

FRAMING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE:
A COMPARATIVE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF MARYLAND NEWSPAPERS

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For my dad, Wes Pippert

Thank you for giving me my education,
fostering my intellectual curiosity,
making sure I still read print newspapers,
and exposing me to new ideas, places, and people.

This isn't enough, but this is for you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My coursework in the Journalism school and the process of writing a thesis has been a simultaneous whirlwind and slow-moving storm, but has furthered my desire to work in the nonprofit sector, particularly in policy. While in law school, I very quickly realized I did not want to be a lawyer. Around this time, I was accepted to a Masters program in Human Development and Family Studies. During my coursework in the HDFS program, I found my passion for social science and research. I have extensively studied women's issues, primarily workplace fairness and the balance between work and family. This course of study has reaffirmed the necessity of human rights, the importance of increasing awareness, and how the law can help affect change.

I found through the past four years that I am passionate about policy work and advocacy. Working at a non-profit dedicated to women's issues one summer reaffirmed my desire to move back to Washington and begin an advocacy career. Being in Washington also showed me, however, the necessity of a public message and the importance of public education and information dissemination. I dealt with the media every day of the summer, whether it was giving quotes, dealing with background questions, or attempting to push a story. My coursework in journalism has educated me about media messaging, public dissemination, and the ins and outs of journalism. I now feel that, as an advocate, I can correctly and passionately inform the public about the human rights issues I fight for.

The Washington program allowed me to gain further experience in studying the journalism side of my interests and allowed me to view a different aspect of working in policy, particularly the importance of message dissemination.

Chapter Two: Timeline of Project and Field Notes

My placement in the Washington Program was at NBC News on the Investigative Team. I worked directly for two producers, Rich Gardella and Carl Sears, who worked with and for two Investigative Team journalists: Lisa Myers and Michael Isikoff. In working with Rich and Carl, I gained a fuller understanding of the intensity of investigative journalism and the necessity of continuing to dig on every story. I worked primarily on one story dealing with plastic gas can combustion. The story was extremely complex, involving litigious and scientific issues.

During my time at NBC, I also helped during the breaking news story of the Navy Yard shooter. Later in the semester, the government shut down, which affected our flammable gas can story. I helped in reporting certain aspects of the story but was primarily at a standstill regarding the gas cans. During my final week at NBC, the Today Show aired our flammable gas can story. NBC Nightly News declined our story for their broadcast.

This chapter includes my weekly reports of working at NBC for 12 weeks, along with my reflections of attending seminars in and around Washington.

Weekly Report 1

The Washington Program officially started this week! I do not begin my professional project at NBC until next Tuesday (the day after Labor Day), so my report this week will primarily be about the seminars we attended and thoughts about my research project (read: my incredibly exciting thoughts about interesting people and work I have yet to do!).

Tuesday was our first official day of the Washington Program and we kicked it off by meeting in the conference room, having orientation, and then closing it off with a seminar with Jeff Biggs. Mr. Biggs is a great guy and the perfect start to the semester. I don't think I've seen him for close to 20 years (I'm old), so it was great to reconnect and hear his thoughts on the Hill, politics, the basic legislative structure of Congress, and "This Town." He's an engaging speaker and, even though I'm originally from Washington, I still learned news things as he spoke. (He's also hilarious).

Our other seminar this week was with the lovely Katy Steinmetz of Time Magazine. I don't know Katy as well as other former students, but she has always been warm and friendly to my brother and me when we've run into her at other events, so it was good to see her. Katy's talk was particularly salient as she just went through the Washington program and knows the struggle it will be to balance the professional project and the research project. I wish we could have talked more about the future of magazines (this has been of interest to me lately), but we ran out of time.

As far as updates on my research project, there is not much to report, sadly. I will begin parsing through my data set this coming week as I have four flights to fill up time with when I head to Michigan and back.

On a personal note, it's been wonderful making the full move back to Washington after four years in Columbia and settling back in with family and friends. I've been able to see a lot of people very quickly and that has been fun and unexpected (I assumed all of my friends would be out of town during August). I'm living with my cousins and their very young children, which is providing a great deal of joy and fun (and a serious lack of sleep). So, although I have not fully started in the program yet, it has been an extremely full week and I'm grateful for the chance to recharge over the weekend!

Weekly Report 2

This week was spent settling in to Washington living. I was fortunate to be able to go to the taping of The Kalb Report, which was celebrating (as was the rest of Washington) the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. As always, Representative John Lewis was powerful, giving articulate and thoughtful recollections of the March on Washington. His insights into the current status of equality and race relations are always fascinating and the night of the taping was no exception.

I particularly enjoyed Gwen Ifill's thoughts. She referenced a book ("The Race Beat"), which I had read in Dr. Perry's History of Mass Media class, and brought up the issues surrounding journalism and the Civil Rights Movement. One of the things that Ifill mentioned was the similarity in emotional responses to the deaths of Emmitt Till and Trayvon Martin. I was surprised that more panelists did not bring up the similarities between these cases and I thought her insights were particularly salient. Ifill said the deaths of both boys caused an unanticipated, highly emotional response, which effected social change unseen to date.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the seminar on Friday as I was back in Holland, Michigan for my best friend's wedding. On the way to the airport my dad spoke very highly of Stephanie Kuck and I was even more sorry to miss her talk. Hopefully, I will be able to catch one of her seminars if she speaks next semester.

While I was incredibly busy during the wedding weekend (I will send pictures later to those of you who are interested – it was beautiful, outdoors, and I cried the entire time), I was able to use my flights for data analysis. So far, so good. At the wedding, I sat next to a Ph.D candidate from Chicago and we bonded over qualitative research (yes,

I'm single). It was incredibly serendipitous as I was able to process my own research project and get feedback from a neutral third party.

I begin my first day at NBC tomorrow and I'm very excited and anxious to get into a settled routine. On a personal note, it was so wonderful having this past week and a half getting settled into my life here in Washington. The long weekend was such a blessing for many reasons and returning back home to my cousins was calming and wonderful. The kids are doing great and my life feels very complete at the moment. Thus far, the Washington program has been a wonderful and stable addition to my life (almost) post-grad school.

Weekly Report 3

Work began in earnest this week, finally. I very much enjoyed my first week at NBC: everyone was very welcoming, kind, and encouraged our intern class to take advantage of our opportunity while we are at NBC. Our first day was an extensive orientation/onboarding, which was helpful to understand basics about NBC and get acclimated. I am interning with 6 other people and each of us received different assignments. I have been assigned to work with the new investigative team, which was not even in place when I was hired. My work will mainly be with Lisa Myers and Michael Isikoff, who are investigative correspondents for NBC. Their producers and I will be working together on research, story ideas, and production aspects of the stories. Unfortunately, due to confidentiality restrictions, I cannot actually write what stories I am working on. If the stories eventually come to fruition, I will be able to disclose but until that happens, I cannot write about specifics. Hence, most of my weekly reports going forward will probably be about how I did “research.”

On Friday, Barbara took our group to the Newseum for a tour with Paul Sparrow. I have been to the Newseum many times (including when it was in Rosslyn for years) but this was the first “professional” tour I’ve had (and none of you can ever tell my dad that – he would be so offended). I really enjoyed our time at the Newseum and Mr. Sparrow’s comments about the exhibits they received from the FBI and the exhibit about JFK. One of the conversation topics he brought up at the beginning of our tour was what the definition of a journalist is; for instance, is a reporter who writes for a government-controlled news publication (like Hamas) actually a “journalist?” This is a really fascinating question, which Ryan discussed, at length, in his Mass Media Seminar class a

year ago. There is no easy answer, but someone needs to do more research on what our definitions are of journalism and why we choose to define a journalist in a particular way. (Sorry for this tangent but it was my favorite part of our tour).

In addition to the thrilling conversation-starting topics, I also loved the Pulitzer Prize photographs exhibit, even though it was not part of our guided tour. I have zero experience with photojournalism (or photography of any kind) and I think it is partly the reason I enjoy photo exhibits like the one they showcased at the museum.

On a personal level, this week was far too busy to do much of anything with my professional project. I have a writing deadline for an encyclopedia coming up far too quickly, so that took up the majority of my time. This coming week, the kids are out of town (read: I have a quiet house and will not have to wake up twice a night with the baby), so I am planning on getting a lot accomplished: mainly by printing out the columns and beginning the coding process of the Baltimore Sun. I am looking forward to the opportunity to settle in to my job and use my downtime for writing. In addition to my thesis, I am also (very casually) collecting data for (hopefully) a future project on the Bradley/Chelsea Manning debate and how news organizations decided to cover this high profile transgender person. I am also trying to figure out whether I want to write something on the definition of who (or what) a journalist is (Ryan, you will likely get an email about this soon). Exciting times!

Weekly Report 4

Over the past week, I discovered two interesting things about my job: 1. I love it, and 2. I never watch the news anymore. This second discovery was surprising to me and it ties deeply into the first reason. My days are so busy I do not have time to read any news or even turn on the TV that is sitting at my desk. For instance, I missed Russia offering to negotiate the seizure of Syria's chemical weapons. And I'm in journalism! In many ways, it is a blessing because it could easily become frenetic to keep up with every breaking story. I am lucky to be on the investigative (read: heavy research) team...and this ties into the first discovery I had this week about why I love my job right now. One of my producers was on vacation this week, so he let me use my office (he has an office with windows!). I spent the week at his desk, pouring over research. I am currently researching a story on a federal legal question for Rich Gardella, whom I directly report to. Because he is so busy, we mainly communicate by email with my findings and have the occasional meeting for good measure. I have enjoyed this research, even though I felt like I hit a wall on Thursday afternoon. (I'm hoping this is resolved on Monday).

The other project I worked on this week was research for Lisa Myers on an issue related to healthcare. If you know me at all, you know I hate talking about healthcare...and yet, it seems to follow me everywhere I go. I was not exactly thrilled when I got this assignment, but it was an interesting story and I had great conversations with people while researching it.

Rich has made a point to explain to me not only how broadcast journalism works but also how journalism, as a whole, works. Rich is aware that I have zero broadcast experience (it also does not help that I do not watch television) but also that I have

literally no journalism experience. I am learning an indescribable amount from him just from observing him in our meetings, even things as simple as what it means to get something “on background.”

We did not have a seminar this weekend and I am still parsing through my data sets (or at least thinking about parsing through my data sets). It is very slow going and I am hoping that I use these next six weekends when I am out of town to get writing done on the plane rides. (I hope).

Personally, I am doing great. It was lovely to have the house to myself but I have missed the kids so much: it will be great to have them back. On Saturday, I had lunch with two close friends, who are alums of the Washington Program (Aamer Madhani, USA Today and Joe Morton, Omaha World-Herald) and we talked about my experiences thus far. I have known both of them since they did the program (15 years ago!) and they were very encouraging with the work I am doing and how overwhelmed I feel with how much I’m learning. The long weekend was a very (very) fun one, and I am paying for it with lack of sleep, but I am excited for a full workweek and squeezing in as much time as I can with the kids before I leave on Friday for a wedding in Kansas City!

Weekly Report 5

Hello committee members, I trust your week has been well. This week was incredibly busy. I was planning on having a low-key day last Monday and by the time I got to work, 2 people had been confirmed dead by the Navy Yard shooter. My day completely changed with the breaking news. I helped with clips and gathering information for the Nightly news. On Tuesday, I was still on the story, but this time focused on logging interviews and transcripts.

By Wednesday I was able to return to the stories I have been working on since I got here. I made progress on the Affordable Care Act and legal stories, which helped make a difficult week more bearable. Overall, I have been touched by how much Rich and Carl engage with me and help me understand their reasoning behind the decisions they make. Having no journalism experience at all makes for an interesting job sometimes. Their explanations about how to get the interview they need, or why they choose the clip they choose is invaluable.

Our seminar was on the Hill this week at Senator Blunt's office. We met with his press secretary who was incredibly gracious and explained her job responsibilities very well. I would never work on the Hill in any capacity (famous last words, I know), but I thought she had a clear understanding on what her job was and good boundaries around that.

