradis, Member of AIDS advocacy group New Friends,
quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 October, 1988

"We've grown up with TV, and we've learned what has visual impact and how to give the perfect, three-second sound bite."

Dan Bellm, Member of civil disobedience group Forget-Me-Nots,
quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 October, 1988

Introduction

Social movement strategy changes in response to the type of domination that movement activists attempt to unseat. Activists choose tactics that they perceive to be the most effective and legitimate technologies for social change, and they reject other tactics as impractical or improper. Yet activists do not approach their choice of strategy in a vacuum; rather, their very perceptions of tactical availability, legitimacy, and efficacy are shaped by the landscape of powerful social institutions in which their movement is situated. Thus a crucial site of inquiry for exploring the nature of dominance in contemporary society is how movement activists choose their tactics – and why they fail to consider or even imagine the possibility of using other tactics.

Theorists of social movement behavior have proposed several explanations for a movement's choice of strategy. Movement activists may alter their tactics to respond to openings in the political structure (McAdam 1982). Movements may also use other social movements' strategies as a template for action (Clemens 1993; Minkoff 1994). Path-dependency may also play a role in tactical choice; as a movement organization becomes associated with a given strategy, it may be unwilling to alter its approach and thereby betray its organizational identity (Engel 2007).

In this paper, I take a multi-institutional approach to investigate the potential influence of one powerful social *field*, the mainstream news media (Bourdieu 1998), over social movement

actors' choice of tactics. I first review the communications and social movements literatures in synthesis, and generate predictions regarding the influence of the mainstream journalistic field on a selection of social movement tactics. To test these hypotheses, I examine news coverage of the movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights from 1985-2008. I then analyze this data in the context of secondary sources discussing chronological shifts in LGBT movement tactics, and discuss whether the journalistic field may have influenced or helped diffuse dominant tactics within the LGBT movement. I conclude with a discussion of the importance of these findings, and the applicability of this model, to the multi-institutional politics model elaborated by Armstrong and Bernstein (2008).

The LGBT movement is a natural choice as a case study for this research because the movement has undergone major shifts in strategy in the past few decades. LGBT organizations have moved from focusing mostly on electoral politics and lobbying in the mid-1980s (Rimmerman 2001), to protest and direct action in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Armstrong 2002: 182), to legal advocacy from the mid-1990s to the present. Previous research has focused on formal changes in "hard" political institutions, such as legislatures (Rimmerman 2001) and the courts (Andersen 2005), to explain these shifts. This study revitalizes the discussion of LGBT movement tactic by empirically examining a *social* field whose potential impact may be very broad, given its interactive nature (updating itself with each day's news) and pervasive social presence (both as an artifact of reporting and as a starting point for conversation, art, and policy). Understanding how the LGBT movement is constructed in this social field is an important step toward understanding how social fields legitimate and influence particular movement strategies. Furthermore, by focusing on a social field that operates apart from, but often in coordination with, the State, this study investigates how social fields interact and operate to sustain power relations in society.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Social movements rely on the mainstream media to convey their messages and actions to the public, to increase their legitimacy as viable political players, and to attract allies (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). The "multi-institutional" theoretical approach taken in new institutional, cultural, and feminist theory (Friedland and Alford 1991:232; see Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 82) helps explain important dimensions of the interaction between movements and media – including how norms institutionalized through the journalistic or media *field* create patterns in news coverage of social movements, and how the journalistic field operates as a site of social power. The multi-institutional politics approach understands society as composed of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory social fields, which structure power relations between individuals and groups. It stresses the importance of informal sources of power, such as norms, understandings, and logics generated within social fields, which siphon privilege to particular actors and actions. The mainstream news media constitute one such social field; the media consist of networks of actors (news organizations and individual reporters) operating under common institutionalized logics and norms (Bourdieu 1998).

The first section of this literature review synthesizes the empirical practices and logics operating within the journalistic field and hypothesizes from them how the journalistic field privileges certain voices within a social movement and marginalizes others. The second section of this literature review argues that bringing the journalistic field under a common theoretical frame with other important sites of social power, such as the state, professions, and organizations, advances theoretical understanding of how these arenas work to constrain or enable mobilization and popular resistance.

Privileging and Marginalization within the Journalistic Field

Power is inherent in the concept of the social field. Although power arrangements within the field may appear stabilized, the field is a site of competition and struggle for control. The reason that fields appear stable is that dissenting voices are often denied a platform; those who

oppose dominant field norms and logics tend to be marginalized within the field, and their perspectives become illegitimate noise. Thus the rules of a given field generate power differences among actors within that field, as the rules prioritize certain messages and forms of action, and marginalize others (Bourdieu 1986).

The content of mainstream news reflects dominant practices and logics within the journalistic field. The communications literature has observed three prevalent patterns in mainstream media news coverage: dramatization, fragmentation, and personalization. These patterns derive from a combination of factors, including the competitive relationships between corporate news organizations, professional norms among journalists, and widespread cultural tropes. In this section, I analyze how these biases likely affect coverage of social movement tactics.[1]

1.) Dramatization

Dramatization and selection bias

Drama is the hallmark of American journalism (Bennett 1988: 35; Paletz and Entman 1981). Reporters are taught that "every news story should...display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouncement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle, and an end" (Memo from a major television executive news producer to staff reporters, cited in Bennett 1988: 40). The penchant for drama that pervades the journalistic field compels reporters to cover dramatic news events at a disproportionately high rate as compared to non-dramatic news events.

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[1] This section generates hypotheses regarding differential media coverage of different social movement tactics because there is surprisingly little empirical literature on this point. One exception is McCann's (1994) research on the pay equity movement, which finds that mainstream media sources cover litigation more readily than protest. The activists McCann interviews assert that "litigation brings the media in a way that nothing else has so far" (McCann 1994: 58). According to McCann (1994), litigation put the pay equity issue on the agenda of the two major national newspapers in his study: "[T]he coverage given to legal action dwarfed – by five to ten times – that accorded to each of the other aspects of political action in pay equity conflicts, including legislation, electoral campaigns, labor strikes, and union negotiation battles; more than twice as much attention was given to legal activity than all the other categories combined (58-9)."

Coverage of protest activity reveals a strong dramatization bias. Protests regarding a controversial issue (Oliver and Myers 1999; Oliver and Maney 2000), or protests that involve violence (Barranco and Wisler 1999; Mueller 1997) or a counterdemonstration (Oliver and Maney 2000), are the most likely types of protest to receive media coverage.

Litigation, another tactic social movements use, is also dramatized in news coverage. William Haltom and Michael McCann (2004) write, "In the context of civil disputing…newspapers pay attention to frivolous filings, wild charges and countercharges, and interpretations redolent of propaganda and spin" (172). Journalists also report cases that involve a large damage award over stories where little money is at stake (Haltom and McCann 2004; Bailis and MacCoun 1996; Nielsen and Beim 2004).

