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Framing Strategies of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Advocacy Organizations: The Case of Let California Ring's 'Garden Wedding' Commercial

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FRAMING STRATEGIES OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER
ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF LET CALIFORNIA RING'S
"GARDEN WEDDING" COMMERCIAL

A Thesis

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

By

Helena Mica

August 2008

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Master of Arts

Thesis Proposal

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ABSTRACT

FRAMING STRATEGIES OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER
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August, 2008

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Framing is the process of presenting a complicated argument by relying on the ideas and concepts that a person already has regarding a basic subject. The idea of same-sex marriage has traditionally been presented by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) advocacy organizations using a frame of equal rights, with same-sex couples seeking equal treatment under the law. However, due to a lack of support for this argument, the organization Let California Ring introduced the "Garden Wedding" commercial in the fall of 2007 that presented same-sex marriage in a new, emotional frame. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the organization Let California Ring, particularly in terms of what differentiates their organization from other LGBT advocacy organizations; the presentation of the emotional frame found in the "Garden Wedding" commercial; and news media reaction to both the organization and the commercial itself.

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Chapter 1

Framing Strategies of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Advocacy Organizations: The Case of Let California Ring's "Garden Wedding Commercial"

Introduction

According to Thom Hartmann, host of syndicated radio show *Air America*, “a *frame* is a simple way of understanding a complex set of feelings and sensations” (129). The frame of an argument may not say anything regarding the actual substance of the argument, but it is the way in which it is presented to the audience. Why is this important? “Politics is all about frames... once you’ve defined a frame, you’ve colored or changed the meaning of everything that is contained in that frame” (Hartmann, 129).

Issues for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community have had to be especially presented with care, in every aspect of legislation. As Haider-Markel (2001) explains

How an issue is framed will determine whether or not it reaches the political agenda, what venues are suitable for its discussion, what actors will be mobilized and/or allowed to participate in the policy process, the focus of the policy proposals, and who wins and who loses within political institutions (359)

While framing is important in all LGBT issues, in the case of same-sex marriage, framing has come to be the key element of the debate.

The debate over same-sex marriage has been a struggle in the United States since the early 1990s when Hawaii first questioned the legalities of limiting the idea of marriage to “one man and one woman.” Since that time, the Defense of Marriage Act has come to pass, the Federal Marriage Amendment has been proposed, and forty-four states have either state laws or state constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage: the exceptions are New Mexico, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and of course, California (Human Rights Campaign Statewide Marriage Prohibitions Map, 2008).

California is an interesting case. After having enacted a same-sex marriage ban in 2000, the law was challenged in 2003 when San Francisco began to offer marriage licenses for same-sex couples, only to have those later revoked by the state. There have also been a few legislative attempts to pass a law supporting same-sex marriage, which were vetoed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. On May 15, 2008, however, the state Supreme Court made a landmark decision overruling the previous bans.

Even with the decision made by the Supreme Court, the roller coaster ride is not over, as an initiative that would again outlaw same-sex marriage in California has qualified for the November ballot. According to Lisa Leff of the *Oakland Tribune*,

If approved by a majority of voters Nov. 4, the amendment would overturn the recent California Supreme Court ruling that legalized same-sex marriage in the state. It is similar to same-sex marriage bans that have been adopted in 26 other states (2008).

In the fall of 2007, there was another attempt to pass legislation that would recognize marriages between two members of the same-sex. During that time, when Governor

Arnold Schwarzenegger was expected to veto the legislation, a pro-same-sex marriage organization called “Let California Ring” stepped forward with a somewhat different agenda in mind; to open up the lines of dialogue and discussion amongst undecided voters. Their primary tactic for opening up this discourse was through a commercial framing same-sex marriage in a light different from previous arguments. Instead of arguing for equal rights, it presented the contention in the context of marrying for love.

The purpose of this paper is to examine framing strategies of LGBT advocacy organizations, particularly around the issue of same-sex marriage. A theory of how these organizations determine the best argument to present to the public, the media through which the argument is presented, the treatment of framed argument by the recipients, and the counter-arguments presented by opponents will be examined in the literature review. Finally, this paper will conclude with an analysis of the “Garden Wedding” commercial produced by the pro same-sex organization in California, known as “Let California Ring.”

Chapter 2: Literature

Theory

Understanding how LGBT advocacy agencies operate and function is a key element to understanding how they chose which framing strategy to select. One such theory in organizational theory is that of how organizations “think” or “learn”, also called “brain theory.” The specific focus in this theory is how organizations such as LGBT advocacy agencies must learn. As Morgan (2006) explains

In a nutshell, brain theory suggests that learning organizations must develop capacities that allow them to do the following:

- Scan and anticipate change in the wider environment to detect significant variations
- Develop an ability to question, challenge, and change operating norms and assumptions
- Allow an appropriate strategic direction and pattern of organization to emerge.
- They must also evolve designs that allow them to become skilled in the art of double-loop learning, to avoid getting trapped in single-loop processes, especially those created by traditional management control systems and the defensive routines of organizational members (87)

In many ways, LGBT advocacy agencies must become adaptive as the circumstances change.

The concepts of single-loop, double-loop, and triple-loop learning are better explained by turning to Foldy (1999). In single-loop learning, “actors (whether individuals, groups or organizations) consider more effective methods or strategies for achieving their guiding principles (which may be manifested as goals, policies, or values), but these actors are not open to questioning those principles” (213). In other words, members within organizations consider their goals, but are not willing to change or alter their goals, and are less likely to change their strategies and methods toward achieving those goals. Double-loop learning “results when actors do evaluate and change their guiding principles” (213); in other words, double-loop learning is when an organization recognizes that previous strategies are not working, and changes those in order to achieve their goals. Finally, in triple-loop learning, “actors go beyond questioning their own values and consider values of the societal tradition system in which their actions are taking place” (213). To further explain, triple-loop learning occurs when an organization manages to change their strategic approach to a goal while also challenging the traditional system of the dominant society.

Examining how organizations think is not limited to how organizations learn, but also to their creativity as well. According to Woodman et. al. “organizational creativity is the creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system” (293). This is a concept that ties in very well with the idea of how organizations learn: “creativity for individuals and organizations—doing something for the first time anywhere or creating new knowledge—represents a dramatic aspect of organizational change that may provide a key to understanding change phenomena and ultimately, organizational effectiveness and

survival” (293-294). When one considers organizational creativity together with loop-learning, it becomes clear that these are concepts and techniques that have had to be adapted by LGBT advocacy organizations—not only do these organizations challenge the status quo of the traditional population, but they must also present their ideas, concerns, and goals in a variety of creative ways in order to gain support by the dominant population.

