

Article

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Examining the portrayal of Homophobic and Non Homophobic Aggression in print media through an Integrated Grounded Behavioural Linguistic Inquiry (IGBLI) approach

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Introduction.

This brief report recognises that the media creates an understanding of the social world for individuals and wider society. As such this social institution can impact on homophobia in society through its portrayal of the LGBTI community. By utilising a new and innovative qualitative research method, an Integrated Grounded Behavioural Linguistic Inquiry (IGBLI) approach devised by the co-authors Ireland and Birch, newspaper articles from four daily newspapers in circulation within the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia are examined. This cross-cultural examination illustrates differences in the themes contained in reports of homophobic aggression when compared to reports of non homophobic aggression. This article first begins by considering the nature and extent of homophobia.

Nature and extent of Homophobia: An overview.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, homophobia can be understood as:

'...the hatred or fear of homosexuals - that is, lesbians and gay men - sometimes leading to acts of violence and expressions of hostility. Homophobia is not confined to any one segment of society, and can be found in people from all walks of life. Organized hate groups have viciously attacked homosexuals and have used especially violent language in attempting to persecute and intimidate them'.

(Accessed at: <http://archive.adl.org/hate-patrol/homophobia.html#.VdFkVUsqu0s> on 17th August, 2015).

The Australia Human Rights Commission (2014) reported on the everyday types of discrimination, harassment and hostility LGBTI people face, including verbal and physical forms of abuse, with approximately 50% of LGBTI community members admitting to hiding their sexuality due to fear of exposure to discrimination (Australia Human Rights Commission, 2014). As a consequence of this discrimination, harassment and hostility LGBTI people have experienced over time, and continue to experience, it is important to explore and understand the effects of homophobia.

The portrayal of the LGBTI community in the media.

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3 According to Couldry (2009), the media contributes to and sustains unequal power
4 within the social world. This has previously been illustrated through the work of
5 Bourdieu (1991) who recognised that the media has the power to 'construct reality'
6 (pp. 166), which can also be termed as symbolic power. The role of the media, in
7 particular print media, in contributing to the outcome of policy issues, such as same
8 sex marriage, is also well documented and evidenced through the theory of 'agenda
9 setting' (Hester and Gibson, 2007).
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16 Poole (2014) examined the way in which gay males have been represented in the
17 media over a 10-year period, finding that hetero-normative identities dominate the
18 media. Poole's research recognises how the media is prone to stereotyping and
19 communicating negative consequences for those who do not fit conventional norms
20 and values. The implication of this work resonates with Bourdieu's (1991)
21 observations considered above. The findings of Poole (2014) are illustrated through
22 the earlier work of Padva (2007) who reviewed films depicting members of the
23 LGBTI community. Padva noted that homosexuals were often portrayed in the media
24 as 'confused youths' up until the late 1980s, and since then have been shown as
25 individuals who did not conform to gender identities and who were often bullied. The
26 conclusions drawn from this type of research is that the media, in a large part, is
27 driven by heterosexuality and its dominance in society, which can engender
28 homophobia in society. This implies the media can contribute to addressing the types
29 and levels of discrimination experienced by the LGBTI community, including that of
30 homophobia.
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42 The language used by the media, and how it influences society has been examined in
43 the work of Henley et. al. (2002), who conducted a content analysis of newspaper
44 articles covering anti-gay attacks. While variation was found amongst these
45 newspaper reports, the researchers noted that in one newspaper there were both fewer
46 and less specific nominalisations, which are claimed to obscure agency when
47 describing an anti-gay crime as opposed to anti-straight violence. It was concluded by
48 Henley et. al. (2002) that language can influence how readers perceive the amount of
49 harm done to a victim. Analysis of media content, especially with regards to print
50 media, commonly drawn upon content analysis, the use of any type of behavioural
51 assessment to examine media content, however, has been neglected within the
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3 empirical research, especially with regards to the portrayal of individuals and groups.
4 Therefore any consideration of antecedents and reinforcing factors surrounding
5 behaviours of interest from being understood, the core aims of a behavioural
6 assessment (see Lee-Evans, 1994) do not feature within this type of research. The
7 current article, therefore, contributes to redressing this neglect by developing a new
8 and innovative research method in order to analyse the portrayal of homophobic
9 aggression and non homophobic aggression in print media. By doing so, the
10 following analysis incorporates a behavioural assessment framework.