Although reporters are likely to look for the dramatic elements in whatever story they cover, this selection bias will likely work to the advantage of social movement actors using legal tactics. Litigation is more consistently dramatic than protest, making it more likely to receive coverage. While protests signal social disaccord, they rarely involve the sorts of specific disruptive events that make them dramatic, such as injuries, property damage, or arrests. Furthermore, these types of disruptions have decreased substantially since the 1970s (McAdam, Sampson, Weffer, MacIndoe 2005). The courtroom, on the other hand, is a more reliable source of a different sort of drama; courts "dramatiz[e] the seriousness, importance, dignity, rights, and duties of citizens, surrounding them with ceremonious deference" (Ball 1975, in Galanter 1983: 139(n7); see also Barkan 1980: 952). Journalists, who work under tight deadlines and pressure to reduce reporting costs, cut time spent on story scouting by focusing their attention toward spaces that regularly produce dramatic newsworthy events (Herman and Chomsky 2002: 18-19).

Journalists drawn to drama may therefore report more social movement activity from the courtroom than from the streets. [2]

Dramatization and description bias

The prevailing norm of dramatization in the journalistic field affects not only what gets covered (court cases or protests) but how it gets covered. In social movement coverage, the drama of a particular event or tactic often distracts from reporting on the movement's underlying goals and demands. As Bennett (1988) explains, drama tends to "distract journalists' attention from any broad or enduring political significance the event may have had" (40; see also Gitlin 1980).

Protests that are dramatized are subject to *description bias*. Reporters covering protests often focus on the dramatic or violent elements of a protest instead of providing a deeper analysis of the development of the conflict or the crucial contextual background for the particular conflict in question (Boykoff 2006; Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, Augustyn 2001; Iyengar 1991). This dramatic coverage often excludes any discussion of the protestors' specific demands (Mulcahy 1995; Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, Augustyn 2001).

In reporting on litigation, journalists also focus on the personal drama between the litigants rather than on the substantive issues of the case (Haltom and McCann 2004). However, there is reason to believe that dramatization description bias is more detrimental to protestors than to litigants. Protest tactics are considered legitimate, and generate sympathy for a movement, when they are peaceful. For example, a main reason that the civil rights movement gained public sympathy during the 1960s was that protestors remained nonviolent in the face of

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[2] Litigation involves a *type* of drama that may be more easily conveyed through text than through visual images, which may make coverage of litigation more likely to appear in newspapers than on television. Thus the coverage litigation receives in newspapers may be disproportionately large compared to the coverage litigation receives on television. Yet this assumption is not borne out in empirical literature, which finds high correlation between the stories reported in print, radio, and televised news media (see e.g., Clarke and Fredin 1978: 151). This correlation has been attributed to the prevalence of wire services, and to the agenda-setting capacity of elite news sources such as the *New York Times* (Rojecki 1999: 39; Winter and Eyal 1981). Some empirical work even finds television news channels basing their coverage on the content of the *New York Times* (Brown 1971). This high correlation between media sources has been used in other work to justify researchers' use of a single newspaper as a barometer of media coverage generally (Winter and Eyal 1981).

brutal police suppression (McAdam 1996). In instances, however, when protesters adopt violent tactics, the mainstream media's dramatization of protests can result in de-legitimating protest tactics, and alienating the public from the movement's demands (Gitlin 1980; Barranco and Wisler 1999; Mueller 1997).

On the other hand, the elements of drama in the coverage of litigation may be deflected away from parties to a case, and onto "liberal judges" or "runaway juries." Furthermore, lobbying and litigation, no matter how dramatic they become, almost never escalate to violence inside the courtroom. If violence occurs during these events, it is likely to happen outside the courtroom or capitol building. This external drama can give even greater credibility to the litigants.

2.) Fragmentation

Since the 1990s, virtually all of the mass media, including newspapers, publishing houses, recording and movie studios, and TV and cable stations, have fallen under the ownership of nine transnational firms (Bagdikian 2004). The field has become dominated by a profit motive; news organizations compete for the largest possible audience, and reward reporters who deliver news that will attract readers. This centralization and privatization of organizations in the journalistic field has compelled reporters to produce what some observers disparage as *infotainment* (Haltom and McCann 2004), or a simplistic delivery of often complex stories as intriguing factoids (Bourdieu 1998). This has generated another common tendency in mainstream news coverage: fragmentation, in which events are reported in isolation from their social context (Iyengar 1991; Bennett 1988).

Fragmented coverage occurs within a news story when reporters "jump back and forth between interviews, actors, scenes, factual information, and plots" and fail to connect these incidents to the underlying cause or purpose of an event (Bennett 1988: 46). There is also fragmentation in the form of episodic coverage, when reporters present individual stories as

isolated from or unrelated to one another. Articles that do analyze complex economic or political issues appear separately from the "breaking news" with which they are correlated.

Media coverage of litigation reflects this fragmentation bias. Litigation coverage does not always account for the events leading up to the lawsuit (Haltom and McCann 2004: 172). For example, the mainstream media virtually ignore anti-union firings – one type of pre-trial dispute that often provokes social movement litigation. When they are covered, anti-union firings are "treated as individualized and isolated events, diminishing the potential impact of the coverage on the public's understanding of U.S. labor movement struggles" (Carreiro 2005: 1). By focusing on trials, but not on the events leading up to them, trials appear on the public scene out of the blue.

Most of the empirical research on fragmentation bias has examined protest coverage. Protests that involve conflict – which are the protests most likely to receive coverage in the first place – most often receive episodic coverage. Coverage of these conflictual protests fails to relate events leading up to the protest or to describe the activists' demands (Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, Augustyn 2001; Boykoff 2006). However, it is not only the presence of drama that makes protest coverage more fragmented; it is the collective nature of protest. Boykoff (2006) finds that one in four of the articles covering the WTO protests in Seattle and Washington DC contained what he called the "Amalgam of Grievances Frame," or language suggesting that protestors had no clear message, and were "fighting for too many disparate issues" (221). Rather than attempting to connect the protestors' demands, reporters portrayed protestors as confused and conflicted. The "Amalgam of Grievances Frame" is a byproduct of collective action, where several competing voices come together in a single action. Lobbying, electoral campaigns, and litigation, on the other hand, are comparatively issue-specific.

Once again, fragmentation bias is more likely to work to the disadvantage of protestors, rather than litigants, in a social movement. First, protest drama often involves more violence than does litigation drama, making it more prone to episodic coverage. Second, journalists covering protests are often distracted from a movement's substantive issues by the multiplicity of

grievances voiced through collective action, and they report the event under the "Amalgam of Grievances Frame" (Boykoff 2006). Even when the fragmentation bias affects social movement litigation, its effect is less detrimental; because litigation is undertaken by isolated parties and consists of written grievances, it is not compatible with the "Amalgam of Grievances Frame," which obscures the movement's goals.

3.) Personalization

The mainstream news media tend to report news events or phenomena as they affect particular individuals. This *personalization* bias may also be explained in terms of the corporatization of the journalistic field, which requires news organizations to aim for a wide audience, which favors "human interest" stories (Hughes 1940). As with fragmentation, personalization in news stories often obscures the intricacy, structural causes, or widespread nature of an event (Bennett 1988: 26-35).