Furthermore, organizational creativity operates in a manner similar to loop-learning as

the process is based on trial-and-error learning in which (a) some mechanism introduces variation such as different possible associations, (b) a consistent selection process allows the selection of particular combinations of associations, and (c) some mechanism exists to preserve and reproduce selected variations (299).

As both loop-learning and organizational creativity operate in much the same way, it is easy to recognize that LGBT advocacy organizations operate using these techniques when framing social change policies.

It is interesting to consider how framing functions within social movements and the organizations of those movements. According to Benford and Snow, frames “enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space at large” (614). Furthermore, they “help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide actions” (614). In other words, frames in social movement theory, act as a way for people to define what a problem is, how best to approach that problem, and to provide possible remedies for the defined problem.

There are three kinds of frames according to Benford and Snow: “diagnostic framing,” “prognostic framing,” and “motivational framing” (615). Diagnostic frames

are referred to as “injustice frames” which are a “mode of interpretation—prefatory to collective noncompliance, protest, and/or rebellion—generated and adopted by those who come to define the actions of an authority as unjust” (615). In other words, these are the types of frames that an organization presents when describing an injustice.

In the case LGBT advocacy agencies supporting same-sex marriage, the most commonly found argument is the civil rights argument and the equality of same-sex couples with heterosexual couples in regard to benefits of being a recognized couple in the United States. Furthermore, “since social movements seek to remedy or alter some problematic situation or issue, it follows that directed action is contingent on identification of the source(s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents” (616): in the case of same-sex marriage, many organizations have blamed the government and conservative religious (primarily Christian) organizations.

Prognostic framing “involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan” (616). With regard to pro same-sex marriage organizations, many have attempted to achieve recognition of same-sex couples through the courts system, but voter referendums have also been used (although those have been used primarily in order to prevent same-sex marriages from occurring within a state).

Motivational framing “provides a ‘call to arms’ or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive” (617). For example, rather than simply calling for equal recognition of same-sex couples, advocates of same-sex marriage directly frame their concerns of equal rights

with regard to taxes, health care, child care, wills, finances, and several other areas in which married heterosexual couples have an advantage over unmarried same-sex couples.

With regard to framing strategies in social movement organizations, they are “deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed” (Benford, 624). Same-sex marriage advocating organizations must use a variety of strategies such as “frame amplification” in order to achieve their goals. This strategy “involves the idealization, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs” (624). In other words, by appealing to the general public, these organizations hope to tap into dominant cultural beliefs such as equal rights and romantic love.

Chapter 2: Literature

Literature Review: The Frame and Framing Presentation

As discussed earlier, framing is “an interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one’s present or past environment” (Steinberg, 845). In other words, framing is the process of using phrases, ideas, and beliefs that people already have in order to better explain current events and present new situations to them. By analyzing the frame, one is able to gather considerable information; as Steinberg explains, “frame analysis provides us with considerable insight into the ideological dynamics of structuring opposition, mobilizing actors, and sustaining cohesion necessary for successful collective action” (846). Understanding the frame is not only important for understanding the viewpoint of the presenter, but also for understanding how discussion about an issue influences its outcome through the use of language and narrative. Regardless of the argument, “ideological factors-values, beliefs, meanings” (Steinberg, 847) are used to influence policy debates and decisions. Advocates on all sides of debates strategically frame their

arguments using culturally relevant belief systems, norms, and values in order to influence their listeners to their side of the debate.

This same strategy can also be found in the political process as normative ideas “lie in background of policy debates but constrain action by limiting the range of alternatives that elites are likely to perceive as acceptable and legitimate rather than useful means to an end” (Campbell, 23). To a policy maker, their values, norms, and beliefs

may affect their position on public policies by helping them decide which policies are the most appropriate—an especially important consideration when, as is frequently the case, there is no conclusive evidence about which policy option is most likely to work best. (Campbell, 24)

It is because frames rely so heavily on norms and values to begin with that they can be viewed as a form of social influence, Steinberg asks, “if discourse is deployed rationally, how can we view framing as an exercise in reality construction without assuming a social control model in which elite actors manipulate popular consciousness?” (851).

Phrasing frames in terms of cultural norms and values is a way of reaching out to a broad audience, in that they will be at least familiar with the belief system; it is also a way of reaching out to the targeted audience’s emotions. As Nabi explains “once an emotion is evoked, its associated action tendency, which arises in response to the core relational theme, serves to guide information processing, influencing what information is attended to and likely to be recalled and what is ignored” (227). In other words, emotions related to normative cultural values, when presented with frames phrased using cultural norms and values, aid the individual in processing the frame by influencing what is a valuable argument and what is to be ignored.

This process is an example of what Druckman calls a “framing effect” (1044): or to be more exact, “the importance individuals attach to particular beliefs” (1044). Furthermore this “occurs in the course of describing an issue or event, a speaker’s emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinion” (Druckman, 1042). If a person holds the cultural norms and values strongly within themselves, they are more likely to be responsive to the normative frames presented to them by one side. However, if an individual does not hold these cultural norms so highly, they may be more open to the viewpoint presented by the opposing side.

Nabi explains that there is “empirical evidence that discrete, context-relevant emotions selectively affect information processing, recall, and judgment and is essential to support the claim that emotions act as frames” (228). Emotions such as anger and fear “can promote different degrees of message-processing, with uncertainty appraisal serving as the key moderator” (Nabi, 228). In other words, when an individual feels anger or fear in reaction to a particular frame, that feeling helps to prod the recalling of the argument later. Other emotions in reaction to frames can act similarly and for similar reasons. For example, “some emotions such as disgust and surprise enhance recall of the central concepts of commercials in the short and long term compared to other emotions such as happiness, fear, and guilt” (Nabi 228). It is reasonable to expect that when a frame (which is used to sell a policy idea) results in a feeling of disgust in an individual, they are more likely to recall the core arguments of those with whom they disagree.