17 **Methodology**

18 *Sample*

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22 One homosexual aggressive incident newspaper report and one heterosexual
23 aggressive newspaper report was selected from a daily newspaper in the USA,
24 Canada, the UK and Australia, over a 5-year period, between November 2011 and
25 August 2016. Of the four print newspapers selected from each of the named
26 countries, the print newspaper was chosen due to the fact it was one of the most
27 circulated papers in their respective countries.

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33 A total of eight articles were therefore selected, based on a purposive strategy (n=4
34 articles containing homophobic aggression; n=4 articles containing non homophobic
35 aggression).

36 *Analytical approach*

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42 Three distinct, yet complimentary qualitative research methods were adopted in the
43 analysis: 1) a grounded theory approach to analysis, 2) a behavioural assessment
44 framework in the form of a SORC (see Lee-Evans, 1994) and 3) the Linguistic
45 Inquiry and Word Count method (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). These three
46 components are brought together in order to develop a new and innovating qualitative
47 research method entitled an *Integrated Grounded Behavioural Linguistic Inquiry*
48 (*IGBLI*) devised by the co-authors Ireland and Birch. This approach was adopted to
49 allow for the content to be captured and explored without prejudice (through the use
50 of a grounded theory approach), interpreted (through the use of a SORC framework)
51 allowing for an exploration in how the report was being expressed through language
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3 (through the use of a linguistic inquiry and word count analysis). The findings are
4 presented below.
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7 **Findings**

8 *Component 1 of the IGBLI: Grounded Theory analysis component*

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10 A grounded theory approach was the first step of the IGBLI. The process was
11 conducted using the stages of the approach as noted by Schroth (2013), namely
12 generating categories, by noting key points in the data and grouping similar content
13 to produce concepts. By grouping concepts together broader categories emerged, which
14 also contained sub themes. The categories and sub themes were scrutinised by a
15 second researcher to ensure inter-rater reliability in which six broad categories of
16 *effects to victims, responses from others, motivation for the assault, perpetrator*
17 *behaviour, characteristics of those involved and Criminal Justice issues* arose from
18 this analysis.
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28 Overall, while the categories that emerged from the first stage analysis offers some
29 similarities in terms of how the media portrays both homophobic and non
30 homophobic aggression, the nature and extent of this portrayal is different between
31 the two cohorts. This is reflected through various categories and sub themes, which
32 emerged from this analysis such as *effects to victims* and *motivation for the assault*.
33 For example, the focus of the news reports for homophobic aggression significantly
34 focussed on the emotional impact of the incident and the severity of the injury,
35 compared to non homophobic aggressive reports. Reports of non homophobic
36 aggression appeared to focus more on facts such as the time of the attack and
37 perpetrator characteristics. These results are clearly tentative but they do suggest
38 some emerging themes worthy of further study. The next step of the Integrated
39 Grounded Behavioural Linguistic Inquiry (IGBLI) approach aimed to examine this in
40 more detail using a behavioural [functional] assessment.
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Component 2 of the IGBLI: Behavioural analysis component: The SORC

The SORC analysis, a behavioural assessment, as noted earlier in this chapter, accounts for the antecedents and reinforcing factors surrounding behaviours of interest (Lee-Evans, 1994). A SORC comprises four components: S – setting/antecedent, O – organism variables, R – response and C – consequences, namely reinforcers (Lee-Evans, 1994: 20). It allows for further *interpretation* of the aggression reported on in the print media reports as opposed to a simple description of categories and themes that emerged through the grounded theory analysis. The SORC attempts to offer a function of the behaviour, in this instance aggression, through an interpretation of antecedents, background factors and potential reinforcers. SORC analyses were conducted across 8 articles in total, with an example of SORC presented below to illustrate this process. This article captures a homophobic aggressive incident.

Example SORC: Newspaper Report 1 - The United States, USA Today Report: Homophobic aggressive incident (The Associated Press, 2013); This reported on a fatal shooting in New York City. It was reported as an ‘anti-gay hate crime’. The victim was walking with his companion. The perpetrator reportedly used homophobic slurs before shooting the victim in the cheek.

(S) Setting: The offence took place in a busy city, in the middle of a ‘weekend midnight crowd’ in a busy public place known as the ‘bed rock of gay rights’. The perpetrator looked for confirmation that the two men were a couple before shooting, suggesting the possible importance of their homosexuality (i.e. specific trigger). Reports suggest the perpetrator may have felt slightly disinhibited at the time, supported by his actions prior to the crime when threatening individuals in a restaurant after urinating outside it. Homophobic slurs were used by the perpetrator and he confirmed the relationship between the victim and his partner before shooting.