Personalization in news coverage may benefit some social movement tactics over others. When covering protest tactics, journalists seeking to personalize the protest cannot conveniently find a legitimate representative. In the case of movement lobbying, on the other hand, the backers of a proposed piece of legislation are immediately apparent. Similarly, when movement activists litigate, they present journalists with the individual narrative of the parties to the dispute. Sterett (1998) shows how individual narratives are publicized during adjudication. This would suggest that media, which are focused on presenting personalized accounts of the movement, would likely report more of a movement's litigation than its protest actions.

Hypotheses

The empirical literature reviewed above, which examines patterns of reporting in the mainstream news media in light of prevailing logics in the journalistic field, generates a set of testable hypotheses regarding mainstream media coverage of social movement tactics. First, social movement action that takes place in institutionalized political venues (i.e., courts or the legislature) will receive more coverage than action that occurs in the streets (i.e., protest) as reporters monitor locations that reliably produce dramatic and newsworthy events (*selection bias*). Second, journalists reporting on any one of these movement tactics will highlight its most dramatic elements, but they will find more drama to report in litigation than in protest (*description bias*). Third, coverage of litigation and lobbying will be more personalized and less fragmented than coverage of protest because litigation and lobbying involve an identifiable set of central actors and a discreet set of issues and claims (*personalization and description bias*).

The Journalistic Field and the Multi-Institutional Politics Model

Although this paper discusses social movement tactics that target the state, such as litigation and lobbying, its focus is on social movement interaction with alternative sites of social power beyond the state. In particular, it examines how one *non-state* social field, the mainstream media, filters and reconstructs the social meaning attached to particular movement tactics. Observing patterns in media coverage is a crucial first step in analyzing the impact of non-state social fields on social movement organizing, strategy, and tactics – and in uncovering mechanisms and layers of domination that the traditional social movements literature often neglects (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008).

The multi-institutional politics model predicts two ways in which the non-state social fields such as the mainstream media influence social movements. First, the media field shapes a social movement from *within* by shaping activist' very ideas about how, when, and why to work for change. The media field, by favoring particular movement tactics, influences movement members' perception of the tactics available to them, or their "tactical repertoire" (McCammon 2003). The

material consequence of this is that the media often dictate what tactics activists actually use. Movement activists structure particular tactics around perceived media biases (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Ryan 1991; Carroll and Ratner 1999). In summary, media fields shape social movements both by causing activists to strategically alter their tactics to garner media coverage, and by shaping activists' cognitive perceptions of what tactics they have available to them.

Second, the media field may constitute a social movement by shaping the perceptions of those *outside* the movement – or by restricting the movement's public identity. The media field is perhaps the primary institutionalized arena in which public understandings of social groups, including social movements and stigmatized social identities, are formulated and reified. It is *not* simply that the media, by presenting these groups in a way that conforms to the logic of the journalistic field, injects a particular viewpoint into the popular consciousness (Ryan 1991). News consumers do not passively parrot the new media framing as they form opinions about current events. Yet, insofar as people must rely on interpretive packages and frames as tools for understanding their world, it is important to empirically investigate whether the media, by making some of these tools overabundant and restricting the availability of others, influence commonplace perceptions of the world (including perceptions of social movement messages and activities). As Gamson and Modigliani (1989) explain, "Making sense of the world requires an effort, and those tools that are developed, spotlighted, and made readily accessible have a higher probability of being used" (10). From a multi-institutional politics perspective, the journalistic field is an important site of research precisely because of its great power as a social institution; it provides and reproduces conceptual understandings that pervade other, contiguous social fields.

Research Methods

To investigate the hypotheses that social movement litigation and legislative lobbying receive more mainstream news coverage – and more substantive and personalized coverage – than protest, I conducted a content analysis of mainstream media coverage of the LGBT movement from 1985-2007. I searched online newspaper databases for news articles covering

the LGBT movement in three mainstream news sources (represented by one national newspaper, the *New York Times*, and two California newspapers, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Los Angeles Times*) (see Appendix 2).[3] This returned a sampling frame of 27,767 articles. From these I selected a random sample of 40 articles per newspaper per year from 1985-2008 to code for LGBT movement activity (2,880 articles in total). Irrelevant articles (lists, events, obituaries, letters to the editor, and articles that did not cover LGBT movement activity) were excluded from any substantive coding, generating a set of 1145 articles, which report a total of 1275 tactics. The analyses presented in the section below are of the tactics reported in the articles, and not the articles themselves (n=1275).

Articles from these news sources were analyzed as a single dataset. For the purposes of this paper, I do not discuss the variation between these sources. Observing the data as a three-year moving average, one sees no significant differences between the papers (see Appendix 1). This finding is in line with other studies that show no significant variation between regional and national sources (Gamson 1992: 197). Possible explanations for this lack of variation include widespread syndication, corporate ownership, and agenda-setting by major newspapers (Herman and Chomsky 2002; Bagdikian 2004; Rojecki 1999: 39).

Relevant articles were coded for information including a) the principal issues that the article reports; b) the principal movement tactics that the article reports; c) whether the article mentions the name of a movement organization; d) the length of the article; e) whether the article includes a quotation from a staff member of the organization; f) whether the article mentions countermovement activity; and g) whether the article quotes a countermovement representative.

Particular attention was placed on the tactics reported in each article. Codes for the primary tactics discussed in this paper were *Direct Action*, *Legislative/Electoral Politics*, and *Litigation*. *Direct Action* included protests, marches, rallies, demonstrations, civil disobedience, boycotts, non-violent resistance, and collective action. It did not include gay pride parades,

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[3] The *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* are available in searchable format through LexisNexus from 1985 to the present. The *San Francisco Chronicle* is also available on LexisNexus, although for a more limited time period (starting in 10/1/1989). I used the searchable ProQuest Historical Newspapers website for the *San Francisco Chronicle* from 1985 to 1990.

which were coded as *Community and Service Provision* (see below). *Legislative/Electoral Politics* included lobbying, legislative policy/program analysis, and voter registration or education campaigns. Lobbying was construed broadly to include LGBT activists' or organizations' attempts to influence the legislature. It included activity by LGBT legislators. Activism regarding ballot initiatives was also included in this category. *Litigation* included all activities associated with litigation, including filing, service, discovery, settlement, oral argument, final judgment, and appeal.

Other codes assigned to coverage of LGBT movement activity were *Education*, *Community and Service Provision*, *Philanthropy*, and *General Advocacy*. *Education* included coverage of original research, such as studies, public opinion polls, and media monitoring, as well as the provision of ongoing education services, such as the distribution of educational materials, classes, study groups, lecture/film series, as well as counseling, training, and referral. *Community and Service Provision* included art displays, cultural heritage festivals (such as the Pride Parade), cultural workshops, or efforts to produce visual, audio, or broadcast media. *Philanthropy* included charity, fund-raising, and any provision of general financial assistance to LGBT individuals. Finally, *General Advocacy* included articles that cited LGBT organizations as being "for" or "against" certain general propositions, but did not report directly on movement activists organizing around those propositions.

Research assistants coded every article for the presence of these tactics, and found 1275 tactics reported in the 1145 articles set. Given that the focus of this research is on tendencies in media coverage of movement tactic, all rates and comparisons reported in this analysis use the number 1275 as a denominator or basis for comparison.