When an argument does not create such feelings in the listeners, or when the targets of a frame are undecided regarding an issue, that presents the opportunity for the

advocates to change their targets' minds to their own conclusion. This act of persuasion "takes place when a communicator effectively revises the content of one's beliefs about an attitude object, replacing or supplementing favorable thoughts with unfavorable ones or vice-versa" (Druckman, 1044). As mentioned before, if a person holds the cultural values presented in a normative frame very strongly, they already agree with some of the advocates. But, for those who are unsure, new frames and differently presented arguments can result in a change of mind of the audience. For many advocates on different sides of an issue, these undecided people are often the primary targets for their arguments.

Persuading the undecided can be as difficult as forming the initial frame. One concern is that due to a lack of literature on when framing works and doesn't work; framing effects may be entirely the result of elite manipulation. However, rather than believing that framing effects act as evidence of elite manipulation, Druckman suggests that

framing effects may occur because citizens delegate to ostensibly credible elites to help them sort through many possible frames.... people turn to elites for guidance and they are thus selective about which frames they believe—they only believe frames that come from sources they perceive to be credible (1045).

Through the course of two experiments, Druckman found evidence to support the above statement: that credible sources were deemed to be reliable when providing information and frames, and non-credible sources were not thought to be reliable, even when providing the same information and frames as the credible sources (1059).

For example, Gibson and Hester studied the effects of credible sources discussing gay and lesbian issues and the fears that there might be a bias in news coverage over

these issues. The results of the study offered “little support for previously expressed fears that news coverage of gay issues—coverage that may privilege an anti-gay point of view through the use of official and prestigious sources—would lead to increased anti-gay sentiment in readers” (79). They found no evidence that readers who were exposed to credible sources either supporting or opposing same-sex marriage were more likely to agree with that point of view.

Along with ensuring that there are credible resources providing information and frames, it is equally important to have these frames presented in a credible manner. One of the most common places for information to be dispersed and public events discussed is the newspaper. As Oliver and Myers explain, “the public discussion of public issues is important, that public events play a significant role in promoting or shaping the public sphere, and that mass media are important conduits of information between groups of people” (40) is a basic fact. The discussion of these public issues can vary as “at any given time, there are certainly regularities and patterns about the kinds of content conveyed in various forms, but these meanings are always contextual and always evolving” (Oliver and Myers, 41).

Expectedly, one concern is the level of bias in reporting on public discourse; however, “we can assess biases in the coverage of protest or claims-making content only by measuring it against the coverage of other kinds of content or the lack of message content” (Oliver and Myers, 41). In this way, “the same issue can be constructed as contentious or not and the boundary between contentious and consensual issues are always evolving” (Oliver and Myers, 41). In order to determine what events or frames are considered newsworthy, one has to recognize the systemic factors that categorize the

likelihood that an event (or frame) will be covered in the newspaper. There are three kinds of events that influence the likelihood of coverage: “the predispositions of news organizations or of particular reporters toward certain kinds of events or issues, journalistic norms and standards for assessing the news value of events and issues, and the mundane routines of producing news reports for deadlines” (Oliver and Myers, 45), each of which will be discussed in more detail.

Oliver and Myers explain that “movement-oriented commentators often stress the predispositions of news organizations or reporters in selecting events for coverage” (45). These commentators focus on the concentrated control of the mass media, specifically the lack of coverage of events due to concerns about social disorder.

In terms of news value, “journalistic norms and standards for assessing the news value of events are widely agreed to be important in determining which events get coverage” (Oliver and Myers, 45). News value criteria taught to journalism students generally includes

the prominence or importance of the issues including the number of people affected and the magnitude of the effect; human interest and human drama; conflict or controversy; the unusual; timeliness; and proximity, with a proximity for local events over distant ones (Oliver and Myers, 46)

When one considers the recent same-sex marriages occurring in California, it is less surprising to see that there has been less coverage over the event in the Eastern United States versus the coverage in California and other states nearby.

Finally, in terms of new routines, “it is helpful to distinguish the more mundane news routine constraints on the reporter’s job, specifically the problems of getting information and writing to meet a deadline” (Oliver and Myers, 46). A deadline for when information can be provided is certainly a major issue of concern for a local newspaper;

however, when one considers new methods of news information dispersion such as 24-hour news channels, official internet news sites where international news reporters can post a story at any time, local and non-local news coverage several times a day, and the most recent media for message-spreading, internet blogs, this is less an area of concern.

According to the March 13, 2006 article, “A New Medium for the Message,” “interest groups are increasingly using the Internet to reach beyond the Beltway (Washington, DC) and traditional lobbying techniques to bring more voices to bear on Congress” (54). By relying on the new technology, these organizations have been able to show Congress their broad base of support, indicating that their constituents are the same and that their causes should be heard. By using blogs “millions of like-minded people can be marshaled at a moment’s notice to flood Congress with e-mails or phone calls on any issue the groups consider vital” (54). There is a down side, however: “the sheer volume can end up seeming like just a lot of noise, and lose meaning in the process” (55). Furthermore, unless these organizations have a compelling argument, these mass voices are largely ignored. This does not mean that all blogging should stop though, because many politicians are keeping an eye on them, as well as setting up their own blogs.

It will be interesting to investigate how in the age of new technologies and the Internet, an older idea such as a commercial may influence the same-sex marriage debate in California.

Chapter 2: Literature

Literature Review: Framing the Same-sex Marriage Debate

The debate over same-sex marriage may be one of the country's most complicated issues in recent memory. There are two primary sides to the debate with a little-heard-from third one, and very little in the way of a clear answer as to how to solve the issue. Despite a growing acceptance of LGBT Americans since the late 1960s when the Gay Rights movement began, "it was the Hawaii case that put same-sex marriage on the political and cultural radar screen, eventually prompting passage of the federal Defense of Marriage Act and similar legislation in more than thirty states" (Hull, 2007).

In 1990, three same-sex couples applied for marriage licenses in Hawaii. When these applications were denied by the health department on the grounds that the couples were of the same sex, the couples decided to sue the state, only to have their case dismissed by the circuit court. It was only on appeal that the Hawaii Supreme Court remanded the case to trial and found that the denial of marriage licenses to same-sex couples could be construed as a violation of Hawaii state constitution's equal rights amendment. Unless the state could show that the statute's sex-based classification was justified by compelling governmental interests, the court would find in favor of the

plaintiffs. Subsequently, Hawaii legislature passed a law to ensure that only opposite-sex couples would be legally recognized (Hull, 212-213).