(O) Organism variables: The perpetrator had been previously arrested for attempted murder, though little of this arrest was known. The use of homophobic slurs suggests

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3 a pre-existing negative belief system.
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6 *(R) Response:* High intense violent response (i.e. shooting of the victim).
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9 *(C) Consequences:* Potential positive reinforcement for the perpetrator through
10 gaining notoriety by committing the crime in public and negative reinforcement
11 through the remove of negative emotion/feelings of hate towards the victims.
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14 *Hypothesised function(s):* To express homophobic views.
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20 The SORC analysis of newspaper articles, illustrated by the example above, reflects
21 differences in the way aggression towards homosexual and heterosexual people is
22 portrayed in the media. Through the analysis of the aggression reported within print
23 media amongst the four countries of the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia, the
24 description with regards to the antecedents and what triggers an incident of
25 homophobic aggression compared to a non homophobic aggression incident differ in
26 terms of the amount of detailed offered. This difference is also found to be a feature
27 in the SORC with regards to background factors and potential reinforcers, which are
28 both more detailed features in the homosexual aggressive news reports than in the non
29 homosexual incidents. While such findings preliminary and small scale, they do
30 suggest the application of a behavioural assessment for analysing media content is
31 worthy of further study.
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44 *Component 3 of the IGBLI: Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) analysis*
45 *component*
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48 A Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count analysis (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010) was
49 used to examine the choice of words employed in these 8 articles consider in this
50 IGBLI. The LIWC allowed for considering the news reports separately for the
51 aggression towards homosexuals and the aggression towards non homosexuals.
52 Pictures, adverts, unrelated words (such as date of publication and authors' name)
53 were removed from the article prior to analysis, although titles of articles were
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3 retained. Text was checked from slang and abbreviations, as instructed (Pennebaker,
4 Booth, Boyd, & Francis, 2015). The results are presented in table 1 below in which
5 the output from the LIWC text analysis is reported, this output also includes total
6 word count as well as positive and negative words reflecting emotions.
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11 <<TABLE 1 HERE>>
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14 To explore if these were significant, Mann-Whitney tests were conducted using SPSS.
15 The only significant difference was for overall cognitive words ($U=.00$, $p=.021$),
16 which were higher for the homophobic aggression articles. This suggests that overall
17 there was not a great difference in the way in which the reports of homophobic and
18 non homophobic articles that were included in this study were communicated via
19 written lanaguage. Although when reporting on homophobic aggression word
20 selection indicates greater active thinking (i.e. cognitive words), suggesting these
21 reports may be more reflective.
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28 **Conclusion.**

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30 In conclusion the variations in reporting styles and content presented in this study
31 reflect the observations offered by existing research. For example, in research such as
32 that by Poole (2014) it was noted that the media commonly treat certain individuals
33 and groups such as the LGBTI community differently when compared to other
34 individuals and groups. While scholars have argued that the way in which individuals
35 are portrayed in the media has the potential to impact on the audience's acceptance of
36 stereotypes, which ultimately may lead to discrimination such as homophobia. The
37 media, therefore, has a duty to report and represent individuals and groups, such as
38 those in the LGBTI community, in a fair and accurate way, and without prejudice. By
39 engaging in such practice the media can contribute to a reduction and prevention in
40 homophobia and help improve the health and wellbeing of the LGBTI community.
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Table 1: Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count text analysis of homophobic aggression and non homophobic aggression in print media reports.

	Articles referring to homophobic aggression					Articles referring to non homophobic aggression				
	USA	Canada	UK	Australia	Total	USA	Canada	UK	Australia	Total
Self-references (I, me, my)	0.34	2.25	1.35	1.26	1.13	1.63	0.00	0.36	0.00	0.94
Social words	10.74	12.13	9.03	12.63	10.78	11.44	8.76	10.43	8.66	10.53
Positive emotions	0.34	1.35	0.40	0.25	0.53	1.34	0.52	0.36	0.00	0.86
Negative emotions	2.94	2.25	3.77	2.27	2.96	1.49	4.12	6.12	3.15	3.07
Overall cognitive words	4.52	5.17	3.64	3.79	4.26	2.53	3.61	3.24	1.57	2.75
Articles (a, an, the)	11.09	6.07	9.97	8.33	9.40	11.44	7.73	10.07	14.17	10.85
Big words (> 6 letters)	19.57	16.18	18.60	19.95	18.73	19.91	25.77	20.86	19.69	20.99
Total word count	884	445	742	396	2467	673	194	278	127	1272