Findings from the Empirical Media Analysis

Selection Bias in Coverage of LGBT Movement Tactics

Newspapers were relatively stable in their coverage of Philanthropy, General Advocacy, Community and Service Provision, and Education. Yearly coverage of these tactics remained within a 10-article range from 1985-2008 (with SDs of 1.2, 2.2, 2.7, and 3.4 respectively). Education tactics received a surprisingly high level of coverage over time, representing a full fourteen percent of all tactics covered. The likely explanation is that journalists look for external support for the assertions in their articles. Reporters covering an issue that is the subject of a LGBT public information campaign seek validity by citing the perspectives of these representative organizations.[4]

The more compelling findings relate to the coverage of Litigation, Direct Action, and Electoral Politics/Lobbying. First, as the literature would predict, journalists appear particularly eager to report on litigation. As Figure 1 shows, Litigation tied with Lobbying/Electoral Politics as the most frequently covered tactic after Community and Service Provisions (see *supra*, fn.5). Both Litigation and Legislative/Lobbying received three percentage points more coverage than did Direct Action.

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[4] The other categories that received consistently high coverage with little fluctuation, General Advocacy (12% of all tactics covered) and Community and Service Provision (21% of all tactics covered), do not say much about the interaction between social movements and the journalistic field, and are therefore excluded from this analysis. The *General Advocacy* code was a catch-all for articles that cited LGBT people and organizations as being "for" or "against" general propositions, but did not report on LGBT activists organizing around those propositions. These articles seemed to report LGBT people's reactions to current events, and did not focus on LGBT activism. *Community and Service Provision* included a broad range of tactics from cultural displays to service provision to the arts. It is important to count these activities as "social movement activity" (Armstrong 2002). However, since these activities are quite different in nature, coverage of them has only a diffuse impact on the LGBT movement's overall identity.

Figure 1: LGBT MOVEMENT COVERAGE BY TACTIC
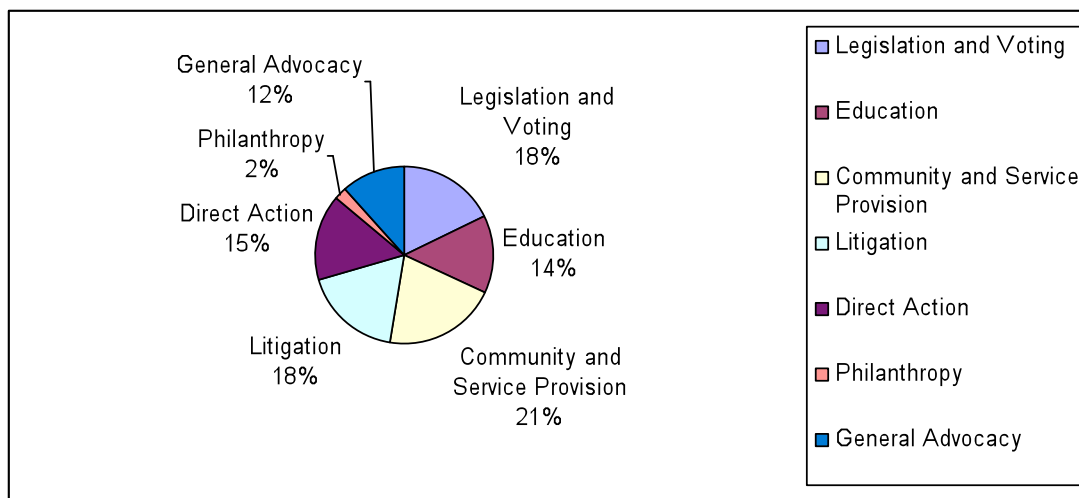
N = 1275 (tactics reported)

Figure 2
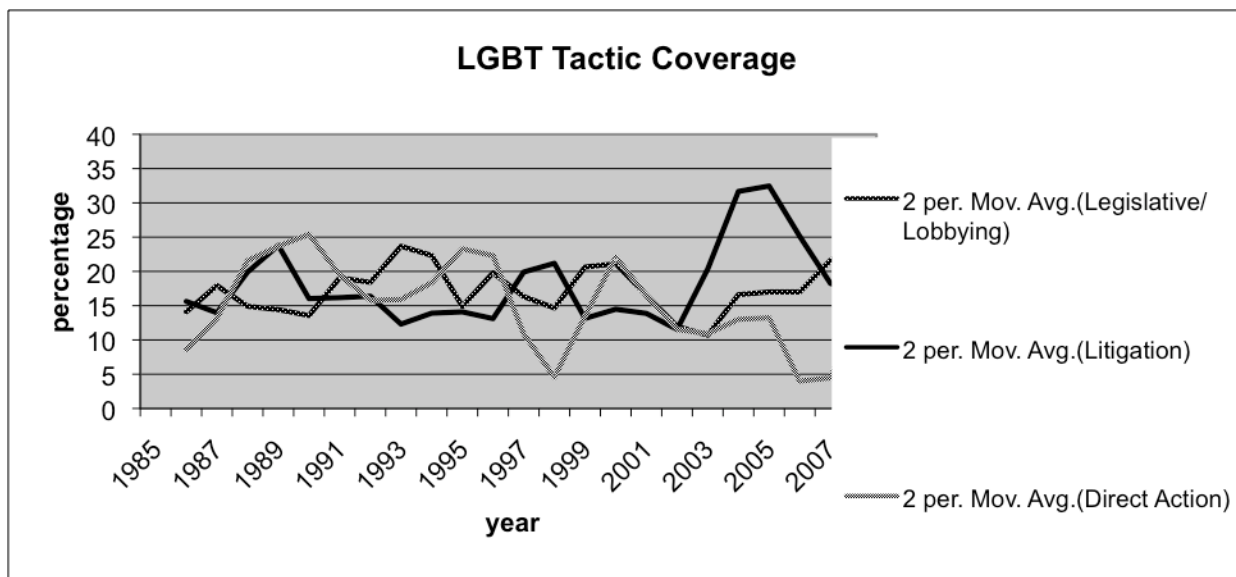
*The moving average smoothes out large jumps in the data to a level that is more likely reflective of how the public actually *interprets* newspaper data– as periodic, and not cabined by yearly cut-off points.

Election years apparently pique media interest in legislature-related political activity; the LGBT movement experienced a surge in coverage of Legislative/Lobbying tactics during or before election years. As the data in Figure 2 show, increases in Legislative/Lobbying coverage typically fall on the year immediately preceding a presidential election. Other research has similarly found that coverage of movement activity tends to follow most salient issues in a given election period (see Oliver and Maney 2000).

Perhaps more surprising is the finding that Litigation was just as likely as Lobbying and Legislative Politics to receive media coverage. One of the reasons that litigation has such high overall coverage rates is that the tactic experienced a sharp increase in coverage beginning in 2003-4 (see *infra*, *Variation in Coverage of LGBT Movement Tactic Over Time*). The peak during those years might be explained by the two major litigation victories for the LGBT movement that occurred during those years: *Lawrence v. Texas*, the U.S. Supreme Court case that held a Texas sodomy law that was enforced against a gay couple to be unconstitutional, and *Baker v. State*, the Vermont Supreme Court decision that found prohibitions against same-sex marriage to violate the state's constitution. Yet even before these years (from 1985-2002), the average percentage of yearly coverage devoted to litigation had been as high as 15.8% of all tactics covered (as compared with the average 16.7% of direct action and 16.8% legislation/lobbying). It therefore appears that the high rate of news coverage is not explained by a genuine increase of newsworthy litigation alone. The data support the hypothesis that litigation itself produces a relatively stable and high level of media coverage over time.