Since that time, as the debate over same-sex marriage has grown to the point where all but six states have either a law or a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, there have been a variety of arguments made both for and against same-sex marriage. The primary frame for same-sex marriage has been the argument of protecting civil rights by seeking equal treatment and protection of same-sex couples under the law that currently protects only opposite-sex couples. One of the primary arguments against same-sex marriage is that advocates are not seeking equal rights, but rather “special rights.” The other argument is the “morality” defense; this will be more thoroughly examined below.

In trying to understand the “equal rights” frame, one should examine the rights that same-sex couples are seeking to receive through the process of marriage. According to the Human Rights Campaign (an LGBT human rights organization), committed same-sex couples both pay more in taxes annually and are also denied basic rights that are afforded to legally recognized opposite-sex couples including:

- Hospital visitation. Married couples have the automatic right to visit each other in the hospital and make medical decisions. Same-sex couples can be denied the right to visit a sick or injured loved one in the hospital.
- Social Security benefits. Married people receive Social Security payments upon the death of a spouse. Despite paying payroll taxes, gay and lesbian workers receive no Social Security survivor benefits – resulting in an average annual income loss of \$5,528 upon the death of a partner.
- Health insurance. Many public and private employers provide medical coverage to the spouses of their employees, but most employers do not provide coverage to the life partners of gay and lesbian employees. Gay employees who do receive health coverage for their partners must pay federal income taxes on the value of the insurance.
- Estate taxes. A married person automatically inherits all the property of his or her deceased spouse without paying estate taxes. A gay or lesbian

taxpayer is forced to pay estate taxes on property inherited from a deceased partner.

- Retirement savings. While a married person can roll a deceased spouse's 401(k) funds into an IRA without paying taxes, a gay or lesbian American who inherits a 401(k) can end up paying up to 70 percent of it in taxes and penalties.
- Family leave. Married workers are legally entitled to unpaid leave from their jobs to care for an ill spouse. Gay and lesbian workers are not entitled to family leave to care for their partners.
- Immigration rights. Bi-national families are commonly broken up or forced to leave the country to stay together. The reason: U.S. immigration law does not permit American citizens to petition for their same-sex partners to immigrate.
- Nursing homes. Married couples have a legal right to live together in nursing homes. Because they are not legal spouses, elderly gay or lesbian couples do not have the right to spend their last days living together in nursing homes.
- Home protection. Laws protect married seniors from being forced to sell their homes to pay high nursing home bills; gay and lesbian seniors have no such protection.
- Pensions. After the death of a worker, most pension plans pay survivor benefits only to a legal spouse of the participant. Gay and lesbian partners are excluded from such pension benefits. (www.hrc.org, "Questions About Same-Sex Marriage")

Advanced planning in the form of documentation such as wills can provide for some of these missing rights for same-sex couples; however, as Riggle et. al. (2006) point out, only "marriage automatically confers rights on each partner to protect his or her relationship in times of crisis" (760).

In analyzing the same-sex marriage debate both in Canada and in the United States, Smith (2007) discovered that "because the rights frame dominates Canadian political discourse, it is very difficult for right-wing politicians and the religious Right to counter the claims of same-sex marriage" (7). Interestingly, it is in the United States that "the rights frame is politicized in a different way and tied directly to right-wing backlash politics" (7); this is connected to the fact that "rights for lesbians and gays are discursively constructed as part of a complex of public policy issues on which there is a

highly politicized debates about morality and race” (7). In Canada, “the rights frame is centered in the approbation of homosexual behaviors, identities and relationships and, yet, the role of morality in the rights frame is explicitly discounted” (9). The “wrongness” of homosexuality isn’t considered in the frame, unlike what has happened in the United States.

It is not the rights frame alone that differed between same-sex marriage cases in Canada and the United States. In the United States, the rights frame stems from rights recognition found in the Bill of Rights where “there are several provisions that have been used to litigate lesbian and gay rights claims, including the First Amendment (free speech and assembly) and the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment” (Smith, 13). However, in Canada, gay and lesbian rights cases have been mostly litigated under section 15 of the Canadian Charter: “section 15 is more straightforward than the Fourteenth Amendment; it prohibits state action that violates equality rights of citizens and enumerates an open-ended list of such grounds” (Smith, 13). The real issue has revolved around what makes a “suspect class,” a group which has historically experienced discrimination. Unlike the Canadian Charter which “strictly bans discrimination based on race, sex, national origin, and a range of other grounds, there has been a struggle in the USA over the inclusion of groups such as women within the suspect (or quasi-suspect) class” (Smith, 13).

The equal rights argument is widely used by LGBT advocates in the United States, and

although they would like to obtain full marital status for same-sex partnerships, popular objections to treating such partnerships as marriages (which have religious as well as legal standing) have led many to advocate

instead for ‘civil unions,’ which are viewed as more feasible politically (Price et. al. 184)

This single distinction between the use of “marriage” and “civil unions” can also influence the responses from the general public. In their investigation, Price et. al. (2005) split internet discussion boards into ideologically conservative, ideologically liberal, and mixed groups and then presented them frames regarding same-sex couples using the terms of “same-sex marriage” and “civil unions” in discussing LGBT rights.

Their results “suggest that the framing manipulations did influence the ways that groups discuss the prospect of legalizing gay partnerships” (Price et. al. 200). Furthermore, “these effects were contingent on the ideological makeup of the groups” (Price et. al. 200). Groups that were ideologically liberal were more inclined to support both civil unions and same-sex marriage (though to a lesser extent), often citing the rights frame. Groups that were ideologically conservative were more inclined to use moral arguments and “special rights” arguments against both same-sex marriage and civil unions (however, they were slightly more inclined to support civil unions). Finally, groups that were ideologically mixed were mixed in terms of support and in terms of citing specific arguments, favoring neither of the frames.

Similar results were produced in Soule’s (2004) research regarding same-sex marriage bans across the states. States that had (in general) a more Democrat base were less likely to pass same-sex marriage bans, but not significantly less so than states with a strong Republican base. It is reasonable to assume that in states where there was no strong Republican or Democrat base, that there was the greatest level of discourse.