Personally, I had a phenomenal week: I PASSED THE BAR EXAM! This was as stunning to me as I'm sure it is to you. I had a very happy week celebrating with friends and was able to attend a wedding of two law school classmates in Kansas City this weekend, capping off an excellent celebration. I am heading back to Columbia on Friday

for another law school wedding and you may see me lurking around the J-school at some point! I hope all is well with each of you!

Weekly Report 6

Over the past week I kept pretty busy. After the residual Navy Yard shooting stories, I went back to work on the four stories I'm currently helping out on. I worked primarily on a products liability story and was able to make some progress, which was nice. I am deeply appreciating meeting with my producers and learning so much from them, even things as simple as how to organize story material in Outlook is infinitely helpful.

I am hoping to get more involved in editorial meetings or planning meetings. I am primarily researching tasks and stories right now, which is fascinating but I want more interaction with people (and not just through email). After I email the producer I work with the research I have found, I wait for feedback and repeat the process. I enjoy this process of researching with feedback, but I hope to have more interpersonal communication in this process.

The seminar this week was at Hearst with Chuck Lewis. I needed this seminar more than almost any other mainly because...I need a job! I felt better after hearing his seminar just knowing that I needed to simply take the next step in actually applying for whatever jobs I need to apply for. So, my goal for this coming week is to apply to at least 3 jobs.

On the personal front, I was back in Columbia this weekend. It was so wonderful being back in CoMo and spending time with friends. I had a law school wedding, which was really fun (minus the rain) but it did not bring the productivity on the plane rides I hoped for. This was also related to the cold I got from the kids (which has turned into a fever for Wynn, but not Charlie, so I hope I'm safe). I've been taking a lot of zinc and

will be in Washington (finally) this coming weekend, so I am very hopeful that I will be hyper productive and get a lot written!

Weekly Report 7

This past week was both very busy and dreadfully slow. While the government shutdown initially brought some work, by the end of the week I was going a little crazy. The stories I was working on were on (and currently are) on standstill until the shutdown is resolved. With almost all federal agencies sending the media people on furlough, no one could return my calls so I was left in limbo.

On Thursday, I was (very) excited to put an early end to the week and get sworn into the Missouri bar although, due to the shutdown, the location had to be changed and the judge was unable to retrieve his robe from his office. I was planning on leaving the office early when news broke that there were shots fired at the Capitol and everyone was on lockdown. Needless to say, besides being worried about everyone I know on the Hill, I was already strategizing how to cancel the swearing-in ceremony. Luckily for me, Judge Grant decided the show must go on and we had a lovely and meaningful ceremony swearing me in to the bar. I was honored and humbled all of my family in Washington came, as well as our very own Barbara Cochran! It was a lovely and truly special night.

Our seminar on Friday was spectacular and by far my favorite of the semester thus far. We met Mike McCurry and picked his brain about the shutdown comparisons (and differences) between 1996 and today, the Lewinsky scandal, the polarization of politics, and many other topics. I could have stayed at that table for six hours, easily. He had incredible insight and intellectual depth into the political system, the schism between the parties today (including the lack of willingness to compromise), and the importance of a free press and transparent White House (which is currently nonexistent in this

Administration). Truly fascinating. I'm working to figure out how I can be best friends with Mike McCurry.

On a personal level, it was just amazing to finally be in DC for the weekend! My cousins and the kids were away, so I had the house to myself and was able to relax, sleep, see friends, and sleep some more. I am traveling to New York this coming weekend, so I am trying to rest up as much as possible and snuggle with the kids every chance I get!

Weekly Report 8

The government shutdown continued this past week...leading to more frustration. Most of my stories that I am working on are on standstill until the government reopens. Almost every single place I called for information related to my products liability story are furloughed. In an attempt to do some work, I researched a lot on statistics related to the story.

Once the story finally airs, I will be able to talk in my weekly report much more extensively about the process, my feelings about journalism, obstacles we ran into, etc. Sadly, until that time this report has to be incredible general about the story's progression.

Our seminar this week was particularly great. We went to Covington and Burling for our seminar with Kurt and Steve, who are partners at the law firm. They gave one of my favorite seminars on media law. Even though I have been pretty clear that I do not want to practice law, the only area I would (if I did) is media and 1st Amendment issues. Kurt and Steve started by talking about the federal media shield law that they have been working on for about 10 years. It was so, so interesting and made me all the more passionate about that legislation. I will certainly be following what happens.

Personally, I was in New York this weekend at my high school reunion, which was fantastic. I connected with many old friends and teachers and had a really special time. Of course, I hated being away from the kids – who are growing so quickly it's scary – but it was a very quick and fun trip. Sadly, all of this traveling is taking a toll on my research and writing. I may take until the spring to defend, but I will be in touch with Ryan this week and let the rest of you know quickly.

Weekly Report 9

The reopening of the government brought, fortunately, more work and returned phone calls and emails. While it was not clear at all, at the beginning of the week, whether we would actually get a deal (which would keep the government closed and also bring default), luckily by Thursday, people returning from furlough were returning emails and phone calls. The stories continue, particularly the products liability story. I am learning a lot in talking with Rich, my producer/boss, about how litigious stories work and evolve.

This week I also learned more about how quickly story arcs fade. This is a sad truth about journalism, that as a entry-level journalist, I am learning painfully. I was asked to do some research for a story related to the NSA and, almost just as fast, was told to stand-down as the story was already over. This is minorly heartbreaking, but a good lesson for me to learn very early on.

Our seminar this week was at NPR and it was great. The wonderment of the actual, physical building cannot be overstated. The NBC bureau is...old. (I'm being kind, here). NPR is a giant campus of technology and light. It was amazing. Our speaker (Keith Hunt, VP of Diversity) was really interesting. Diversity is a topic fraught with emotion (I am no exception). I thought he did a really good and creative job of defining diversity and practically trying to implement it in the NPR newsroom.

Additionally, I was also interested in the ways NPR is trying to adapt to technology and media consumption. I have been reflecting on this in my own life. Growing up, my brother David and I were allowed to watch Mr. Roger's Neighborhood (and that's it). My mom did not allow us to watch any other television (...which is why I

don't watch TV today). If I ever whined and asked to watch Mr. Roger's in the morning, my mom could honestly reply, "He's not on until 3pm. You will have to wait." Currently, Charlie (the 3-year-old) loves the shows Daniel Tiger and Dora the Explorer. We DVR each show and let him watch one or two episodes before bedtime. This means, however, that each viewing/media consuming is entirely up to us. Charlie knows that when he asks me to watch TV, I have complete autonomy in deciding whether he is allowed to or not. In addition to making me feel like the bad guy when I tell him he can't watch a movie, Charlie is also having an enormously different media experience than I did growing up. Having TV/media at your fingertips, I think, means a hyper-focus on instant gratification and a loss of the virtue of patience. I was grateful we touched on some of these issues at NPR.

Personally, I had a great weekend seeing friends and going to the Bears v. Redskins game. The weather was amazing and the cousins had a lot of fun in the sun together (minus the Bears loss, which was heartbreaking). I'm gearing up for my trip to Chicago this weekend and hoping I get work done on the plane!

Weekly Report 10

Last week was one of the busier weeks I've had at NBC, and during the program itself. Work was particularly busy as Rich was (and is) trying to wrap up a story he has been working on for a long while. He let me sit in on an interview Lisa did with a source in the story, which was fascinating. It was a long interview (2 hours) and it was taped, so there were moments when Lisa or the guy would take breaks and regroup. I thought it was going to be more contentious than it ended up being and it was a good window into source maintenance and my own expectations/opinions about reporting.

On Tuesday I had the highlight of my life! I'm somewhat kidding, but it was a thrill. Barbara invited us to go to a Q&A with Floyd Abrams. You only need to ask Jon Peters how much I love Floyd Abrams (Dr. Perry - you are probably the only one who would bother, but let me save you all the suspense: I love him). He spoke very eloquently and clearly about the First Amendment and was particularly excellent on how damaging and destructive the Obama administration has been to the First Amendment, and particularly to journalists. I also really appreciated his stance on Citizens United (because we completely agree). Barbara was a phenomenal interviewer (the next Charlie Rose!) and I enjoyed the experience a great deal.

On Friday we went to The Washington Post to meet with Jeff Leen, the editor of the investigative team. I really enjoyed meeting him and an investigative reporter, Dave Fallis. Jeff explained how the Post does investigative journalism and their process around stories. It was very interesting to hear and better understand - and especially to see the similarities and differences between print and broadcast investigative reporting.

Personally, things are good and busy as always. I was in Chicago this weekend, which was so wonderful (and freezing). I was in town for my high school reunion and to see some friends. My high school reunion was interesting: out of the 80 classmates in my class, 79 are married with at least 2 children (you guys get one guess which one isn't married and doesn't have kids). Overall, a really fun night though and a good weekend to reconnect. I'm so happy to keep cheering for the Cards in the World Series and looking forward to having a few continuous weeks in Washington! And, the best part of this week is Halloween is coming up...Charlie (almost 3) is going to be a pirate and Wynn (almost 1) is going to be a parrot (Get it?!?! ... "Pirate Pippert" and "Parrot Pippert" !?!?!). Prepare yourselves for a picture next week in the weekly report...their costumes are too adorable for words.

Weekly Report 11

Last week continued was busy and has continued into this week. The story that Rich, Lisa, and I have been working on since I started at NBC continues...at this point I'm losing hope that it will EVER air, but such is life in television, I'm learning. I may be able to travel this week or next week to see a taping, which I'm very excited about, but that depends on a few different moving parts.

I was also able to do more research for Mike and Lisa, mainly around healthcare questions, primarily about the unbelievably disastrous roll-out of the Affordable Care Act. It has been interesting to witness such incompetence...and then report on it! This is a new experience for me! Journalism!

Our seminar this week was with Terry Bracy, who is a lobbyist and it was very touching. He had such nice things to say about my dad and Barbara. His work was fascinating and I loved getting a more inside look at how lobbying works. One thing I wish I had been able to ask is how he keeps going and doesn't get discouraged when projects take years (decades!). I think in whatever career I end up in, I hope that I have a greater sense of accomplishment (or at least I feel like I'm producing something) with greater frequency than it seems his lobbying firm does.

Personally, this weekend was very busy. One interesting event I went to on Saturday was as a plus-one of my friend Tommy Burr's to a luncheon honoring Petula Dvorak (a local Washington Post columnist). She spoke very eloquently about her transition from a local reporter to a columnist with a local focus and about how she deals with (a lot of) criticism from readers. A recent column, however, during the shutdown was shared by so many of my friends on social media defending Our Town (as opposed

to This Town) from the people the rest of the country send her to "work." It was excellent. The kids also continue to do well (potty training actually may be the end of me) and we all appreciated the extra hour of sleep on Sunday. Halloween was also the most precious thing I have ever witnessed and brought back a million memories. We went to an informal Booz Allen Hamilton party and the kids stole the show. Too cute to handle. As promised, please see attached for a picture of Charlie as a pirate and Winnie as a parrot (aka The Pipperts Take On Halloween!!)

Weekly Report 12

Last week was busy...and slightly more diverse than normal. I started off last week taking a break from the (unending) story that I have been working on since I got here and worked on a healthcare story. If you know me, you know how draining healthcare stories can be for me, but this one was interesting! I did research surrounding the state-exchanges and particularly the Oregon state exchange (Oregon has not yet enrolled a single person). I enjoyed doing very traditional reporting and talking to fun people like state representatives! Thrilling! I saw the evolution of a story from its idea to research to the pitch. Unfortunately, with the typhoon that hit at the end of last week, our story was shelved for the time-being.

The other story that Rich and I have worked on seemingly forever is continuing. I am amazed at how long investigative pieces take, but recognize and understand the importance of getting the story right...especially in light of the current "60 Minutes" Benghazi scandal going on. Even though our story is nowhere near as controversial, it has been a good lesson in journalism for me to witness.