Furthermore, these findings regarding coverage of litigation are a conservative estimate of the tactic's ability to attract media coverage. While the categories coded as Direct Action and Electoral Politics/Lobbying included many different types of activities, the only tactic that was coded as Litigation was actual litigation.

The high rates of coverage of Lobbying/Legislation and Litigation tactics may be explained by mainstream news reporters' heavy reliance on insider and institutional actors (e.g., "government officials" and politicians) to find and substantiate their stories (Gans 1979; Ryan

1991; Kruse 2001; Herman and Chomsky 2002; Bennett 1988: 95). This focus on institutional actors means that news is likely to consist mostly of those activities that come from institutionalized venues (Graber 2006). Thus social movement activity that occurs within institutionalized political venues are likely to gain *more* coverage, simply because these activities are more likely to fall into a reporter's field of vision.

Description Bias in Coverage of LGBT Movement Tactics

The literature reviewed above not only predicts that reporters will *select* stories of LGBT litigation and lobbying more often than they will select stories of direct action; it also predicts that reporters will *describe* litigation strategies in more substantive detail than when reporting on a movement's direct action tactics. In particular, the description biases observed within the journalistic field (dramatization, personalization, and fragmentation) may work to the advantage of activists using litigation. This section operationalizes each of these biases in turn, and evaluates their impact on media coverage of particular movement tactics.

1.) Dramatization of Coverage

Drama in media coverage of LGBT movement tactics was measured by coding whether articles mentioned and/or quoted antigay activists (the "countermovement"). This measure captures only a narrow definition of drama as outright, organized, and public opposition between two political groups. Although it does not draw out all potential producers of drama in news coverage of movement tactics, it does generate some interesting findings.

Lobbying was the tactic most frequently associated with the antigay opposition; 30.5% percent of Lobbying articles quoted countermovement representatives, and 29.6% percent discussed the countermovement (see Appendix 3). Litigation was a close second with 27% of articles citing opposition leaders and discussing the opposition. Interestingly, Direct Action (the tactic often described as the most dramatic or controversial) was only discussed in the context of antigay activists 17.9% of the time – almost a ten percentage point difference from litigation.

This high level of oppositional litigation coverage supports the hypothesis that reporters dramatize litigation coverage. Litigation, which pits individual litigants against one another in a discrete legal contest, is a tactic likely to appeal to the journalistic penchant for drama. However, as noted above, this dramatization does not necessarily work to the disadvantage of organizations performing protest tactics. Whereas drama in protest coverage might be damaging to a movement and produce negative public sentiment (Gitlin 1980), zealous and adversarial behavior is an expected and legitimate characteristic of litigation (Model Rules of Professional Conduct 2009).

2.) Fragmentation of Coverage

To measure which social movement tactic was most prone to *fragmentation*, or the failure of the mainstream media to connect key issues of concern to movement activists, the articles were coded for the number of issues that they covered. From this code, I determined which type of tactic was most likely to yield coverage of multiple issues of importance to movement activists.

Legislative and Litigation tactics were more likely than Direct Action to be reported in the context of at least one additional issue (other than the main issue that the article reports) (Appendix 4). In other words, Direct Action was the tactic most likely to be subjected to single-issue (likely fragmented) coverage. Although Legislative/Lobbying tactics apparently receive more multi-issue coverage than did Litigation, it is important to note the substantive differences in news coverage of these two tactics that likely drive this finding. Lobbying efforts are usually more multi-issue by nature than litigation, which reduces the range of pertinent social issues to a single legal claim (see White 1987-88). Because litigation is not itself a multi-issue tactic, the finding that litigation generates such broad issue coverage suggests that reporters are investing more time in covering the context and scope of the issues behind movement litigation.

3.) Personalization of Coverage

Taking a quotation from an activist – allowing her to recount the event from her own perspective – is one way that journalists personalize coverage of social movement activity. I therefore measured the personalization bias by observing which tactics were more likely to produce quotations of LGBT activists and individuals. Here, Litigation and Legislative tactics were again more likely than Direct Action to generate activist quotations (Appendix 5). About 61% of articles on Legislative tactics quoted an LGBT representative. Fifty-two percent of articles on Litigation did the same. Only fifty percent of articles on Direct Action quoted an LGBT representative. Education was another tactic that generated a high percentage of LGBT representative quotations. This is likely because the representatives in those articles were being used as experts, and were quoted for factual figures and research.

Communications scholars criticize the personalization bias in news coverage because it often takes the place of important fact-finding and obfuscates the broader social context of news events. However, personalization often works to the benefit of a social movement. Personalization brings a human face to a movement's demands, when the mainstream press too often portrays activists as radicals far outside the mainstream (see Gitlin 1980). Thus the personalization bias in media coverage, which occurs more often in coverage of Litigation and Legislation/Lobbying than it does in Direct Action, will likely work to the benefit of the LGBT activists who use the former tactics.

Variation in Coverage of LGBT Movement Tactics Over Time

While the sociolegal and communications literatures predicted the sustained high coverage of litigation, this finding will come as a surprise to those who know the historical trajectory of the LGBT movement. Previous studies on the LGBT movement during the 1980s and 1990s tend to make two observations. First, in the early-1980s, many LGBT organizations turned their focus toward combating the AIDS epidemic, which caused them to bureaucratize, nationalize, and focus largely on lobbying and electoral politics (Rimmerman 2001). Gay

activists confronting the devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic experienced little opposition to these organizational changes; they were accepted as the political powerhouse the movement needed to combat the fatally inadequate political response to the epidemic.[5] Second, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, several groups like ACT-UP (1987), Queer Nation (1990), Transgender Nation (1992), Lesbian Avengers (1992), Transsexual Menace (1994), and It's Time America (1994)[6] emerged, using protest and creative direct action tactics like "kiss-ins" (Armstrong 2002: 182). Many of these groups disbanded in the late-1990s (Armstrong 2002: 183).

Yet during the periods when electoral politics, and then direct action, are thought to have dominated the LGBT movement (early-1980s and late 1980s through the early 1990s, respectively), the mainstream news media maintained a strong focus on litigation – a tactic that not many LGBT organizations used until the late 1990s and early 2000s. In fact, mainstream media coverage of litigation tactics appears to have actually *preceded* their ascendancy in the movement.

To determine whether the media may have influenced movement tactics – as the multi-institutional politics model would predict – I generated a series of "peak periods" in media coverage of each movement tactic that experienced significant fluctuation (Litigation, Lobbying, Direct Action). To generate these peak periods, I first converted the data into 2-year moving averages. The moving average smoothes out large jumps in the data to a level that is more likely reflective of how the public actually *interprets* newspaper data– as periodic, and not cabined by yearly cut-off points. I then converted the moving average for each year into standard units, so I could analyze variation within the coverage of the tactic over time. Finally, I separated out the top 25% or so of the data in standard units, and designated them as "peak coverage years."