As mentioned before, the rights frame is the primary argument when used by advocates for same-sex marriage, but there are a couple of arguments against same-sex

marriage that should be considered as well: anti-marriage within the LGBT community, the morality frame, and the claim of special rights.

One unusual frame against same-sex marriage actually stems from the gay and lesbian community. According to the queer culture frame, “traditional heterosexual marriage is a patriarchal institution that entails the oppression of women and the marginalization of those who do not fit the white, middle-class norm” (Smith, 10). Through critiquing the dominant heterosexual society and denying it on the basis of not wanting to participate in a system that is inherently unfair, the frame calls for a rejection of that system.

The morality frame states that “the behavior or lifestyle of homosexuals may be judged to be wrong or as undeserving of social sanction and state support” (Smith, 10). But this view can still be addressed in a variety of ways: “at one end of the scale, some may frame lesbians and gays as socially repugnant and distasteful, thus conveying a deep sense of stigma toward lesbian and gay people and their relationships”; on the other hand, the morality frame also encompasses those who believe that homosexuals and even homosexual behavior can be tolerated in private but who defend state policies and actions that exclude homosexual relationships from some or all forms of legal protection and recognition on the ground that these relationships are inferior to those of heterosexuals (Smith, 10).

While the morality frame may be the most oft-presented frame, the frame of same-sex marriage as seeking “special rights” must also be considered. According to Dudas, the “special rights” frame stems from “the allegation that certain populations are seeking special rights is, in fact, a reaction to the political activism of women, African

Americans, the physically and mentally disabled, Native Americans, and gays and lesbians over the last 50 years” (724). This frame has developed as a result of resentful Americans creating their own backlash movement in response to the social changes in the last half of the twentieth century. Their resentment, “propelled by an overwhelming sense of injury that portrays egalitarian social change as not only damaging to their interests but also fundamentally unfair, has reshaped the contours of American politics” (Dudas, 724).

The special rights frame in the politics of resentment is constructed in two ways; “first, the languages and logics by which resentment is expressed are central, not incidental, to resentment itself; and these languages and logics tend to be neutral and persuasive, often obscuring the specific interests that resentment bolsters” (Dudas, 727). In other words, the resentment felt by these activists can be found throughout the language and arguments used by the activists, and that while the resentment is plain, the reasoning behind the resentment is less so. Second, “resentment is a general feature of modern life; the impressions of unfairness, violation, and victimization to which it gives voice makes intelligible and meaningful a whole array of potential experiences and behaviors” (Dudas, 727). The targets of these groups feel resentment without understanding why, but the language that they use is able to give those feelings of resentment meaning, and eventually, a target toward which they can be aimed: at the groups that are not seeking equality but rather, special treatment.

The process of a right claim turning into a special right involves “simultaneously a degradation of the rights claim, and implicitly, a defense of the cultural and material arrangements that are under attack from that rights claim in the first place” (Dudas, 734).

This happens in two different steps: “first, a rights claim is pronounced special if it is understood to be exclusive—if it asks for the claimant to be treated differently by government than are other similarly situated citizens” (Dudas, 734). For example, it’s been suggested that same-sex couples who are seeking marriage rights are clamoring for mandated social approval of their relationships (Weithoff, 69). Secondly, “a right is deemed special if it is understood to generate for its recipient unearned privilege” (Dudas, 734). The dominant religion in the United States (if undeclared) is that of Christianity, which does not have a history of being sympathetic toward gays and lesbians. Religious organizations often state that protection of LGBT people is not necessary because it is against their beliefs and any support of the people is against those beliefs (Weithoff, 70).

Finally, “claims for special rights are claims for benefits in *excess* of those that would be granted by a just social order—one orchestrated according to the practice of equal rights” (Dudas 734-735). Seeking marriage rights for same-sex couples can be considered as pushing societal support of these couples onto those who do not want to have to be supportive of them. As a result, these groups of people can claim that advocates of same-sex marriage are seeking special rights.

The claims of same-sex marriage advocates seeking “special rights” can be traced back to the letters to the editors found during the course of the same-sex marriage ban amendment in Hawaii after the first case was presented to the courts.

Hull found that among the letters opposing same-sex marriage, “the two most frequent themes were the need for the will of the majority to prevail on the issue of same-sex marriage and objections to the tactics of supporters of same-sex marriage” (220). This call for the will of the majority to prevail on the issue of same-sex marriage is

similar to the ideas of recipients receiving undeserved privilege and benefits being granted in excess of those granted by a just social-order. The idea is that same-sex marriage advocates would be impinging on the freedom of religion and religious expression as well as the general population's lack of support of same-sex couples by forcing them to recognize them at the legal level. They further argued (and to this day, these same arguments are made) that public policy regarding gays and lesbians should not be made by courts or elites because that infringes on the democratic values of the society (Hull, 220).

The next step after understanding previous arguments for same-sex marriage (that of the equal rights frame), and understanding arguments against same-sex marriage (anti-marriage sentiment from the LGBT community, morality, and special rights arguments) is to understand how to go about examining the new argument presented by Let Freedom Ring, the idea of honoring same-sex couples for their love.

Chapter 3

Research Terms and Conceptual Framework

Operational Definitions

There are two primary variables of concern in this research, that of an organization, and the concept of framing. For the purpose of this research, an organization such as “Let California Ring” is defined as a social movement organization, specifically involved in the same-sex marriage debate in California. The idea of a frame can have multiple definitions that essentially mean the same thing, but for the purposes for this study, a frame is defined as “a perspective infused into a message that promotes the salience of selected pieces of information over others” (Nabi, 225). In terms of variables, the point of this research is to examine how social movement organization such as “Let California Ring” thinks in terms of changing its basic frame of the argument for same-sex marriage in California from a frame based on equal and civil rights to a frame based on honoring relationships and the couples’ love for each other.

Research Design

This research was accomplished using secondary source material as well as some first source material. “Let California Ring’s” online website, www.letcaliforniarings.org/ will be examined in terms of its mission statement, strategies, and videos. In particular, the commercial “Garden Wedding” is examined frame by frame. Along with examining the website and the commercial itself, news responses and reports will also be examined, to look at how this new commercial was presented to the general public. As all of the information can be found over the internet through archives and press releases, timing is less important, but the time frame for the study could be considered to have happened between the fall of 2007 and the spring of 2008.