Our seminar this week was the ever-entertaining Donna Leinwand. I always have loved her seminars and always walk away completely convinced I could never do what she does. Donna has been a disaster correspondent for USAToday for a long time and I admire her tenacity all the more after this semester because I could not report on disasters.

Personally, things are very exciting! My cousin, Margaux, and her husband Jorge had their first child this morning: Catalina! I was at the hospital today for most of the day getting to meet little Catalina, who is just beautiful and has a full head of hair! Catalina

shares a birthday with our other cousin, Paige, who is a reporter at Politico, and comes a day after little Wynn's first birthday (we celebrated Wynn's birthday last night with cupcakes). All so exciting! I feel so blessed to be in Washington for all these celebrations.

Chapter Three: Project Evaluation

My professional project at NBC News was, overall, a great educational experience and one that I enjoyed very much. Going into the Washington Program I had (literally) zero experience as a working journalist. I had never called a source, never had anyone talk to me “on background,” and had never had to multitask assignments. While the experience was a great one, there were also some challenges that I did not anticipate, particularly because of my job assignment.

During my time at NBC, I worked on the investigative team. Immediately prior to arriving, the investigative team was reorganized. As part of the reorganization, I was directed to work for two producers (Carl Sears and Rich Gardella), who in turn worked for two correspondents (Lisa Myers and Michael Isikoff). The investigative team is unique in that (obviously) the stories are longer form and there is not daily production of stories. One of the major downsides to my semester was that Rich, my direct producer, was involved in a highly complicated, litigious, and scientific products liability story that took up the entire semester and aired on my last day of work. As a result, most of my time was spent helping him in the ways I could around this story, but without seeing the finished result.

While in Washington this semester we had two major news events that both drove news and stalled news. Relatively early on in the semester, the Navy Yard shooting occurred, which obviously dominated coverage for about two days. When breaking news occurred, essentially all hands were on deck to help out in any way possible. I was able to work with Carl and help find elements for different shows of the police response to the

shooting as well as observe the graphics department when they were making a map of Washington, showing viewers where the Navy Yard was proximate to the White House and Capitol building.

The second major event was the government shutdown. The shutdown was epically frustrating for me because it was right when I needed to talk to some government sources for the story I was working on with Rich. I was at a standstill trying to talk to people, almost every one who was furloughed. While it would have been interesting to cover the shutdown, I was unable to because the investigative team had no need to cover the shutdown.

The story that drove the majority of my semester was on the product safety of portable gasoline cans. Essentially, portable gas cans, which are ubiquitous in households, can explode under extremely limited circumstances. The gas can industry is aware that the cans can explode but has not mandated flame arrestors in the cans (which is an inexpensive way to presumably solve the problem). From the beginning, I had conflicted feelings about the story. The “limited circumstances” in which a can explodes usually involves having a fire source near (or even in) the gas can: this, in my opinion, is clearly consumer negligence. I continually, throughout the semester, approached this story as a lawyer and would find myself arguing for the gas can industry.

In the end, I believe we told a fair and balanced story about freak accidents that have happened when gas cans have exploded. I am not entirely convinced that this story was as newsworthy as we may have presented it, but we did explain how and why gas cans explode as well as clearly explain that gasoline and fire should never be mixed together. I was surprised how much I fought back against the story and this confirmed

that I should be more open to a legal career (that I have continually tried to reject). For this reason, the experience at NBC News was a good one and opened my eyes to both the ins and outs of journalism and my own future career path.

Chapter Four: Work Product

While working at NBC News, I was placed on the investigative team. My work was primarily focused on correspondent Lisa Myers' story on gas cans that, under certain conditions, explode. I worked with producer Rich Gardella, and joined him on researching the science behind gas can explosions and the legal tort cases raised by victims of exploding gas cans. The story involved replicating an exploding gas can in a controlled laboratory, interviews with victims and surviving family members affected by gas cans, and an interview with counsel for the gas can industry. Lisa's script was rewritten multiple times over multiple days for different versions of the story. In the end, The Today Show aired the 5-minute segment on Dec. 4, 2013, which was the only show on NBC that aired the story.

The gas can story can be found here: <http://www.today.com/video/today/53733179>

Chapter Five: Analysis
Framing Same-Sex Marriage: A Comparative Textual Analysis
of Maryland Newspapers

The coverage of same-sex marriage in mainstream American newspapers is a relatively recent, yet incredibly salient, topic. Until May 2004, no U.S. state administered or legally recognized gay marriage and, other than local policy battles regarding the issue, it was mainly left uncovered. As the movement for same-sex marriage recognition and equality has gained recent traction, through both victories and setbacks, media coverage of the fight for legally recognized marriage has increased.

In the November 2012 elections, four states had ballot questions regarding same-sex marriage¹. Maine, Maryland, and Washington voters passed the ballot measures and these three states join six other states² and the District of Columbia in recognizing same-sex marriage. As more states begin to deal with judicial enactments, legislative action, and, in some cases, ballot measures pertaining to legal recognition of same-sex marriage, the electorate will continue to rely on the media to inform them about debates over social issues. The voting electorate will particularly rely on the media when these social issues pertain to their voting, especially in light of the recent same-sex marriage recognition questions, which were placed on multiple ballots in the 2012 elections.

¹ Maine, Maryland, and Washington had ballot questions concerning the legalization of same-sex marriage. Minnesota's ballot question was whether to amend their constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman.

² The six states that recognized same-sex marriage prior to Washington, Maine, and Maryland were: Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

By studying how a topic is presented to the audience and its effects, one can begin to understand the preexisting beliefs and attitudes of the consumers and how their media consumption affects those beliefs (Entman, 1993). The media's framing occurs on all levels of "media." The media is a vast field, ranging from everything from entertainment television to news magazines to weblogs (Brewer, 2002). News media is of particular interest because news media is partly how voters become educated regarding election issues. Research on the framing of news stories can show researchers and the public how different news outlets and organizations frame certain issues.

Framing is a twofold process as both the media and audiences "frame." The media framing occurs when a story is presented with a central idea and storyline: This includes what is emphasized, excluded, what sources are used, the headline, and how the lead is written (Entman, Matthews, & Pellicano, 2009). At the same time, audiences frame in their own way as they interpret and process the information they are consuming. This process coincides with each person's unique biases, opinions, and values concerning the issue in the story they have read and are processing, yet the initial framing is from the media's presentation and dissemination to an audience.

Framing is a particularly germane analysis for political stories because, as Dardis (2007) points out, "there are many competing ways (frames) through which individuals can interpret any aspect of reality (e.g., a sociopolitical issue), and this interpretation affects subsequent comprehension and perception of the 'reality'" (p. 248). For social issues in particular, framing is an appropriate theory because it highlights the supporters, opponents, and observers involved in the debate at hand.

In this vein, framing theory can help explain and show how newspapers frame sociopolitical issues, such as same-sex marriage legalization and recognition, for the voting electorate. Similarly, from a practical standpoint, this research can show *how* the media informs the electorate. The purpose of the current study is to conduct an in-depth textual analysis of how two widely-read newspapers, the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Washington Post*, covered the Maryland same-sex marriage ballot question during the November 2012 elections.

Literature Review

Overview.

Historically, civil rights coverage has been slow, at best, to begin coverage and maintain it over time. During the 1950s and 1960s, the media was slow to cover race relations, particularly in the south (Roberts & Klibanoff, 2006). As the civil rights movement gained support, and following the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision rendering school segregation unconstitutional, more papers began to send reporters to the south to cover desegregation and the movement generally (Grimes, 2005; Roberts & Klibanoff, 2006). The media eventually covered the Civil Rights Movement by framing the story as a group of people striving for equality, not as a movement of fringe extremists (Roberts & Klibanoff, 2006). In the same way, the same-sex equality movement's frame has evolved as an issue of civil rights, which has translated to some media outlets framing their stories as such.

Historical Context.

The movement's recent focus on marriage equality has gained media coverage, yet prior to this recent development, coverage of the gay community generally has been

limited: the media, including movies, television shows, commercials, and news coverage, has tended to stereotype both gays and lesbians. While researching different forms of media coverage on gays and lesbians, Fejes and Petrich (1993) found television shows presented gay and lesbian characters as isolated, secondary characters that simply existed in a heterosexual environment. As the authors researched news media coverage of homosexuality, they discovered that prior to the 1960s there was close to no mention of homosexuality. When it was mentioned, however, it was portrayed and presented as “a sickness, perversion, or crime” (Fejes & Petrich, 1993, p. 402). During the 1960s, gay and lesbian activists began addressing these stereotypes, legal inequalities, and various forms of discrimination (Ross, 2012). Through gradual legal changes, allowing gays and lesbians to have greater equal protection under the law, and the higher prevalence of “out” members of the homosexual community, America began to see more openly out members of the gay community in public office and the public square generally (Ross, 2012).

Moving into the 1970s and 1980s, newspapers and other media outlets covered the 1980s AIDS epidemic, which strongly impacted the gay community, as thousands of gay men died from AIDS (Fejes & Petrich, 1993). As this health crisis progressed into the 1990s, in which the inclusion of homosexuals in the military was vigorously debated, the press continued to “heterosexize” gays and lesbians by presenting and framing their behavior within a heteronormative context (Fejes & Petrich, 1993, p. 405). The mid-1990s brought with it the debate over “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” regarding the military’s rule excluding homosexual people in the military (Ross, 2012). Then-President Clinton signed an Executive Order implementing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” which instructed

homosexual men and women not to tell others about their sexuality (Ross, 2012). This executive order also banned asking about another's sexual orientation in the military.

In 1998, Matthew Shepard, a young Wyoming man, was savagely beaten to death due to his identity as a gay man. His beating was widely covered and increased the visibility of both homosexuality and homophobic violence against the gay community (Becker & Scheufele, 2009). His death, along with other violence against homosexuals³, brought with it a national conversation that continues today regarding hate crimes, hate crime legislation, and the impact and prevalence of homophobic violence in particular.

The heteronormative lens through which members of the gay community were and are viewed is further compounded by the negative story association that has been presented to audiences: The fight for equality, debunking the "sickness" myth, the AIDS health epidemic, the coverage of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy debate, and stories about hate crimes against gay people has reinforced negativity over the course of four decades in stories dealing with the gay community (Ross, 2012). Although some of these stories were eventually seen as victories (for instance, DSM-III, the American Psychiatric Association's classification of mental disorders, dropping homosexuality as a mental disorder), the vast majority of these news stories presented the gay community from a negative standpoint: stories in which gays and lesbians were fighting to achieve something they did not have or, especially during the AIDS crisis and stories about hate crimes, dying from something. By continuing to present homosexuals situated within a heteronormative world, the gay community has consistently been framed as "other" and "different."

³ Another noteworthy, and highly covered, example of a hate crime was the brutal rape and murder of Brandon Teena, a transgender man who was born biologically female. His story was dramatized in the 1999 film, "Boys Don't Cry."

As recently as 2007, an Arizona television station was criticized for its coverage of a male “sex-posé” piece, which was about hetero- and homosexual Tucson men who had sexual encounters in local parks, yet the piece presented gay men as lurking in the shadows of the local Tucson parks (Chávez, 2011). A local LGBT support group labeled the piece as “sensationalistic and inflammatory” (quoted in Chávez, 2011, p. 8). Chávez noted that although heterosexual married men were mentioned in the story, the vast majority of men interviewed about their behavior in the park were gay yet their faces were blurred. These types of news stories reinforce negative associations people have about homosexuals and the gay community.

In August 2002, *The New York Times* announced that the Sunday Styles section, a portion of the paper dedicated to fashion, food and wine, home and garden, and wedding announcements, would begin printing commitment celebration announcements of same-sex couples (Gibson, 2004). In light of previous decades’ coverage of gays and lesbians, which was highly negative, this was one of the first pointedly positive editorial choices in general reporting on homosexuals. Yet, in a study comparing gay and lesbian journalists’ opinions with their senior editors’ opinions of newspaper coverage of the gay community, opinions differed widely (Bernt & Greenwald, 1992/1993). Forty-five percent of senior editors reported their papers devoted enough space to non-medical issues concerning the gay community, yet 83 percent of gay and lesbian journalists disagreed (Bernt & Greenwald, 1992/1993). In addition to disagreeing on the comprehensiveness and completeness of coverage regarding the gay community, senior editors also disagreed with gay and lesbian journalists over the acceptability of terms and words used to describe the gay community (Bernt & Greenwald, 1992/1993). These

disagreements over the type, amount, and tonality of coverage further highlight the negative association the gay community feels about what stories the media is covering and presenting, even when they are the ones presenting and framing the story as journalists.