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[5] For example Larry Kramer helped found Gay Men's Heath Crisis in 1982 before splitting with the group over its use of institutionalized political channels. He went on to form the direct action group ACT-UP.
[6] See http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/transgender_activism,3.html.

Figure 2: Peak Coverage Years, by Tactic

Legislation		Litigation		Direct Action	
SU	*Year*	*SU*	*Year*	*SU*	*Year*
1.281481	1991	0.386819	1988	0.98538	1988
0.911111	1992	0.816619	1989	1.131579	1989
1.837037	1993	0.386819	1991	1.423977	1990
1.651852	1994	2.679083	2004	1.277778	1991
1.096296	2000	2.679083	2005	0.692982	1994
1.466667	2008	0.673352	2006	0.692982	1995
				1.423977	2000

These data show that peak coverage of Direct Action (1988-1991) appears to have preceded the largest growth in direct action organizations (1990-4). No research to date has systematically examined the growth of legal and litigating organizations in the LGBT movement (but see Andersen 2005). Future research should address whether the drastic surge in media coverage of litigation in 2004-2006 has generated a corresponding upshot in LGBT movement litigation.

There is a significant limitation to the findings described above: The analysis does not compare media coverage of the LGBT movement to the tactics LGBT activists *actually initiated*. As the analysis does not make this direct comparison, the finding that media coverage influences the tactics activists choose can only be seen as a preliminary. To confirm this finding, we must compare the data presented here to sources describing the actual tactics adopted by the LGBT movement at different times throughout its history.

Future analysis must also assess whether certain tactics are most likely to receive media coverage simply because they are intrinsically linked to particular issues. For example, marriage is a hot button issue that is typically litigated. The findings in this paper do not rule out the possibility that the issues that a tactic generally serves, rather than the tactic itself, best explain coverage of LGBT movement activity.

Conclusion

Implications for the LGBT Movement

The preliminary findings presented in this paper have implications not only for social movement theory, but also for the LGBT movement in particular. Substantial newspaper coverage of LGBT tactics that take place within institutionalized political arenas such as the legislature or the courts likely affects the way that the heterosexual public perceives the movement. Although public opinion does not simply follow media representations, the media influence how people interpret issues (McCombs and Shaw 1972). The media provide news consumers with cues about what issues are salient, and people often rank their priorities accordingly (McCombs and Reynolds 2002). In other words, as Cohen (1963) explains, "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about" (13). While the portrayal of the LGBT movement as primarily working through institutional venues may not dictate public perceptions of LGBT people, it likely influences what the public perceives to be central movement issues.

This could affect the LGBT movement in at least two ways. First, it could shape the movement's constituency by de-mobilizing LGBT people who lack legal or policy expertise. Second, it could limit the movement's social impact by narrowing the sorts of movement claims that enter the public sphere. When movement goals that are difficult to achieve through institutional venues are not reported, they remain marginal and unfamiliar to the public. On the other hand, movement goals that once appeared exotic or ridiculous might achieve normalcy through routine public exposure.

Comparing the different fates of two campaigns within the LGBT movement will help to illustrate these claims. Two strains of LGBT activism, queer politics and same-sex marriage advocacy, emerged in the early 1990s. Queer politics focused on eliminating the gender binary,

using tactics such as occupying public spaces, social performance, and direct action.[7]   Same-sex

marriage advocates took to the courts (or used electoral politics when antigay activists proposed

a discriminatory ballot initiative). The goals of both of these activist strains initially appeared

sensationally radical – even though marriage politics took place in institutionalized political

venues. However, while same-sex marriage has since become a regular part of contemporary

political discourse, dismantling the gender binary remains an obscure goal, both within and

outside of the LGBT movement. This paper suggests one dynamic that might help explain such

issue marginalization: the mainstream media privileges and offers expansive coverage of

movement tactics that take place within institutionalized political venues and marginalizes those

that fall outside of institutional frameworks.

Implications for Other Social Movements

The importance of this study to social movement theory will depend on its

generalizability to other social movements. Challenges to generalizability may be particularly

likely in the case of the LGBT movement because there are many who claim that it is

fundamentally *different* from other movements. Opponents of LGBT rights insist that LGBT

people do not suffer material or economic discrimination in the same way that those in other

movements have. Herman (1996) explains how such claims fit into a larger rhetoric that

delegitimizes the LGBT movement:

> The primary theme of the CR [Christian Right] pragmatists is that while rights may be
>
> due to the 'truly disadvantaged', the gay movement does not fit this description. Their
>
> argument contains two, fused, limbs: first, gays are immensely wealthy; second, the gay
>
> movement is not only one of the most politically powerful in the country, but lesbians
>
> and gay men as individuals actually hold vast amounts of political power and unfairly

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[7] For example, Berlant and Freeman (1992) write that Queer Nation's "tactics are to cross borders, to occupy spaces, and to mime the privileges of normality—in short, to simulate 'the national' with a camp inflection. *This model of political identity imitates not so much the 'one man one vote' caucus polemic mentality of mainstream politics* but the individual and mass identities of consumers…[QN] has produced images, occupied public spaces of consumption, like bars and malls, and refunctioned the culture of the trademark" (152; see also Gamson 1995: 400; Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

wield it over others. As a result, the CR contends, civil rights protections will simply

further extend and entrench the extraordinary privileges of this elite and deceitful

(because they portray themselves as 'oppressed') group.

If claims about LGBT wealth had any empirical backing, they would indeed detract from the generalizability of the findings presented in this paper. Well-funded movement organizations are more likely than those with fewer resources to use institutionalized tactics such as lobbying (Staggenborg 1988: 593). Therefore, if LGBT people as a group were wealthier than average, and thus more likely to contribute resources to their organizations, LGBT organizations would be more likely to use institutionalized political tactics than the organizations in other movements. The high percentage of media coverage of institutionalized tactics in the LGBT movement would be unlikely to translate to other movements with fewer resources to invest in such tactics.

However, there is no empirical basis for the claim that LGBT people are wealthier than average. In fact, studies employing multiple regression analyses of national survey data indicate that the opposite is true. Census data from 1999 show that "[a]mong all full-time employed men ages 25-54, the median earnings of partnered gay men are $3,000 below the income of men partnered with women (married and unmarried)" (Gates 2003). An earlier analysis of the 1990 General Social Survey found that gay men who worked full time were paid 26 percent less than heterosexual men (Badgett 1995). An analysis of the 1990 Census similarly found that gay men earned 27 percent less than heterosexual men (Klawitter and Flatt 1998). (In the latter two of these studies, women with female partners showed no difference in earnings from heterosexual women after controlling for other factors.)

In summary, there is nothing inherently elite about the LGBT community that would make it more likely than other movements to use legislative and legal tactics (and thus to attract more media coverage of those tactics). However, it does not necessarily follow that findings regarding the LGBT movement apply to other social movements. The LGBT movement must be analyzed in the context of its countermovement, which has influenced its political power, its priorities, and the very language of its demands (Fetner 2001; see Meyer and Staggenborg 1996).