Population and Sample

The many social change movement organizations that advocate for same-sex marriage would be the full population. The sample in this case is the organization “Let California Ring.” In terms of population and the sample of frames, this is all frames on all sides of the same-sex marriage debate. In the case of sampling, however, this research will specifically examine the “Garden Wedding” commercial that promotes an advocating same-sex marriage frame in terms of recognition of same-sex couples and honoring their love for each other.

Data Collection and Analysis

As stated before, the commercial as well as the organization will be examined in terms of the frame that they represent and how this frame differs from previous frames in terms of organizational thinking and emotional framing of the argument represented.

Limitations

One of the biggest concerns in terms of the limitations of this research would be the access to data such as news reports covering the “Garden Wedding” commercial. While many news sources such as local television news programs, national newspapers, and news websites may have covered the commercial initial, it may be hard to find them in the vastness of the internet. Furthermore, even organizations that reported or collected news reports could have deleted their collections of stories, both of which are experiences beyond the control of the researcher.

In terms of validity and reliability, it is reasonable to assume that the examination of the commercial will be both valid in terms of dissecting what is being shown in the commercial and reliable in terms of the frame as emotional approach to the same-sex marriage debate.

Finally, it is impossible to determine the effect of the commercial on its targeted audience. At this point in time, while the California courts have legalized same-sex marriage, there is a ballot measure for this upcoming November that would once again ban same-sex marriage in the state. As that election is still many months away, it is impossible to know how people who will vote have been influenced by the commercial (if at all). Furthermore, it is very difficult to determine the exact effect the commercial would have on their targeted audience of undecided voters.

Chapter 4

Research: The Organization: Let California Ring

The organization “Let California Ring” is a somewhat unusual LGBT advocacy agency. Unlike organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign, which states that it is “America’s largest civil rights organization working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality” (www.HRC.org), or the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force whose mission is “to build the grassroots power of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community” (www.thetaskforce.org), Let California Ring describes itself as “a public education campaign to open hearts and minds about the freedom and the respect, support, protections, and responsibilities that come with marriage” (www.letcaliforniarings.org). Unlike the previous organizations that directly state that they are directly working for LGBT Americans and their rights in the first sentence, Let California Ring doesn’t do that. Their approach is to present themselves as a teaching organization reaching out to those who are undecided regarding same-sex marriage in California.

The full brochure about Let California Ring is one single page that explains their processes:

Let California Ring is a public education campaign to open hearts and minds about the freedom to marry and the respect, support, protections, and responsibilities that come with marriage. Every day, gay and lesbian Californians are denied the freedom to marry the person they love. Through a groundbreaking television ad and video, an interactive website and a statewide network of community leaders and volunteers, the campaign addresses the public's concerns and conflicts about marriage and same-sex couples, builds a better understanding of the everyday challenges lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Californians face, and encourages dialogue through individual and public conversations about ways to end exclusion (Let California Ring Brochure).

As mentioned before, Let California Ring seems a little different from some of the other LGBT advocacy organizations out there. Their website is a little different, for instance. As they state, it is interactive, rather than just having a number of facts, and a lot of text overall as can be found at both of the other two organizations. They also use videos, that can be found at their website under the Media Center-Videos link, showing that they are more visually-oriented than some of the LGBT advocacy organizations.

It's important to also examine the exact mission statement, as that is what most people who might become interested in the organization look at when gathering information about an organization and trying to decide if they are interested in working with the group. Let California Ring's mission statement reads as:

Lesbian and gay Californians deserve the freedom to marry the person they love. Let California Ring is a public education campaign to open hearts and minds about the freedom to marry and the respect, support, protections, and responsibilities that come with marriage. Let California Ring is a project of Equality California Institute, working in a diverse coalition of over 60 national, state and local organizations (www.letcaliforniarings.org/mission)

Throughout the mission statement, there is an emphasis on public education, as well as the love and respect that gay and lesbian couples already have for each other and the

respect and support that they deserve for those relationships. The focus is on honoring same-sex couples and their relationships.

What is also interesting about the Let California Ring organization is that it is not a singular organization, but rather a campaign launched by multiple groups and funded by many more as well as individuals. The following list is included from the website:

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California
- California Faith for Equality
- COLAGE
- Marriage Equality USA
- National Black Justice Coalition
- National Center for Lesbian Rights
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
- Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
- The San Diego LGBT Community Center
- Trans Equality LA

These organizations found that working together toward the common goal of achieving marriage rights for same-sex couples in California would be a better approach than working separately.

One of the techniques Let Freedom Ring uses that is a little unusual aside from advertising is that of the House Party. One of Let California Ring's major goals is to get 500,000 new supporters for same-sex marriage rights and the idea is help achieve this through house parties. As the Let California Ring website explains:

Getting a group of people in your life together in one room to talk about the freedom to marry is the most effective way to spread the basic messages of love and fairness for all families. Talking to people you know will ultimately build a team of hundreds of thousands of people working to open hearts and minds across California. The numbers add up fast!

Having a house party is easy--and it's a great way to raise funds that keep the campaign going. We've got a special house party kit that makes throwing a house party easy, including a great DVD.

By the way, a house party is also a PARTY. It's fun. You'll do all the things you normally do to have a party, like choose food, music, and friends, with the added benefit of some meaningful conversation too. We will even send trained, inspiring Let California Ring speakers to your event to support you and your efforts
(www.letcaliforniarings.org/House_Parties)

This is an unusual tactic, one that aims to attract those that can be called “Straight Allies.” These are heterosexuals who are willing to support the LGBT community in a variety of ways, such as by voting and spreading the word amongst those that they know who might also be willing to participate. Because there are considerably more heterosexuals than non-heterosexuals in the United States, the LGBT community must often rely on those who are sympathetic to them and their causes.

The interactive website, the working with other organizations, house parties and the use of more visually-based techniques such as the advertisement to be discussed are all signs of the organization operating a little differently from some of the other LGBT advocacy organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign or the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. These techniques can be examined and partially explained by using the single-loop, double-loop, and triple-loop learning of organizations discussed in chapter 1. In single-loop learning, “actors (whether individuals, groups or organizations) consider more effective methods or strategies for achieving their guiding principles (which may be manifested as goals, policies, or values), but these actors are not open to questioning those principles” (Foldy, 213). For Let California Ring, it could be argued that the organizations that make up the education campaign have the collective goal of getting more straight allies involved in the fight for same-sex marriage rights in California. It can also be assumed that these organizations had tried other techniques in order to get straight allies involved in same-sex marriage rights, possibly by including

them in their usual outreach to the LGBT community only to find that they were not reaching those potential allies who were undecided.