The Fight For Marriage Recognition.

Over the past few decades, the gay community has won numerous victories, yet the history of the American fight for same-sex marriage began less than 15 years ago through different state actions. The movement has been incredibly varied: Almost simultaneously, as some states legalized same-sex marriage, other states immediately banned it by defining marriage as solely between a man and a woman. In 1996, the United States Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defined marriage as only between a man and a woman for all federal purposes (Denniston, 2012). DOMA further allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages created in other states. The gay community fighting for same-sex marriage recognition challenges DOMA on the basis that it violates the Constitution, which provides each citizen equal protection, in every state, under the law.⁴ In 1999, however, the Vermont legislature legalized same-sex civil unions soon after the Vermont Supreme Court found that “the state constitution prohibited denying to gay and lesbian couples the legal benefits attached to civil marriage” (Hester & Gibson, 2007).

The 2004 election cycle, however, dealt a major blow to the movement as 11 states⁵ voted and passed constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage (Hester & Gibson, 2007). Yet, almost immediately prior to the November 2004 elections,

⁴ The Supreme Court overturned DOMA in June 2013 in the case *United States v. Windsor*.

⁵ The 11 states were Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah.

Massachusetts became the first state to legally recognize same-sex marriage through a ruling of the Massachusetts Supreme Court. During the October 2012 term, the United States Supreme Court considered ten same-sex marriage petitions to determine whether to hear the cases (Denniston, 2012). Eight of these cases dealt directly with DOMA and its constitutionality and DOMA was overturned in *United States v. Windsor* by a vote of 5-4 on June 26, 2013.

In 2008, California had a widely publicized debate on “Proposition 8,” a ballot question asking voters to define a marriage as only between a man and a woman. The Proposition 8 ballot question was in direct response to court action, which held that homosexuals had the same right to marry as heterosexuals. Over \$82 million dollars was spent informing the public about the ballot question. Opponents to the same-sex marriage ban spent over \$44 million dollars (Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox, & Shah, 2010). In the end, California voters voted in favor of Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage was banned. A similar ballot question in North Carolina also passed in 2012 and defined marriage as only between a man and a woman.

In the recent 2012 elections, four states had a same-sex marriage question on the ballot, including Maryland. Maryland legalized same-sex marriage recognition through legislative action in 2011. Opponents of same-sex marriage gathered enough signatures to challenge the legislation and put the question on the November 2012 election ballot. The Maryland electorate voted in favor of recognizing same-sex marriage and, thus, the legislation went into effect in 2013.

After the election, in June 2015, the Supreme Court formally recognized the constitutionality of same-sex marriage. Two years prior, in June 2013, two Ohio men,

James Obergefell and John Arthur decided to get married after the Supreme Court's decision in the U.S. v. Windsor, which had overturned DOMA. Obergefell and Arthur were married in Maryland that July. When they learned Ohio would not recognize their marriage, they filed a lawsuit. Multiple cases were consolidated and renamed and, eventually, the Supreme Court heard Obergefell v. Hodges in April 2015.

In June 2015, the Supreme Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment requires all states to grant same-sex marriages and to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states as a result of the Due Process Clause. In Obergefell v. Hodges, Justice Kennedy wrote for the majority, "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family." He continued that same-sex couples "seek to find its [marriage] fulfillment for themselves. ... They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right." While most states immediately complied with the Supreme Court decision, there were a few notable examples of individuals who did not. In Kentucky, Kim Davis, a Rowan County clerk, refused to issue a same-sex license due to her religious beliefs. Davis spent five days in jail as a result of her refusal. In Alabama, Supreme Court Judge Roy Moore was suspended after he instructed probate judges to ignore the Supreme Court's ruling and refuse to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

As the gay community turned their fight toward the issue of marriage and demanded legal recognition of gay and lesbian unions, the media was also forced to shift their coverage towards this issue. The coverage itself and the study of framing are both particularly salient today as same-sex marriage became ubiquitous in each election

cycle, put on ballots, and legislative and court action was increasingly taking prospective action (either by supporting or opposing same-sex marriage recognition).

Framing Theory

Framing theory lends itself to literature surrounding how the media covers certain stories and the media effects on the audience. Studies have also shown that simply the consumption of media itself has its own effects, even when the researchers are not interested in the particular frames the media is using to present stories. In a recent study, Lee and Hicks (2011) found respondents were more likely to be in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage if they used television as their primary form of entertainment, enjoyed watching political talk shows, were likely to read web blogs, and thought magazines were more interesting than television rather than those who consumed less media. The frames the media used were not predictive of supporting or opposing same-sex marriage, it was simply the consumption of media itself (Lee & Hicks, 2011).

Previous researchers have found framing affects the ways in which audiences discuss and frame their opinions. In one study, participants who read a story about same-sex marriage framed in equality language discussed their opinions about same-sex marriage using terms associated with equality. In the same way, research subjects who read a similar story framed in terms of morality, answered questions about their views using morality words (Brewer, 2002). A later study, however, manipulated a news story about same-sex marriage by analyzing participants' reactions to the types of sources quoted in the story (Gibson & Hester, 2007). In one version of the story presented to consumers, high-ranking officials and prestigious sources were quoted as supporting

same-sex marriage while less significant and nonofficial sources were quoted as arguing against same-sex marriage. A second group of participants read a story in which the sides were reversed: the high-ranking and prestigious sources were quoted as opposed to same-sex marriage and the nonofficial sources were in favor of same-sex marriage. Finally, the third group of participants read a balanced story with equal amounts of both prestigious and nonofficial sources quoted as supporting or opposing same-sex marriage (Gibson & Hester, 2007).

The authors found the participants' opinions of same-sex marriage did not differ across the three variables (Gibson & Hester, 2007). Gibson and Hester (2007) argued their study showed there is no foundation for the fear that news stories that feature quotes from prominent or "celebrity" sources who are opposed to same-sex marriage will taint consumers against same-sex marriage or the homosexual community generally. While each article was framed differently, through the use of sources (both the official nature of the source and the level of prestige associated with the source) and quotations used, the participants were not affected by the prestige of the sources and their supposed opinions of same-sex marriage recognition.

Research on media framing of the gay community is also nuanced: research on the media can include entertainment television or news media (and the many different forms of news media). As Fejes and Petrich (1993) pointed out, gay and lesbian characters were forced to adapt to their heterosexual environment. This heteronormative standard persists in more recent shows, like *Will & Grace* and *Ellen*, as gay characters are rarely shown in their own communities with other homosexual friends and that gay parents are portrayed as misfits (Landau, 2009).

In comparing representations of heterosexual and homosexual families, Landau (2009) found the media consistently portrayed homosexual parents as different and other, while situated within a heteronormative frame. She wrote that the articles she studied “favor[ed] mainstream heterosexist, heteronormative, biological explanations of human sexuality and reproduction. These constructions, deployed through textual and photographic images, visibly ‘other’ the range of origins of children of same-sex parents, thus relegating them to an outer social-scientific space” (Landau, 2009, p. 90). Framing the heterosexual lifestyle as ideal or “normal”, and presenting the homosexual lifestyle as “other,” perpetuates a worldview in which members of the homosexual community are devalued, seen as deviant, and as a minority. These frames, presented to audience consumers, continue to promote the homosexual community, especially gay parents, as other, different, and not “normal,” as compared to heterosexual parents and people (Landau, 2009).

These differences in frames are particularly relevant as research continues to show close to no difference between children of gay or straight parents (Landau, 2009). Additionally, when reporting on children of gay parents, newspapers have questioned obsessively on the sexuality of children, which is not done when reporting on the children of straight parents. Landau (2009) points out that a 2004 *Boston Globe* interview with the daughter of lesbian parents quoted the daughter as saying she was “very” straight, again normalizing heterosexuality and presenting it as ideal (Landau, 2009, p. 91). The implicit and explicit privileging of heterosexuality constantly makes homosexuals feel as though they must conform to heteronormativity or that they have to make up for their sexuality (Landau, 2009).

News media consumers also have frames presented to them through the news stories they consume. Many times, the coverage surrounding same-sex marriage consists of debates between two, often polarized, sides. When consumers are presented with issue frames, especially those in the public debate, audiences tend to form their opinion based on their association between the issue presented and the frames in which the issue has been covered (Brewer, 2003). Additionally, debates over issues regarding “values” tend to be shaped on the basis of knowledge of the public debate.

Brewer (2003) notes, “the role of political knowledge in shaping the impact of a value on opinion about a political issue can depend upon whether public debate offers one undisputed interpretation or two competing interpretations of the value” (Brewer, 2003, p. 174). Within the same-sex marriage debate, in particular, scholars must study the media frames presented because of the inherent debate over values. Becker and Scheufele (2009) point out:

“The relationship between predispositions and policy support may be especially relevant in the case of gay marriage given the media’s framing of the issue as a debate over moral values and the growing number of religious institutions that have become vocal participants in the gay marriage debate (Price et al. 2005)” (p. 188).

The question of whether the media provides fair, balanced, and equal treatment in coverage can be answered, in part, by analyzing the frames through which newspapers present the debates. American newspapers, in particular, can show how mainstream media has covered and framed the debate. Although the majority of mainstream newspapers take editorial positions, even on highly contentious issues, newspapers continue to maintain they report stories unbiased and fairly representative of both sides of the issue.

Previous research has used framing theory to guide its questions regarding civil rights questions generally, and coverage of homosexuals in particular, across a variety of media outlets (Brewer, 2002; Li & Liu, 2010; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2005). As researchers begin to better understand how the media frames specific issues, journalists and reader/consumers are able to have a more informed understanding of media bias. Although journalists in the West, and particularly in America, are trained to be independent watchdogs without a bias, many believe the media is biased or slanted (Ho et al., 2011). This bias is particularly relevant when analyzing the media's heteronormative word choices employed, especially when discussing same-sex marriage. Liebler and colleagues noted that the presentation of same-sex marriage was framed from a heterosexual standpoint, implicitly privileging heterosexual norms and standards (Liebler, Schwartz, & Harper, 2009). Additionally, the media's strategy to present homosexual parents has, by and large, been to "normalize" these parents, which is another form of heteronormative standards being imposed on the homosexual community (Liebler et al., 2009). Their research, guided by framing theory, explicates the unique framing that occurs when discussing the sexuality of a group which has been ostracized in the past as well as show primary examples of framing. Textual analysis of the coverage of American newspapers, through a framing lens, allows for the media to self-critique in light of findings and allows readers to gain insight into the media's presentation of coverage by comparative analysis.

This paper sets out to explore two widely read Maryland newspapers that extensively covered the same-sex marriage debate around the November 2012 election. By examining and comparing the *Baltimore Sun's* and the *Washington Post's* coverage of

the ballot initiative, this paper hopes to show how the two leading Maryland papers framed the same-sex marriage debate. Thus, the research questions are:

RQ 1: How did The *Baltimore Sun* and The *Washington Post* coverage frame the same-sex marriage referendum vote during the November 2012 election?

RQ 2: How did the coverage framing differ, if at all, between the two papers?

Method

To effectively analyze both newspapers' frames, the mode of analysis will be a comparative textual analysis between the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Washington Post*. The textual analysis will analyze the extent and type of coverage on the ballot question in both newspapers. In order to determine the slant of the published stories and to compare the newspapers against each other, analysis will consist of whether the story is for or against same-sex marriage, the points of views expressed in the story, the sources and quotations used, and the editorial positions the newspapers took prior to the vote.