Perhaps by propagating stereotypes of activists as elite, the countermovement has compelled journalists to focus more on LGBT lawyers and lobbyists. Psychological studies on stereotyping suggest how this might occur. Preexisting beliefs and stereotypes shape people's information-gathering strategies; we seek out information that confirms preexisting beliefs, rather than information that disconfirms or is even irrelevant to those beliefs (Johnston 1996; Johnston and Macrae 1994). Thus journalists might seek out stories that conform to stereotyped notions of LGBT privilege.

Therefore, the LGBT movement may be unique insofar as it exists in a setting where oppositional forces have drawn focus to its ostensibly elite behavior, and media coverage of institutionalized LGBT activity such as litigation – a tactic that requires professional advocates and a high level of resources – might simply reflect the rhetorical power of the antigay activists. Future comparative research, then, should determine the movement-specific characteristics that influence media coverage of movement tactic.
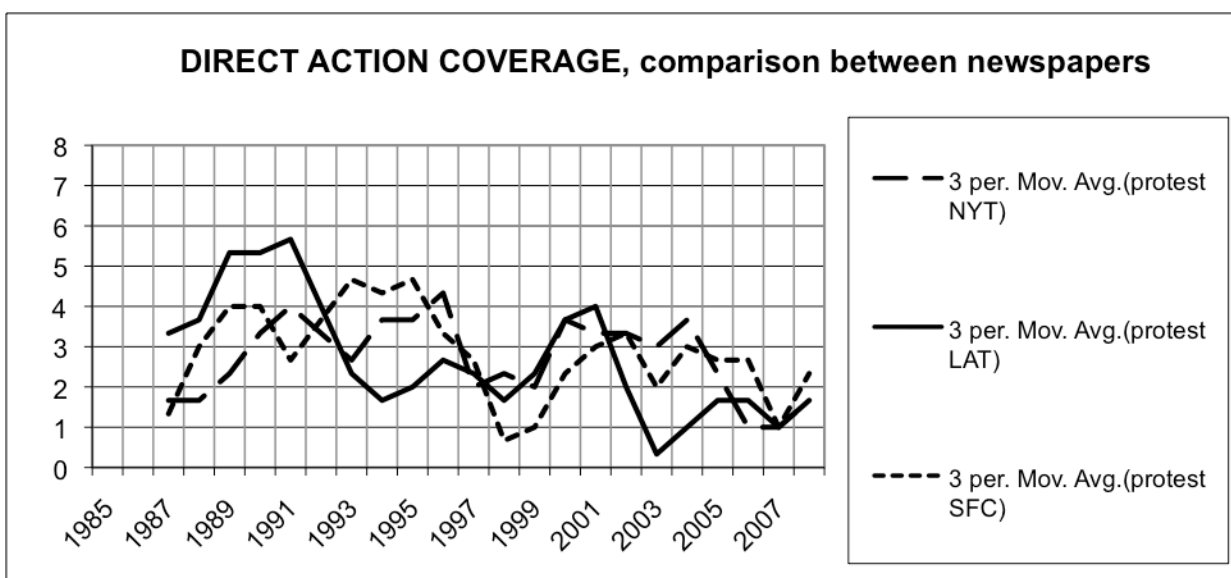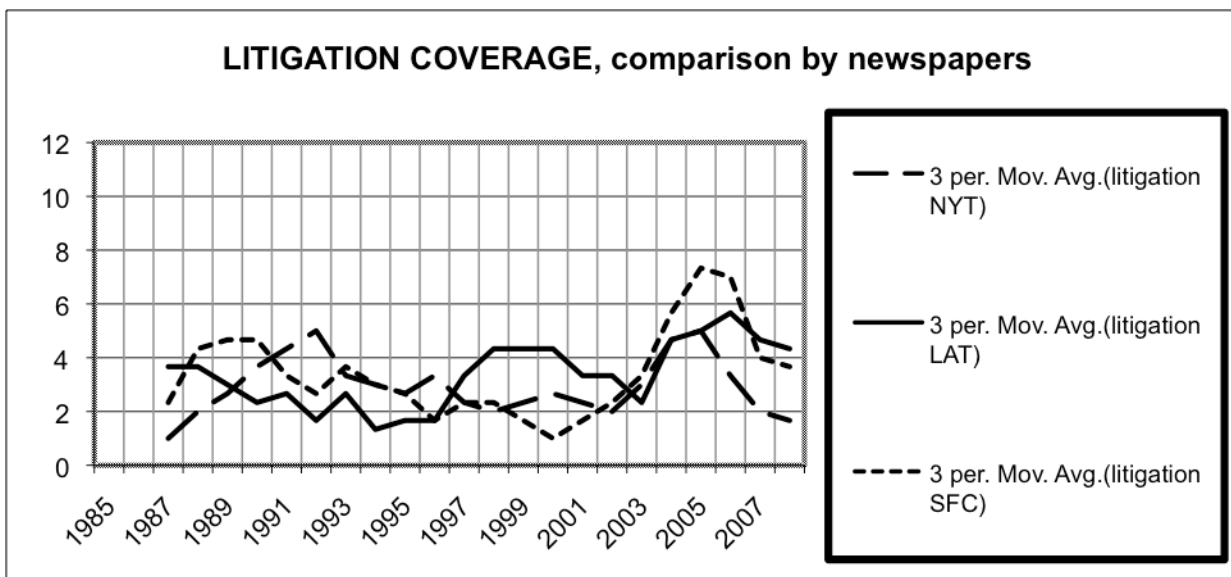
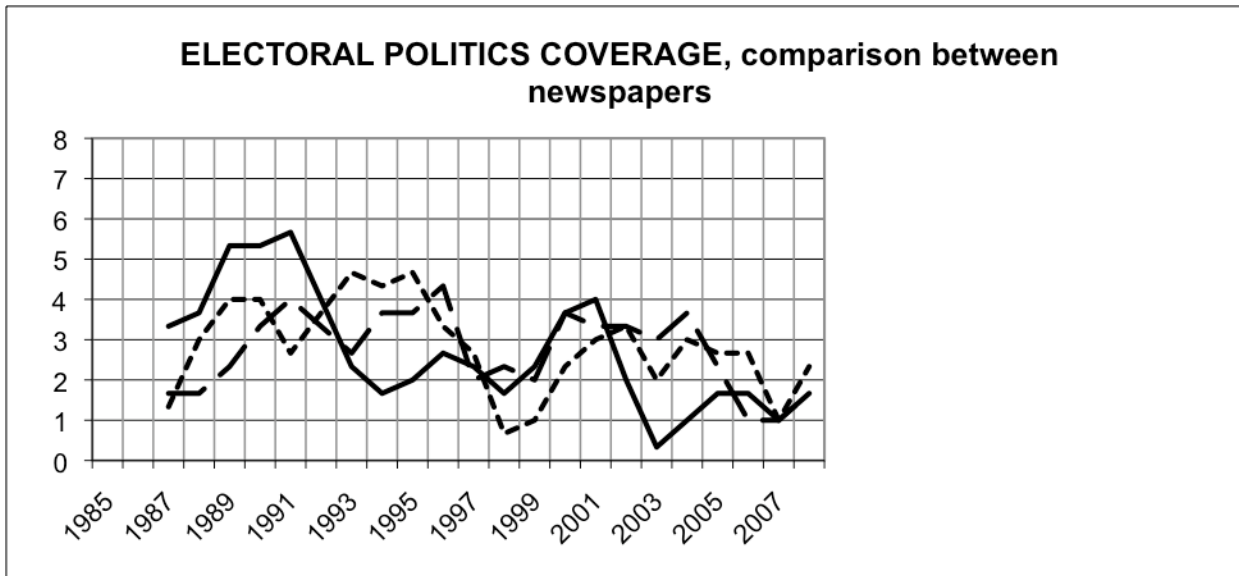**Implications for Social Movement Theory**