As mentioned earlier, double-loop learning “results when actors do evaluate and change their guiding principles” (Foldy, 213); or when after consideration of previous tactics, organizations realize that their current techniques no longer work as well as they might have hoped, so they must change their methods. In this case, the fact that the organizations making up Let California Ring decided to shift gears in their approaches and instead of using just a general outreach to straight allies interested in supporting the LGBT community, decided to directly go after those Californians who were on the fence regarding same-sex marriage. Using techniques such as house parties, a visually-oriented website, and television advertisements are examples of changing the techniques in order to reach more of the targeted audience.

In triple-loop learning, “actors go beyond questioning their own values and consider values of the societal tradition system in which their actions are taking place” (Foldy, 213). As mentioned before, Let California Ring presents a somewhat new idea in their commercial, one that approaches the same-sex marriage debate by using the argument of honoring the love of same-sex couples have for each other. This new frame is examined in more detail in the next section while studying the “Garden Wedding” commercial that Let California Ring released.

Chapter 4

Let California Ring's "Garden Wedding" Commercial

One of the most unique factors about Let California Ring is that they produced a commercial that was not only played in San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and Palm Springs, but can also be found on multiple websites such as YouTube.com and a variety of personal blogs and websites. The original sixty second "Garden Wedding Commercial can be found at YouTube.com, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkhhD6Gqz34> .

What follows for the purposes of this examination is a frame-by-frame description of the commercial.

[Commercial opens; music plays throughout]

A little girl skips through, carrying a basket, the camera turns to follow her as she skips behind two women; one straightening the veil on the bride's head

[Scene shift]

The bride looks at herself in the mirror, smiling and looking very pleased with her appearance in her bridal gown and veil, the camera fading out from the view of the bride's reflection to the bride herself turning around

[Scene shift]

The bride stands up, taking the arm of an older man who is smiling very broadly (probably her father) and is about to escort her down the aisle

[Scene shift]

The door to the garden is closed, the father reaches out to turn the handle and it comes off in his hand; he then reaches up and tries to open the door by pulling on the wood around the small rectangular windows on the door

[Scene shift]

The door from the outside as the father opens the door at last, outside view of all the guests and the orchestra playing music, the father leads his bridal daughter off to the side

[Scene shift]

The father leads his daughter when their way is suddenly blocked by two cars parked very close together, and the viewer realizes that they are in the parking lot with no way to go around the cars; the bride sighs and hefts up her many skirts, turning sideways and trying to walk between the cars

[Scene shift]

As the bride gets through the parked cars, she steps on several soft drink cans that are littering her path, breaking her shoe heel, turning her ankle and stumbling very badly

[Scene shift]

Father catches the daughter, patting her hand encouragingly several times as they go on with their walk up to the garden trellis that is heavily covered with vines and ivy

[Scene shift]

The bride bumps into her ivy-covered trellis pausing to reach up and try to move some of it out of her way

[Scene shift]

The camera changes view to that of the bride's viewpoint for a moment, and the audience can see the lovely layout of the garden: the flower girl is right in front of her, family and friends are on either side of the aisle, with her groom waiting for her in the far ground with a canopy of vines

[Scene shift]

The camera returns to watching the bride as she tries to push the ivy in front of her out of her way and it catches her veil, taking it off of her head and messing up her hair as she finally gets through

Scene shift]

A close up on the flower girl as she starts to dispense her flowers, followed by a close up on the bride's face, which now seems a little furrowed and upset until she smiles; followed by a close up on three men, an older gentleman (possibly the pastor or priest who will be performing the ceremony, the groom, and a third man (possibly the groom's best man) who are smiling until their faces change to that of upset

[Scene shift]

The flower girl holds tightly onto the waist of the bride as the viewer sees the back of the father try to pull her off the bride; he finally dislodges her and the viewer sees from the side as the flower girl is taken off of the bride with a final side-view shot of an older woman who is smiling up at the bride

[Scene shift]

A close-up shot of the bride's face, with what looks like a forced smile as she limps forward

[Scene shift]

A side view of the same older woman, only without her head in view as she sticks out her now visible cane to trip up the bride

[Scene shift]

The bride turns to look at the older woman as she falls down

[Scene shift]

A shot of the groom and the two men alongside him; his face appears shocked to see his bride fall and he rushes to her side, the best man and the pastor grab onto him, pulling him back and keeping him with them

[Scene shift]

The bride sitting down in the middle of the aisle, turning toward the groom and looking up, her face sad and upset

[Scene shift]

The text “What if you couldn’t marry the one you love?” pops up across the bottom half of the screen over the bride’s dress as she looks very sad

[Scene shift]

The screen turns black; the text “everyday, gay and lesbian couples are prevented from marrying”, the screen stays black until the text “support the freedom to marry” shows up along with the Let California Ring’s website link. The only difference between this commercial and the current one at Let California Ring’s website under videos (which can be found at

<http://www.letcaliforniarings.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=ltJTJ6MQIuE&b=3554233&ct=4563207>)are the last few words of text: “Join the California Supreme Court in

supporting everyone's freedom to marry." These words are then followed by the Let California Ring website link.

As mentioned before, what seems to be truly unique about this commercial's frame of same-sex marriage is that it is presented in a frame other than, simply, the equal rights argument. This commercial uses the emotions of the viewer to help the argument that same-sex couples should be recognized for the honor and love that they have for each other, which is, of course, the very argument that Let California Ring has been making from the beginning. It is the emphasis of the new frame, combined with the visuals, which really make the organization different from several other same-sex marriage advocacy groups.

This commercial embraces both the idea of using emotions in connection with a frame and persuasion techniques. As mentioned earlier, emotions such as anger and fear "can promote different degrees of message-processing, with uncertainty appraisal serving as the key moderator" (Nabi, 228). However, the emotions hoped to be triggered by this commercial are those of sadness and upset, as well as trying to develop a connection between people who have gotten married or who will (heterosexuals) and those who cannot (gays and lesbians) and get them to empathize with those who cannot.