The newspapers chosen for analysis are each widely read in Maryland: the *Washington Post* serves Washington, D.C.'s Maryland suburbs while the *Baltimore Sun* is Maryland's largest general-circulation daily newspaper ("Audience," 2012; "(Baltimore) The Sun," 2012). The *Post* is a unique paper because, although it is a local paper serving the District, Maryland, and Virginia, it is a national newspaper that is widely read across the country. Comparative textual analysis between these two papers allows readers to see the framing of news stories more clearly and definitively. Research concerning the *Sun* and the *Post*'s framing of the news can adequately inform or deny the bias many believe is present in newspapers.

Because there are no formal public debates for ballot issues, like there are for political candidates, media outlets are of substantial importance in educating the public about the issue, the opposing sides, and the disagreement itself. The differences between two highly-read newspapers will help inform how the media is presenting this often contentious issue. Previous literature about media coverage of same-sex marriage has used textual analysis to inform and guide its research. Liebler and colleagues (2009) used textual analysis to explore how marriage was presented in newspapers in states with anti-gay marriage ballot initiatives (Liebler et al., 2009). In a similar study also guided by framing theory, Li & Liu (2010) examined 209 stories from 5 different papers, including the *Washington Post*, through content analysis to determine how same-sex marriage was presented.

Sample.

In the present study, the stories selected from both papers are from a 17-day period. The selected stories were published 14 days prior to the November 6, 2012 election and 2 days after the election. The sample includes Election Day (November 6, 2012) and that is how the 17-day sample is reached. In order to obtain this sample of stories from each paper, the data collection was a two-fold process. In the 14 days leading up to the election, multiple “Google Alerts” were set for both the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Washington Post* that contained the words “same-sex marriage,” “gay marriage,” “ballot,” “election,” and “Maryland.” The articles and blog posts from both papers that used any of these words anywhere in a story were emailed to the author. These emails with the Google Alerts continued until 2 days after the election.

Additionally, the author used the LexisNexis database to locate articles from the *Washington Post* and the *Baltimore Sun* that may have not been flagged from the Google Alert. The searches were similar to the Google Alerts and contained the phrases “same-sex marriage” and “ballot initiative” in the published stories. Further, after the data was collected, the author searched the online archives of both newspapers to ensure each article addressing the Maryland referendum vote on same-sex marriage was captured. The articles analyzed were all news stories, features, opinions, op-eds, letters to the editor, and editorial pieces published in the paper. The news stories and features were eventually grouped together as “news” pieces while the op-eds and editorials were considered editorial opinions. Letters to the editor were included in the sample as straddling the unique position of being reader responses, but included in the newspaper from an editorial decision.

In analyzing same-sex marriage ballot question for Maryland voters, the particular newspapers chosen represent widely read newspapers, both in Maryland and nationally. Limiting the data to the two-week window before Election Day was purposefully done. The two weeks prior to the election is when the coverage of a particular election issue (whether it be a candidate or a ballot question) is the most saturated. This two-week period is crucial for voters as they read the “last-minute” stories and the paper’s editorial position in preparation for their vote. The Election Day material is useful simply for having the exit-polling data stories and the eventual outcome of the election (in this case, upholding same-sex marriage in Maryland). Finally, the two-day period after the election is equally interesting because the newspapers are dealing with, in this particular case, implementation stories, lifestyle stories, and opposition reaction stories. These stories

also inform the public of the immediate reactions of those in favor and opposed to same-sex marriage as well as help the voters immediately see the impact of legalizing same-sex marriage.

This purposive data set includes the last-minute time before the election when voters are reading what the newspaper's editorial stance is as well as the immediate aftermath of the election, as the electorate learns of the impact of their vote. The newspapers chosen for the present study adequately represent Maryland newspapers that are widely read and reach Maryland voters. These papers' similarities and differences in their coverage of Maryland's same-sex marriage ballot referendum will show different types of framing and whether media bias exists (through unbalanced reporting).

Data Analysis.

The analysis of collected stories was done through comparative textual analysis. Coding each story through axial coding allowed the researcher to see major concepts develop and then categorize them. Coding occurred on multiple levels, including coding the amount of stories published on the ballot issue, the difference in amount of news stories and editorial stories, the sources and quotations used, whether celebrities or famous people were cited in the article, and word choices used describing the ballot referendum. Major themes and concepts were determined and put into categories, and the researcher compared the categories discovered between the two papers and whether the coverage and tone changed after the election when same-sex marriage was legalized. The frames that each paper used in their stories was compared against each other during the data analysis, in order to better understand if the papers used different frames and the manner in which the frames were employed in the stories.

Results

RQ 1: Amount of ballot coverage.

While both the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Washington Post* covered the 2012 election and Maryland's election issues, the *Sun* covered the same-sex marriage referendum much more extensively. Over the 17-day period sample, the *Sun* ran a total of 69 stories that either mentioned the ballot referendum or dealt with the ballot question exclusively. The *Washington Post*, on the other hand, ran 36 stories either mentioning the same-sex marriage vote or covering the ballot measure solely.

During coding, the stories were divided into five types of articles: news pieces, feature stories, letters to the editor, op-eds, and editorials. For the purposes of this paper, news stories and feature pieces were coded separately but considered under the umbrella of "news stories," while letters to the editor, op-eds, and editorials were grouped under "opinion pieces." The *Baltimore Sun* had a total of 20 news stories and eight features, for a total of 28 news items and 33 opinions. The *Washington Post* ran 13 news stories and two features, for a total of 15 news items and 13 opinion pieces. The *Sun*'s news coverage of the ballot issue was almost double that of the *Post*'s in news stories, with 28 news stories compared with 15 stories. The *Sun* also dominated the *Post* in opinion pieces, with over double the amount of coverage, although it was primarily in the form of letters to the editor. The *Post*'s op-eds and editorials surpassed the *Sun*, both in total amount and in the amount published prior to Election Day.

RQ 2: Influencers in news stories.

The data analysis also included an examination of types of influencers in the stories: word choice, sources and quotations used, including whether any celebrities or notable people were cited and/or quoted. These factors are what cause stories to be framed a certain way, and can by their very nature influence the reader. When an issue is framed in a positive or negative light, a reader can be swayed regarding the issue.

Discussion

Purpose of study.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the frames used analyzing the amount of coverage in the *Washington Post* and the *Baltimore Sun* concerning the ballot referendum measure on same-sex marriage in the 2012 election. Part of this analysis also included looking at the types of influencers the papers used, including the choice of words, quotes, and sources the articles used. Using framing theory, one can study how a controversial issue was presented to a reader in the critical weeks prior to an election.

Summary of major findings.

RQ 1: Amount of ballot coverage.

The difference in opinion coverage between the papers was striking for two reasons. As mentioned above, the *Sun* ran more opinion pieces (n=33) than news stories (n=28) in its coverage of the ballot measure. Although the *Post* ran more news stories (n=15), its coverage of the same-sex marriage ballot measure was almost equal to the opinion pieces the paper ran (n=13). What was additionally notable was the type of opinions each paper ran. Among its 33 opinion pieces in the 17-day period, the *Baltimore Sun* ran 27 letters to the editor, four op-eds, and two editorial pieces. The *Washington*

Post, alternatively, ran only one letter to the editor, but published seven op-eds, and five editorials. The *Sun* not only placed a greater emphasis on opinion pieces generally, but a significantly greater weight on letters to the editor.

Op-Eds. When compared to the *Post*, the *Sun* kept its paper's opinion pieces restrained. Of the *Sun*'s four op-eds, three were written by the same columnist (Rodricks) who supported same-sex marriage. The other op-ed that was published only mentioned same-sex marriage in passing and did not state an unequivocal position on the issue, but was seemingly for the ballot referendum. Three op-eds, two of which were written by Rodricks, were published prior to Election Day, which is stark contrast to the *Washington Post*'s five op-eds in the same timeframe.

The *Post*'s opinion pieces were much more directly related to the issue of same-sex marriage and more numerous as well. Of the seven op-eds published over the 17-day sample, five were published prior to Election Day and were written by five different columnists. Each of the op-ed writers approached the ballot issue from different perspectives: one coming from a Republican perspective, some focusing on the history of LGBTQ rights, and one addressing the historical significance of the ballot measure; yet each op-ed was in favor of same-sex marriage. Whereas the *Sun* only ran two op-eds that were directly related to the ballot referendum prior to Election Day (both written by the same writer in favor of same-sex marriage), the *Post* ran a plethora of op-eds, by five different writers, all in favor of same-sex marriage. In addition, the *Post*'s editorial decision to publish five op-eds by five different writers prior to Election Day shows editorial diversity, yet of only one opinion and without viewpoint diversity. The *Post* framed same-sex marriage from *different* opinion writers who all had the *same* opinion.

While it is unknown whether there was an opportunity for the *Post* to publish an op-ed from an opinion writer who was opposed to same-sex marriage (a paper cannot force its columnists to write about a specific topic, encourage a specific opinion, nor publish material it does not receive), the paper neglected to present that viewpoint in a longer form piece. It is also worth noting that after Election Day, the *Post* published two more op-eds, by the same author, celebrating Maryland's vote to uphold same-sex marriage in the state.

The *Sun* also presented a positive portrayal of same-sex marriage through their opinion writers, but in a more muted way. The two op-eds directly dealing with the ballot question were written by the same columnist and published prior to the election. While there was not diversity of opinion, there also was not diversity of viewpoint from opinion writers because there was only one writer. Additionally, after Election Day, the *Sun* published one more op-ed, also written by the same columnist, in praise of Maryland's vote.

Editorials. The editorial boards of both papers also published editorials about the issue, but as with the op-eds, the papers differed in the amount of coverage. While the tone of both papers' editorials were similar in urging Maryland voters to uphold same-sex marriage and vote "yes" on Question Six, they varied in amount. The *Baltimore Sun* published one editorial prior to Election Day and one editorial after Election Day, while the *Washington Post* published three separate editorials pre-Election Day and two more editorials after Nov. 6th.

The *Sun*'s editorial published prior to Election Day on Oct. 30, 2012 highlighted the importance of equality, the protection of religious freedom, and dismissed the

opposition's view of "unintended consequences" of same-sex marriage as "scare tactics." The editorial board emphasized the "principle that the law should treat everyone the same" and that gay Marylanders should not face "discrimination under the law when it comes to one of the state's fundamental institutions." The majority of the editorial board's argument is dismantling the opposition's argument of consequences related to gay marriage. The board cites three examples the opposition used and calls each of them "unfounded" and highlights the bill's religious freedom exemptions as legal protection against the threat of these possibilities. The day after Election Day, on Nov. 7, 2012, an editorial was published that praised Maryland's vote, describing it as a "watershed for civil rights."

The *Post* published three editorials prior to the election, each focusing on a different aspect of the vote. The first editorial, published on Oct. 23, 2012, profiled the gay rights movement in federal courts and called DOMA a "noxious federal law" and "inconsistent" with America's "foundational values." The *Post* described "cold discrimination" that gay and lesbians had faced and acknowledged a "natural resistance to changing traditional institutions," but noted Maryland voters had a chance to turn the tide towards acceptance of gay marriage. In a second editorial, published on Oct. 30, 2012, the editorial board directly dealt with Maryland's ballot question. The *Post* framed the vote as one akin to acceptance of interracial marriage, outlawing anti-Semitic discrimination, and promoting equality for women. Noting the "fast-shifting attitudes toward same-sex marriage," the *Post* wrote the "trend line is clear" and same-sex marriage is likely inevitable. Similarly to the *Sun*'s editorial, published on the same day, the *Post* also dealt directly with arguments posed by the opposition, and highlighted that

the “law has been written explicitly to protect clergy, churches, and affiliated entities.” The editorial closes by urging Marylanders to go against the tide of same-sex marriage votes, which had failed in “every state, 32 so far, where it has appeared on the ballot” and should “put themselves at the forefront of the move toward fairness.”