The multi-institutional politics model grounds this study theoretically, both by predicting patterns in media coverage and by explaining how these patterns reflect power dynamics within a multi-institutional social environment. In the end, this study also contributes to the multi-institutional politics model by examining how formal political institutions and informal social institutions together constitute power relations – not only between power-holders and contenders, but also *among* the contenders themselves (see also Evans and Kay 2008). Media coverage is an important symbolic resource that can create (or exacerbate) a power imbalance within a movement when it is largely allocated to groups that use institutionalized political tactics. This study proposes that mutually-supportive journalistic and political fields operate on social movements themselves by altering power dynamics within the movement.

Furthermore, this paper investigates how the journalistic field supports the logic and legitimacy of institutionalized political processes. Studies in the communications literature have indicated several ways in which the journalistic field overlaps with and sustains other powerful social fields; news coverage reflects the values of the corporate sector (Herman and Chomsky 2002), of political officials (Bennett 1988; Herman 1996), and of legal reasoning (Ferree 2003). Similarly, greater coverage of institutionalized social movement tactics legitimates state-run and managed institutions by spreading the perception that those are the customary, capable and accepted venues through which oppositional groups contest the status quo.

All this introduces an additional concern about reproduction of hegemony. Social movements are crucial sites of social change. They problematize institutionalized beliefs that sustain (unequal or unjust) social behavior, and offer a resolution. However, if, as implied here, only the movement's least transformative demands – those that can be expressed through institutionalized political venues – penetrate the public sphere, this limits not only a movement's ability to enact radical social change, but also the public's ability to imagine truly transformational change (i.e., beyond the current political system). When movements are forced into institutionalized boundaries, the scope of their claims is effectively narrowed, and their counterhegemonic function is diminished.

Appendix 1: Coverage by Newspaper

LITIGATION COVERAGE, comparison by newspapers

- 3 per. Mov. Avg.(litigation NYT)
- 3 per. Mov. Avg.(litigation LAT)
- 3 per. Mov. Avg.(litigation SFC)

DIRECT ACTION COVERAGE, comparison between newspapers

- 3 per. Mov. Avg.(protest NYT)
- 3 per. Mov. Avg.(protest LAT)
- 3 per. Mov. Avg.(protest SFC)

ELECTORAL POLITICS COVERAGE, comparison between newspapers

*The moving average smoothes out large jumps in the data to a level that is more likely reflective of how the public actually *interprets* newspaper data– as periodic, and not cabined by yearly cut-off points.

Appendix 2: Locating Media Coverage of the LGBT Movement

Since the purpose of this study is to find which *activity* produces the most coverage, I had to devise a search in which all types of movement activity would have an equally good chance of being included. Therefore, I searched by the *noun* rather than by the *verb*. For example, I searched for gay *activists* rather than for gay *protests, lawsuits, lobbying*, etc. I also used terms that would capture the movement more generally, such as "gay rights."

The final search terms are as follows:

> ("gay rights" or "lesbian rights" or "transgender rights" or "lgbt rights" or "glbt rights") OR ([gay or homosexual! or lesbian! or bisexual! or transgender or transsexual! or "same-sex"] w/p [movement OR organization! OR organizer! OR campaign OR group! OR activist! OR advocate! OR reformer! OR protestor!])

I arrived at these search terms by running multiple searches in a single source (NYT) in 2 single years (1990 and 2008). I broke the search into three parts: a) gay terms (gay, lesbian, etc.); b) activity terms (reformers, activists, etc.); and c) general movement terms (e.g., gay rights). I ran each term in the search individually and looked over a sample of the results to make sure it did not produce too many obviously false hits. These methods persuaded me not to search for specific movement action (e.g., protests, etc.). The methods also convinced me *not* to use the general term "poltic!", which produced far too many false hits.

Appendix 3

Opposition Quoted, by Tactic

		Does not Quote Opposition	Quotes Opposition	Total	
Legislation and Voting	Count	155	68		223
	%	69.50673	**30.49327**		100
Education	Count	158	21		179
	%	88.26816	11.73184		100
Community and Service Provision	Count	229	32		261
	%	87.73946	12.26054		100
Litigation	Count	168	62		230
	%	73.04348	**26.95652**		100
Direct Action	Count	160	35		195
	%	82.05128	**17.94872**		100
Philanthropy	Count	27	3		30
	%	90	10		100
General Advocacy	Count	127	20		147
	%	86.39456	13.60544		100

Countermovement Discussed

		No Discussion of Opposition	Includes Discussion of Opposition	Total	
Legislation and Voting	Count	159	67		226
	%	70.35398	**29.64602**		100
Education	Count	157	22		179
	%	87.7095	12.2905		100
Community and Service Provision	Count	227	34		261
	%	86.97318	13.02682		100
Litigation	Count	168	63		231
	%	72.72727	**27.27273**		100
Direct Action	Count	161	35		196
	%	82.14286	**17.85714**		100
Philanthropy	Count	28	3		31
	%	90.32258	9.677419		100
General Advocacy	Count	124	23		147
	%	84.35374	15.64626		100

Appendix 4: Tactics and Multi-Issue Coverage

		No additional issues in article	One additional issue	Two or more additional issues	Total
Legislation and Voting	Count	169	53	6	228
	%	74.12281	23.24561	2.631579	100
Education	Count	148	29	3	180
	%	82.22222	16.11111	1.666667	100
Community and Service Provision	Count	227	32	3	262
	%	86.64122	12.21374	1.145038	100
Litigation	Count	183	45	3	231
	%	79.22078	19.48052	1.298701	100
Direct Action	Count	159	34	3	196
	%	81.12245	17.34694	1.530612	100
Philanthropy	Count	24	6	1	31
	%	77.41935	19.35484	3.225806	100
General Advocacy	Count	117	24	6	147
	%	79.59184	16.32653	4.081633	100

Appendix 5: Personalization in LGBT Movement Tactic

		Does not quote LGBT rep	Quotes LGBT rep	Total	
Legislation and Voting	Count	90	138	228	
	%	39.4736842	60.52632	100	
Education	Count	67	113	180	
	%	37.2222222	62.77778	100	
Community and Service Provision	Count	153	109	262	
	%	58.3969466	41.60305	100	
Litigation	Count	110	121	231	
	%	47.6190476	52.38095	100	
Direct Action	Count	98	98	196	
	%	50	50	100	
Philanthropy	Count	18	13	31	
	%	58.0645161	41.93548	100	
General Advocacy	Count	51	96	147	
	%	34.6938776	65.30612	100	

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