The *Post*'s final editorial was published Nov. 4, 2012 and briefly summarized the *Post*'s stance on all of Maryland's ballot questions. In addressing question 6, the *Post* “urge[d]” Maryland voters to uphold the law. Almost the entire summary dealt with the *Post*'s assurance of the protection of religious freedom for religious institutions in Maryland. The editorial stated:

“Here's what the law would not do: It would not force clergy to perform marriage ceremonies in violation of their religious beliefs. Nor would religious organizations be required to participate in such ceremonies if they objected. The law strikes the right balance by protecting religious freedom while granting the freedom to marry.”

While both the *Sun* and the *Post*'s editorials had similar themes regarding fairness, equality, the protection of religious freedom, and the historic nature of the vote, the *Sun* only presented the argument once to its audience prior to the election while the *Post* fleshed out those arguments, separately, in three editorials over the course of 14 days. Additionally, after the election, the *Sun*'s editorial board celebrated the decision with one editorial, while the *Post* wrote two editorials describing the vote as one of “tolerance” and noting, “it is now reasonable to imagine a day in the not-very-distant future when marriage for gay and lesbian couples across this country will be unexceptional, unencumbered and mostly unremarked upon.”

Although both papers urged the vote and celebrated its victory, the *Post*'s opinion, both through its editorial board and its opinion writers, was more saturated both through

volume of writing and over the number of days it published the pieces. In publishing more opinion writers with the same perspective, and writing its own editorials more often, the *Post* was likely able to reach a greater audience simply through greater amounts of publication. In addition, for readers who read all of the pieces leading up to the election, the *Post* presented multiple views with the same viewpoint. The *Sun*, on the other hand, only presented one editorial and one columnist's opinion in the lead up to the election. While it was a consistent view, and the same as the *Post*'s view, it was only printed three times over the course of 11 days.

Letters to the editor. The major difference in amount of coverage between the *Sun* and the *Post* was the publication of letters to the editor in the lead up to Election Day. While the *Sun* did not publish as many op-eds or editorials as the *Post*, it dominated the *Post* in this category. The *Sun* published 27 letters to the editor, of which 23 were published prior to Election Day, compared to the *Post* publishing just one letter on Nov. 3, 2012. While the *Post*'s lone letter was against same-sex marriage, the *Sun*'s letters were divided: 16 supported same-sex marriage while 11 were opposed to the ballot question.

The *Sun*'s heavy reliance on letters placed a significantly greater weight and reliance on the voice of the reader in the paper's opinion pages. While, overall, the *Post* had exactly double the amount of op-eds and editorials (n=12) compared to the *Sun* (n=6), the *Post*'s editorial focus was not on the voice of the lay reader. The *Post* framed the issue around what its own opinion writers and editorial board believed about how Maryland voters should vote, not what letter writers believed Maryland voters should do. The *Sun* published the majority of its opinion pieces from voices of the community,

arguing for or against the ballot measure, rather than its own stance or that of the paper's columnists.

As mentioned above, some of this discrepancy may be due to who letter writers were actually writing letters to (the *Post*, again, cannot publish letters it does not receive), but it is also likely that editorial decisions were made about which letters to publish. It is not possible to know which letters the *Post*, or the *Sun*, declined to publish; it is only possible to see what was published and that is clear: over 17 days, the *Sun* published 27 letters while the *Post* published one.

It is worth noting, however, that the sole letter the *Post* published was opposed to the ballot referendum. The letter writer based his argument on natural order and concerns over children being raised in a home with same-gender parents. This is notable not because of the writer's position, but because the *Post*'s published so much from its editorial and op-ed pages in support of same-sex marriage.

Part of framing occurs in editorial decisions regarding the presentation of the issues. Obviously, the editorial stances of papers frame an issue for readers, and in this case the editorial boards were in agreement, however the *Post* far surpassed the *Sun* in the amount of editorials and op-eds they published. Framing also occurs in decisions about which letters to the editor to publish and the balance and tone of each letter. In the present case, the *Sun* framed the debate around voices from Maryland, both pro and against, same-sex marriage, while the *Post* almost entirely opted out of publishing the perspectives of letter writers.

The *Post*'s decision to almost exclusively rely on their editorial board and opinion writers as the voice of debate framed the same-sex marriage debate away from lay

readers to, one could argue, more elitist opinions. Opinion writers, who are paid by the paper to present their opinion in a compelling and well-written way, can be viewed differently by the reading audience as compared to letter writers, writing to a newspaper. Relying so heavily on its own paper's opinion of the issue detracted from local voices as well as giving the impression other opinions did not exist. A person who read the Washington Post opinion pages in the days leading up to the election would have only had one opportunity to see a dissenting view on same-sex marriage. Every other opinion piece in the 14 days prior to Election Day argued for same-sex marriage in Maryland. The *Sun*, on the other hand, framed the issue as a community debate, laid out in the pages of the newspaper for readers to read and see.

RQ 2: Influencers in News Stories

Word Choice. Both the *Sun* and the *Post* covered the ballot question in the days leading up to the election as a controversial issue, fraught with moral and religious implications. The *Post* consistently referred to the ballot initiative as one surrounding "marriage equality," a word the advocates of same-sex marriage used to diffuse the highly-charged "gay marriage" term. In news and feature stories, the *Post* called the issue "controversial" (10/23, 11/3) leading up to the election. On Election Day, the *Post* said the issue "shook up usual alliances" (11/7). On the editorial page, the *Post's* writers consistently bashed the anti-same sex marriage side as intolerant and described DOMA as a "noxious" law that contributes to discrimination, while praising the advocates for same-sex marriage.

The *Sun*, meanwhile, was similar in tone but extensively highlighted the issue as deeply divisive, particularly in the Black church. The *Sun*, however, on Oct. 26 featured a

story about same-sex marriage advocates, Maryland Governor O'Malley and New York City mayor Bloomberg, and noted the ballot initiative had "popular support" from a recent poll. The very next day, on Oct. 27, the *Sun* reports on a new poll that found Maryland voters were "evenly split" on the issue. While sloppy reporting may be to blame for misleading and contradictory statements, this example also highlights a frame of the divisiveness of the issue, which the *Sun* seemed to purposefully report on.

Sources And Quotations Used. When covering the issue, both the *Sun* and the *Post* relied heavily on quotes from both sides, yet both papers quoted more heavily from the advocates of same-sex marriage. As stated previously, the sources used in news stories can frame an issue in terms of importance and notoriety. When issues like same-sex marriage are at stake, voters may pay more attention when noteworthy people, like elected officials or celebrities, weigh in on the issue. In the present case, both the *Sun* and the *Post* used these types of sources when covering the story. On October 24, for instance, the *Baltimore Sun* used a quote from the police captain in Prince George's County, Maryland in support of same-sex marriage. In that case, the police captain was also openly gay, which may have contributed to why the *Sun* used the captain as a source. Regardless, police captains are not typical "man on the street" interviews and do not have a seemingly public interest in whether or not same-sex marriage is approved by voters (as contrasted with, for example, clergy members). In addition, the *Sun* quoted or cited as supporters of same-sex marriage professional athletes who played for the Baltimore Ravens and celebrities like Brad Pitt, Susan Sarandon, Lady Gaga, and Whoopi Goldberg.

The *Washington Post* did not use celebrity sources nearly as much as the *Sun*, and when they cited supporters of same-sex marriage, the celebrities were notable people who tended to be well-known in the political field generally. Both the *Sun* and the *Post* cited New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg as a supporter of same-sex marriage, and the attention Bloomberg paid to Maryland's ballot initiative. Other than noting other political leaders who support same-sex marriage like President Obama, Mayor Bloomberg, and Maryland governor O'Malley, the *Post* only cited two other notable people in their coverage in 2012. One was Brad Pitt's backing of gay marriage and the other was a column referencing political pundit David Brooks' support for marriage equality. While both Pitt and Brooks are famous in certain circles, these two mentions are hardly the coverage the *Sun* devoted in showing the support for same-sex marriage.

The sources cited in both papers that opposed same-sex marriage were predominately religious leaders, many from the black church. The *Post* almost exclusively cited religious leaders as those who were in opposition to the ballot initiative. However, on Oct. 25, the paper reported Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s niece was opposed to the legal recognition of same-sex marriage. The *Sun*'s coverage, while similar, was more nuanced. The *Sun* had more sources who were opposed to same-sex marriage in their coverage, as well as more diversity. In addition to religious leaders and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s niece, the *Sun* also noted Gov. O'Malley's brother was in opposition to the ballot measure. Further, the *Sun* reported Baltimore Ravens center Matt Birk was against gay marriage as well as politicians like Florida Senator Marco Rubio and Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee.

Theoretical Implications

While same-sex marriage is now settled law in the U.S., these findings help show journalists and the public the importance and need for reporting on civil rights issues. Word choices, opinion pieces, sources, and amount of coverage matters when informing the electorate. Since the Maryland same-sex marriage ballot question, the transgender movement has begun its own civil rights fight: notably over bathroom usage. The journalists covering these stories must be sensitive in appropriately researching and reporting these stories to include a variety of thought and opinion. Each story's frame has an impact on the reader, and thus on the voting public. Regardless of whether issues, like Maryland's same-sex marriage question, is on the ballot, this study shows the importance of covering a minority group that feels unheard or less privileged than the majority.

Practical Implications

The coverage of a contentious issue is one that reporters must deal with almost daily. News stories that are fraught with legal, moral, and religious considerations demand fair, balanced, and nuanced reporting. As framing theory shows us, it can be inevitable that journalists frame stories in certain ways. In the present situation, the *Baltimore Sun's* coverage of the 2012 Maryland referendum vote on the legality of same-sex marriage was covered more extensively, and with greater nuance, than the *Washington Post's* coverage.

While it is unknown exactly how readership of the *Post* or the *Sun* influenced voters, it is clear from the data analysis that the papers used editorial stances, word choices, and source decisions in their coverage of same-sex marriage. The *Post's* decision to rely almost exclusively on news items and opinion pieces, without a voice for the reader, reflects a decision to present same-sex marriage from a one-sided perspective.

The *Sun*, while also editorially in favor of same-sex marriage, went the other direction and presented readers' opinions consistently and pervasively, framing the issue as a community debate.

There are multiple reasons for these findings, including that the *Washington Post* is trying to serve the District of Columbia, and is not solely focused on Maryland or the state's ballot initiatives. In addition, the 2012 elections was also a presidential election year, and the *Post*'s coverage was inundated with stories about President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney. As a national paper serving a local jurisdiction, the *Post* must balance the needs of its local readers with that of its national audience. Its Maryland coverage was grouped together with its coverage of other ballot initiatives and election coverage. While it could have done more to serve its Maryland readers, the *Post* did address, as shown above, the Maryland ballot measure.

The Baltimore *Sun*, on the other hand, is a Maryland newspaper, solely focused on the state. Its focus was, and should be, the issues that affect the state of Maryland. The *Sun*'s coverage on the ballot was framed as a local debate between those opposed and in favor of the same-sex marriage initiative. By its very nature as a local paper, the *Sun* chose to frame its coverage of the referendum as a local issue.

Limitations and Future Research

While the present study was limited to a 17-day sample, one obvious limit was the length of the sample during a period of time that was hyper-focused on the election and ballot issues. Having a larger sample, including data from alternative newspapers in Maryland and other national news sources, would present a greater picture of the framing decisions more media outlets used. In addition, since same-sex marriage was ruled

constitutional in June 2015, one area of research that is particularly salient currently is how the coverage has changed and shifted both in tonality and amount around a “debate” of same-sex marriage. While people still disagree with the Supreme Court’s decision, it is now the law of the land.

Future research can and should look at how these dissenters are presented in news stories. Many of the dissenters have religious objections to same-sex marriage, and some want to deny some business services to gay couples, usually around a wedding ceremony. Future researchers should consider whether news agencies are able to coherently frame these constitutional rights, the right to marriage and the right to religious freedom, as equal but competing rights in this new reality in which we live.

In addition, social issues are trending currently about the “trans” movement, particularly around inclusivity and bathrooms. This current research leads directly to the framing of trans stories, legal battles, and outcomes. The trans community has similarly framed their battle for legal recognition as one of civil rights and the present study is a solid basis to further examine the trans movement and its media framing.

Conclusion

As this study shows, research about how a story is framed has value for journalists to self-reflect and critique their own frames when covering a story. Journalists should take the opportunity to analyze previous writing and constantly check whether they are framing a story in a way that is fair and balanced. Additionally, reporters can use this research and determine other areas where minority voices are not heard in the public square, which is dominated by the majority. Journalists are responsible for the

dissemination of issues like same-sex marriage, which once seemed impossible, but as both research and time show us, is possible.

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Appendix: Project Proposal

The following is my project proposal, as approved by my committee, in the spring of 2013. The proposal was titled, “Framing Same-Sex Marriage: A Comparative Textual Analysis of Maryland Newspapers.” One of the only changes to my initial proposal was the sample size. Initially I was going to use a 29-day sample, but that proved to be unneeded. I achieved saturation in my research with the 17-day sample size from both newspapers, and thus altered my sample size in the final analysis.

“Framing Same-Sex Marriage: A Comparative Textual Analysis of Maryland Newspapers”

The coverage of same-sex marriage in mainstream American newspapers is a relatively recent, yet incredibly salient, topic. Until May 2004, no U.S. state administered or legally recognized gay marriage and, other than local policy battles regarding the issue, it was mainly left uncovered. As the movement for same-sex marriage recognition and equality has gained recent traction, through both victories and setbacks, media coverage of the fight for legally recognized marriage has increased.

In the recent November 2012 elections, four states had ballot questions regarding same-sex marriage⁶. Maine, Maryland, and Washington voters passed the ballot measures and these three states join six other states⁷ and the District of Columbia in recognizing same-sex marriage. As more states begin to deal with judicial enactments, legislation action, and, in some cases, ballot measures pertaining to legal recognition of same-sex

⁶ Maine, Maryland, and Washington had ballot questions concerning the legalization of same-sex marriage. Minnesota’s ballot question was whether to amend their constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman.

⁷ The six states that recognized same-sex marriage prior to Washington and Maryland are: Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

marriage, the electorate will continue to rely on the media to inform them about debates over social issues. The voting electorate will particularly rely on the media when these social issues pertain to their voting, especially in light of the recent same-sex marriage recognition questions, which were placed on multiple ballots in the 2012 elections.

By studying how a topic is presented to the audience and its effects, one can begin to understand the preexisting beliefs and attitudes of the consumers and how their media consumption affects those beliefs (Entman, 1993). The media's framing occurs on all levels of "media." The media is a vast field, ranging from everything from entertainment television to news magazines to weblogs (Brewer, 2002). News media is of particular interest because news media is partly how voters become educated regarding election issues. Research on the framing of news stories can show researchers and the public how different news outlets and organizations frame certain issues.

Framing is a twofold process as both the media and audiences "frame." The media framing occurs when a story is presented with a central idea and storyline: This includes what is emphasized, excluded, what sources are used, the headline, and how the lead is written (Entman, Matthews, & Pellicano, 2009). At the same time, audiences frame in their own way as they interpret and process the information they are consuming. This process coincides with each person's unique biases, opinions, and values concerning the issue in the story they have read and are processing, yet the initial framing is from the media's presentation and dissemination to an audience.

Framing is a particularly germane analysis for political stories because, as Dardis (2007) points out, "there are many competing ways (frames) through which individuals can interpret any aspect of reality (e.g., a sociopolitical issue), and this interpretation

affects subsequent comprehension and perception of the ‘reality’” (p. 248). For social issues in particular, framing is an appropriate theory because it highlights the supporters, opponents, and observers involved in the debate at hand.

In this vein, framing theory can help explain and show how newspapers frame sociopolitical issues, such as same-sex marriage legalization and recognition, for the voting electorate. Similarly, from a practical standpoint, this research can show *how* the media informs the electorate. The purpose of the current study is to conduct an in-depth textual analysis of how two widely read newspapers, the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Washington Post*, covered the Maryland same-sex marriage ballot question during the November 2012 elections.

Literature Review

Overview

Historically, civil rights coverage has been slow, at best, to begin coverage and maintain it over time. During the 1950s and 1960s, the media was slow to cover race relations, particularly in the south (Roberts & Klibanoff, 2006). As the civil rights movement gained support, and following the Supreme Court’s landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision rendering school segregation unconstitutional, more papers began to send reporters to the south to cover desegregation and the movement generally (Grimes, 2005; Roberts & Klibanoff, 2006). The media eventually covered the Civil Rights Movement by framing the story as a group of people striving for equality, not as a movement of fringe extremists (Roberts & Klibanoff, 2006). In the same way, the same-sex equality movement has themselves framed their movement as one of civil rights, which has translated to some media outlets framing their stories as such.

Historical Context

The movement's recent focus on marriage has gained media coverage, yet prior to this recent development, coverage of homosexuals generally has been limited: the media, including movies, television shows, commercials, and news coverage, has tended to stereotype both gays and lesbians. While researching different forms of media coverage on gays and lesbians, Fejes and Petrich (1993) found television shows presented gay and lesbian characters as isolated, secondary characters that simply existed in a heterosexual environment. As the authors researched news media coverage of homosexuality, they discovered that prior to the 1960s there was close to no mention of homosexuality. When it was mentioned, however, it was portrayed and presented as "a sickness, perversion, or crime" (Fejes & Petrich, 1993, p. 402). During the 1960s, gay and lesbian activists began addressing these stereotypes, inequalities in laws, and various forms of discrimination (Ross, 2012). Through gradual legal changes, which allowed homosexuals to have greater equal protection under the law, and the higher prevalence of "out" members of the homosexual community, America began to see more openly out members of the gay community in public office and the public square generally (Ross, 2012).

Moving into the 1970s and 1980s, newspapers and other media outlets covered the 1980s AIDS epidemic, which strongly impacted the gay community, as thousands of gay men died from AIDS (Fejes & Petrich, 1993). As this health crisis progressed into the 1990s, in which the inclusion of homosexuals in the military was vigorously debated, the press continued to "heterosexize" gays and lesbians by presenting and framing their behavior within a heteronormative context (Fejes & Petrich, 1993, p. 405). The mid-1990s brought with it the debate over "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," regarding the military's

rule excluding homosexual people in the military (Ross, 2012). Then-President Clinton signed an Executive Order implementing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” which instructed homosexual men and women not to tell others about their sexuality and told others not to ask about it (Ross, 2012).

In 1998, Matthew Shepard, a young Wyoming man, was savagely beaten to death due to his homosexuality. His beating was widely covered and increased the visibility of both homosexuality and homophobic violence against the gay community (Becker & Scheufele, 2009). His death, along with other violence against homosexuals⁸, brought with it a national conversation that continues today regarding hate crimes and hate crime legislation.

The heteronormative lens through which homosexuals were and are viewed is further compounded by the negative story association that has been presented to audiences: The fight for equality, debunking the “sickness” myth, the AIDS health epidemic, the coverage of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy debate, and stories about hate crimes against the homosexuals has reinforced negativity over the course of four decades in stories dealing with the gay community (Ross, 2012). Although some of these stories were eventually seen as victories (for instance, DSM-III, the American Psychiatric Association’s classification of mental disorders, dropping homosexuality as a mental disorder), the vast majority of these news stories presented the gay community from a negative standpoint: stories in which gays and lesbians were always fighting to achieve something they did not have or, especially during the AIDS crisis and stories about hate crimes, dying from something. By continuing to present homosexuals situated within a

⁸ Another noteworthy, and highly covered, example of a hate crime was the brutal rape and murder of Brandon Teena, a transgender man who was born biologically female. His story was dramatized in the 1999 film, “Boys Don’t Cry.”

heteronormative world, the gay community has consistently been framed as “other” and “different.”

As recently as 2007, an Arizona television station was criticized for its coverage of a male “sex-posé” piece, which was about hetero- and homosexual Tucson men who had sexual encounters in local parks, yet the piece presented gay men as lurking in the shadows of the local Tucson parks (Chávez, 2011). A local LGBT support group labeled the piece as “sensationalistic and inflammatory” (quoted in Chávez, 2011, p. 8). Chávez noted that although heterosexual married men were mentioned in the story, the vast majority of men interviewed about their behavior in the park were gay yet their faces were blurred. These types of news stories reinforce negative associations people have about homosexuals and the gay community.

In August 2002, *The New York Times* announced that the Sunday Styles section, a portion of the paper dedicated to fashion, food and wine, home and garden, and wedding announcements, would begin printing commitment celebration announcements of same-sex couples (Gibson, 2004). In light of previous decades’ coverage of gays and lesbians, which was highly negative, this was one of the first pointedly positive editorial choices in general reporting on homosexuals. Yet, in a study comparing gay and lesbian journalists’ opinions with their senior editors’ opinions of newspaper coverage of homosexuals, opinions differed widely (Bernt & Greenwald, 1992/1993). Forty-five percent of senior editors reported their papers devoted enough space to non-medical issues concerning the gay community, yet 83% of gay and lesbian journalists disagreed (Bernt & Greenwald, 1992/1993). In addition to disagreeing on the completeness of coverage regarding the gay community, senior editors also disagreed with gay and lesbian journalists over the

acceptability of terms and words used to describe the gay community (Bernt & Greenwald, 1992/1993). These disagreements over the type, amount, and tone of coverage further highlight the negative association the gay community feels about what stories the media is covering and presenting, even when they are the ones presenting and framing the story as journalists.

The Fight For Marriage Recognition

Over the past few decades, the gay community has won numerous victories, yet the history of the American fight for same-sex marriage began less than 15 years ago through different state actions. The movement has been incredibly varied: Almost simultaneously, as some states legalize same-sex marriage, other states immediately ban it by defining marriage as solely between a man and a woman. In 1996, the United States Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defined marriage as only between a man and a woman for all federal purposes (Denniston, 2012). DOMA further allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages created in other states. The gay community fighting for same-sex marriage recognition challenges DOMA on the basis that it violates the Constitution, which provides each citizen equal protection, in every state, under the law. In 1999, however, the Vermont legislature legalized same-sex civil unions soon after the Vermont Supreme Court found that “the state constitution prohibited denying to gay and lesbian couples the legal benefits attached to civil marriage” (Hester & Gibson, 2007).

The 2004 election cycle, however, dealt a major blow to the movement as 11 states⁹ voted and passed constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage (Hester

⁹ The 11 states were Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah.

& Gibson, 2007). Yet, almost immediately prior to the November 2004 elections, Massachusetts became the first state to legally recognize same-sex marriage through a ruling of the Massachusetts Supreme Court. During the October 2012 term, the United States Supreme Court is considering ten same-sex marriage petitions to determine whether to hear the cases (Denniston, 2012). Eight of these cases deal directly with DOMA and its constitutionality.

Recently, in 2008, California had a widely publicized debate on “Proposition 8,” a ballot question asking voters to define a marriage as only between a man and a woman. The Proposition 8 ballot question was in direct response to court action, which held that homosexuals had the same right to marry as heterosexuals. Over \$82 million dollars was spent informing the public about the ballot question. Opponents to the same-sex marriage ban spent over \$44 million dollars (Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox, & Shah, 2010). In the end, California voters voted in favor of Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage was banned. There are multiple appeals pending, including petitions filed at the United States Supreme Court, and the issue has yet to be fully resolved. A similar ballot question in North Carolina also passed in 2012 and defines marriage as only between a man and a woman.

In the most recent 2012 elections, four states had a same-sex marriage question on the ballot, including Maryland. Maryland legalized same-sex marriage recognition through legislative action in 2011. Opponents of same-sex marriage gathered enough signatures to challenge the legislation and put the question on the November 2012 election ballot. The Maryland electorate voted in favor of recognizing same-sex marriage and, thus, the legislation will go into effect in 2013.

As the homosexual community has turned their fight towards the issue of marriage and demanded legal recognition of gay and lesbian unions, the media has also been forced to shift their coverage towards this issue. The coverage itself and the study of framing are both particularly salient today as same-sex marriage continues to become more ubiquitous in each election cycle, put on ballots, and legislative and court action are increasingly taking prospective action (either by supporting or opposing same-sex marriage recognition).

Framing Theory

Framing theory lends itself to literature surrounding how the media covers certain stories and the media effects on the audience. Studies have also shown that simply the consumption of media itself has its own effects, even when the researchers are not interested in the particular frames the media is using to present stories. In a recent study, Lee and Hicks (2011) found respondents were more likely to be in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage if they used television as their primary form of entertainment, enjoyed watching political talk shows, were likely to read weblogs, and thought magazines were more interesting than television. The frames the media used were not predictive of supporting or opposing same-sex marriage, it was simply the consumption of media itself.

Previous researchers have found framing affects the ways in which audiences discuss and frame their opinions. In one study, participants who read a story about same-sex marriage framed in equality language discussed their opinions about same-sex marriage using terms associated with equality. In the same way, research subjects who read a similar story framed in terms of morality, answered questions about their views

using morality words (Brewer, 2002). A later study, however, manipulated a news story about same-sex marriage by analyzing participants' reactions to the types of sources quoted in the story (Gibson & Hester, 2007). In one version of the story presented to consumers, high-ranking officials and prestigious sources were quoted as supporting same-sex marriage while less significant and nonofficial sources were quoted as arguing against same-sex marriage. A second group of participants read a story in which the sides were reversed: the high-ranking and prestigious sources were quoted as opposed to same-sex marriage and the nonofficial sources were in favor of same-sex marriage. Finally, the third group of participants read a balanced story with equal amounts of both prestigious and nonofficial sources quoted as supporting or opposing same-sex marriage (Gibson & Hester, 2007).

The authors found the participants' opinions of same-sex marriage did not differ across the three variables (Gibson & Hester, 2007). Gibson and Hester (2007) argued their study showed there is no foundation for the fear that news stories that feature quotes from prominent sources who are opposed to same-sex marriage will taint consumers against same-sex marriage or the homosexual community generally. While each article was framed differently, through the use of sources (both the official nature of the source and the level of prestige associated with the source) and quotations used, the participants were not affected by the prestige of the sources and their supposed opinions of same-sex marriage recognition.

Research on media framing of the gay community is also nuanced: research on the media can include entertainment television or news media (and the many different forms of news media). As Fejes and Petrich (1993) pointed out, gay and lesbian

characters were forced to adapt to their heterosexual environment. This heteronormative standard persists in more recent shows, like *Will & Grace* and *Ellen*, as gay characters are rarely shown in their own communities with other homosexual friends and that gay parents are portrayed as misfits (Landau, 2009).

In comparing representations of heterosexual and homosexual families, Landau (2009) found the media consistently portrayed homosexual parents as different and other, while situated within a heteronormative frame. She wrote that the articles she studied “favor[ed] mainstream heterosexist, heteronormative, biological explanations of human sexuality and reproduction. These constructions, deployed through textual and photographic images, visibly ‘other’ the range of origins of children of same-sex parents, thus relegating them to an outer social-scientific space” (Landau, 2009, p. 90). Framing the heterosexual lifestyle as ideal or “normal”, and presenting the homosexual lifestyle as “other,” perpetuates a worldview in which members of the homosexual community are devalued, seen as deviant, and as a minority. These frames, presented to audience consumers, continue to promote the homosexual community, especially gay parents, as other, different, and not “normal,” as compared to heterosexual parents and people (Landau, 2009).

These differences in frames are particularly relevant as research continues to show close to no difference between children of gay or straight parents (Landau, 2009). Additionally, when reporting on children of gay parents, newspapers have questioned obsessively on the sexuality of children, which is not done when reporting on the children of straight parents. Landau (2009) points out that a 2004 *Boston Globe* interview with the daughter of lesbian parents quoted the daughter as saying she was “very” straight, again

normalizing heterosexuality and presenting it as ideal (Landau, 2009, p. 91). The implicit and explicit privileging of heterosexuality constantly makes homosexuals feel as though they must conform to heteronormativity or that they have to make up for their sexuality (Landau, 2009).

News media consumers also have frames presented to them through the news stories they consume. Many times, the coverage surrounding same-sex marriage consists of debates between two, often polarized, sides. When consumers are presented with issue frames, especially those in the public debate, audiences tend to form their opinion based on their association between the issue presented and the frames in which the issue has been covered (Brewer, 2003). Additionally, debates over issues regarding “values” tend to be shaped on the basis of knowledge of the public debate.

Brewer (2003) notes, “the role of political knowledge in shaping the impact of a value on opinion about a political issue can depend upon whether public debate offers one undisputed interpretation or two competing interpretations of the value” (Brewer, 2003, p. 174). Within the same-sex marriage debate, in particular, scholars must study the media frames presented because of the inherent debate over values. Becker and Scheufele (2009) point out, “The relationship between predispositions and policy support may be especially relevant in the case of gay marriage given the media’s framing of the issue as a debate over moral values and the growing number of religious institutions that have become vocal participants in the gay marriage debate (Price et al. 2005)” (Becker & Scheufele, 2009, p. 188). The question of whether the media provides fair, balanced, and equal treatment in coverage can be answered, in part, by analyzing the frames through which newspapers present the debates. American newspapers, in particular, can show

how mainstream media has covered and framed the debate. Although the majority of mainstream newspapers take editorial positions, even on highly contentious issues, newspapers continue to maintain they report stories unbiased and fairly representative of both sides of the issue.

Previous research has used framing theory to guide its questions regarding civil rights questions generally, and coverage of homosexuals in particular, across a variety of media outlets (Brewer, 2002; Li & Liu, 2010; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2005). As researchers begin to better understand how the media frames specific issues, journalists and reader/consumers are able have a more informed understanding of media bias. Although journalists in the West, and particularly in America, are trained to be independent watchdogs without a bias, many believe the media is biased or slanted (Ho et al., 2011). This bias is particularly salient when analyzing the media's heteronormative word choices employed, especially when discussing same-sex marriage. Liebler and colleagues noted that the presentation of same-sex marriage was framed from a heterosexual standpoint, implicitly privileging heterosexual norms and standards (Liebler, Schwartz, & Harper, 2009). Additionally, the media's strategy to present homosexual parents has, by and large, been to "normalize" these parents, which is another form of heteronormative standards being imposed on the homosexual community (Liebler et al., 2009). Their research, guided by framing theory, explicates the unique framing that occurs when discussing the sexuality of a group which has been ostracized in the past as well as show primary examples of framing. Textual analysis of the coverage of American newspapers, through a framing lens, allows for the media to self-critique in light of

findings and allows readers to gain insight into the media's presentation of coverage by comparative analysis.

This paper sets out to explore two newspapers that extensively covered the same-sex marriage debate around the November 2012 election and are widely read in Maryland. By examining and comparing The *Baltimore Sun*'s and The *Washington Post*'s coverage of the ballot initiative, this paper hopes to show how the two leading Maryland papers framed the same-sex marriage debate. Thus, the research questions are:

RQ 1: How did The *Baltimore Sun* and The *Washington Post* coverage frame, immediately prior to and the aftermath of, the same-sex marriage referendum vote during the November 2012 election?

RQ 2: How did the coverage framing change, if at all, after the ballot question passed and same-sex marriage was legalized in Maryland?

RQ 3: What were the framing differences between The *Baltimore Sun* and The *Washington Post* on Election Day?

Method

To effectively analyze both newspapers' frames, the mode of analysis will be a comparative textual analysis between the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Washington Post*. The textual analysis will analyze the extent and type of coverage on the ballot question in both newspapers. In order to determine the slant of the published stories and to compare the newspapers against each other, analysis will consist of whether the story is for or against same-sex marriage, the points of views expressed in the story, the sources and quotations used, the editorial positions the newspapers took prior to the vote, and whether the stories differed after Maryland voters approved same-sex marriage.

The newspapers chosen for analysis are each widely read in Maryland: the *Washington Post* serves Washington, D.C.'s Maryland suburbs while the *Baltimore Sun* is Maryland's largest general-circulation daily newspaper ("Audience," 2012; "(Baltimore) The Sun," 2012). The *Post* is a unique paper because, although it is a local paper serving the District, Maryland, and Virginia, it is a national newspaper that is widely read across the country. Comparative textual analysis between these two papers allows readers to see the framing of news stories more clearly and definitively. Research concerning the *Sun* and the *Post*'s framing of the news can adequately inform or deny the bias many believe is present in newspapers.

Because there are no formal public debates for ballot issues, like there are for political candidates, media outlets are of substantial importance in educating the public about the issue, the opposing sides, and the disagreement itself. The differences between two highly read newspapers will help inform how the media is presenting this often contentious issue. Previous literature about media coverage of same-sex marriage has used textual analysis to inform and guide its research. Liebler and colleagues (2009) used textual analysis to explore how marriage was presented in newspapers in states with anti-gay marriage ballot initiatives (Liebler et al., 2009). In a similar study also guided by framing theory, Li & Liu (2010) examined 209 stories from 5 different papers, including the *Washington Post*, through content analysis to determine how same-sex marriage was presented.

Sample

In the present study, the stories selected from both papers are from a 29-day period. The selected stories were published 14 days prior to the November 6, 2012

election and 14 days after the election. The sample includes Election Day (November 6, 2012) and that is how the 29-day sample is reached. In order to obtain this sample of stories from each paper, the data collection was a two-fold process. In the 14 days leading up to the election, multiple “Google Alerts” were set for both the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Washington Post* that contained the words “same-sex marriage,” “gay marriage,” “ballot,” “election,” and “Maryland.” The articles and blog posts from both papers that used any of these words anywhere in a story were emailed to the author. These emails with the Google Alerts continued until 14 days after the election.

Additionally, the author will use the LexisNexis database to locate articles from the *Washington Post* and the *Baltimore Sun* that may have not been flagged from the Google Alert. The search will be similar to the Google Alerts and contain the phrases “same-sex marriage” and “ballot initiative” in the published stories. The articles to be analyzed will be all stories, features, opinions, op-eds, and editorial pieces published in the paper. Letters to the editor will not be included in the sample.

In analyzing same-sex marriage ballot question for Maryland voters, the particular newspapers chosen represent widely read newspapers, both in Maryland and nationally. Limiting the data to 29 days, particularly the two-week window before and after Election Day, was purposefully done. The two weeks prior to the election is when the coverage of a particular election issue (whether it be a candidate or a ballot question) is the most saturated. This two-week period is crucial for voters as they read the “last-minute” stories and the paper’s editorial position in preparation for their vote. The Election Day material is useful simply for having the exit-polling data stories and the eventual outcome of the election (in this case, the legitimization of same-sex marriage). Finally, the two-week

period after the election is equally interesting because the newspapers are dealing with, in this particular case, implementation stories, lifestyle stories, and opposition stories. These stories also inform the public of the immediate reactions of those in favor and opposed to same-sex marriage as well as help the voters immediately see the impact of legalizing same-sex marriage.

This purposive data set includes the last-minute time before the election when voters are reading what the newspaper's editorial stance is as well as the immediate aftermath of the election, as the electorate learns of the impact of their vote. The newspapers chosen for the present study adequately represent Maryland newspapers that are widely read and reach Maryland voters. These papers' similarities and differences in their coverage of Maryland's same-sex marriage ballot referendum will show different types of framing, whether media bias exists (through unbalanced reporting), and the effects of this reporting on the audience consumers.

Data Analysis

The analysis of collected stories will be comparative textual analysis. Coding each story through axial coding will allow the researcher to see major concepts develop and then categorize them. Coding will occur on multiple levels, such as coding the tone of the headlines, the lead and first paragraph of the story, the sources and quotations used, and where the story appeared in the paper and on each paper's website. After major themes and concepts are determined and put into categories, the researcher can begin comparing the categories discovered between the two papers and whether the coverage and tone changed after the election when same-sex marriage was legalized. The frames which each paper used in their stories will be compared against each other during the data analysis, in

order to better understand if the papers used different frames and the manner in which the frames were employed in the stories.