The image of bride and groom meeting one obstacle after another, culminating in a woman tripping up the bride and the groom being held back by attendants so that he can't attend to his bride, is a very compelling illustration. If "some emotions such as disgust and surprise enhance recall of the central concepts of commercials in the short and long term compared to other emotions such as happiness, fear, and guilt" (Nabi 228); than it is reasonable to assume that an image producing emotions of compassion and

upset is also likely to stay with the viewer. When one considers that the central message of the commercial is to connect the viewers to the fact that gays and lesbians can't get married, it draws the mind to what a wedding is supposed to be and to mean.

If a wedding is supposed to represent hope for the couple's lives, honoring and respecting the love that they have by witnessing it, and supporting the couple in their love and honor, then this commercial drives home the fact that gay and lesbian couples can't have these things, or at least not in a manner that is legally recognizable. For it is certain that gay and lesbian couples could have "commitment ceremonies" enacted by pastors and ministers that are willing to perform them; but that doesn't make them legally binding, and the fact remains that many religious leaders are not willing to perform them in the first place.

This commercial also acts as a persuading device to help change the minds of possible straight allies that are on the fence regarding same-sex marriage. Persuasion "takes place when a communicator effectively revises the content of one's beliefs about an attitude object, replacing or supplementing favorable thoughts with unfavorable ones or vice-versa" (Druckman, 1044). By using the images mentioned above, one can recognize that Let California Ring is presenting a persuasive argument for same-sex marriage through the use of an emotionally-based frame: that of accepting and supporting the love and honor that same-sex couples have for each other. Specifically, they are trying to influence the decision of those who are unsure about where they stand on the issue of same-sex marriage by convincing them through the images and words of their commercial that they can help those who currently can't get married. When a recent poll (Hamlin, 2007) shows that California is almost evenly split on the issue of same-sex

marriage (48 percent opposed to 46 percent approved), then the main objective must be to target those who are on the fence.

Along with examining the frame that is presented, one should also consider the way in which the frame is presented. The use of a commercial stands out because it is visual, when so many of the other frames previously considered have been very verbal and written. It has been said that a picture is worth considerably more than words, in that it leaves a greater impression and can be easier to understand. People do not really think in words, but rather in images and emotions, and this use of a commercial reflects that.

While the commercial and its argument supporting same-sex marriages based on the ideal of recognizing and supporting gay and lesbian couples is important, the next step is to examine the way in which the commercial was presented to the general population through the media.

Chapter 4

Research-Presentation of the Frame: Media Presentation

One way in which the presentation of a frame can be examined, is the media presentation. Eight newspaper articles, two videos and one video transcript were examined for author influence and bias using the criteria mentioned earlier. Of the eleven news presentations, three categories were found: supportive, balanced, and negative presentation of the topic. The majority (eight of eleven media examples) of the various media reactions were found to be balanced, in that they were neither directly supportive, nor directly negative in their reporting; two were found to be supportive in their reporting; and one was found to be negative in its reporting on the topic of same-sex marriage. The quality of the reporting, the phrases that are used as well as general wording the author uses in presenting the story of the “Garden Wedding” ad produced by Let California Ring were examined in order to best determine which of the three categories the various media presentations belonged.

Of the two supportive articles (written by Wolfson and McMillan), one appeared in the *San Francisco Bay Times: The Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Trans Newspaper & Events Calendar for the Bay Area*, so it is logical that the author would likely be supportive of

the ad, the organization, and the same-sex marriage debate. There is no direct evidence to suggest that Wolfson's piece in *The Huffington Post* is a result of the paper being of a part of a pro-LGBT agenda or origin.

There are several quotes in both articles that reflect a positive approach to the television advertisement. For example, Wolfson (2007) in *The Huffington Post* writes:

The wedding ad, which can be seen on www.letcaliforniarising.org, puts viewers in the shoes of the many same-sex couples who are prevented from marrying the person that they love. It's striking how many non-gay people have never really been invited to put themselves in another's place. Left on their own, they too often treat their view or vote on ending marriage discrimination as kind of a "freebie" that has no real-life consequences to couples, kids, and even the gay people they say they want to be fair to.

All of which gives strength to the idea that the writer shares supportive beliefs for the pro-same-sex marriage debate. Another major quote of influence showing the supportive nature of the article is

To make these conversations happen, we have to break the chicken-and-egg of gay people not talking to the people in their lives directly about why we need them to care about ending exclusion from marriage, while non-gay people wait for their non-gay friends and family-members to bring it up, or think everything is fine. It's not enough to be tolerant and caring, because gay people we care about are being treated as second-class citizens and the same-sex couples we know are denied important tangible and intangible protections and respect.

Several phrases in these two quotes show a great strength in supportive words for the ideas behind the commercial. It uses words that have a pro-LGBT ring to them, such as non-gays, and emphasizes the need for support.

The *San Francisco Bay Times* article by McMillan (2007) begins by first mentioning many of the organizations that are working together to create the Let

California Ring campaign. Again, considering that this is a pro-LGBT newspaper publication, it makes sense that it would refer to all of those that are involved in the campaign to let those that they support know what they are working on. The phrases that the article uses to support the new campaign are less directly supportive of the advertisement itself, and more supportive of the movement as a whole:

Kors reminded the audience that it has now been four years almost to the month since the Winter of Love on Valentines weekend 2004, when hundreds of same-sex couples were married in City Hall. And then just six months later, all the marriages were voided by order of the State Court. This action made way for rightwing homophobes to sponsor an amendment to the California Constitution declaring that only a man and a woman may legally marry. Since then, the right wing has spent several hundred thousand dollars gathering signatures to thus revise the Constitution and forever brand same-sex marriages unlawful.

Much of the paragraph expresses frustration directed at the ongoing struggle same-sex marriage proponents have faced in California. Many phrases in the paragraph, such as “voiding marriages,” “rightwing homophobes,” and “forever brand same-sex marriages unlawful” are key examples of the frustration that the writer both feels and shares with the LGBT community.

There was considerably more media coverage that was reflective of a balanced, neutral position. The five articles, one video transcription, and two videos generally present the commercial, discussion of the commercial, discussion of the organization and the discussion of the organization’s goals in a “facts only,” dispassionate discussion. There are multiple examples within each article as the writer tries to present the topic of same-sex marriage and those that support it in a neutral light. Marcelo (2007) of the *San Francisco News* writes “this commercial is part of the Let California Ring campaign that uses various mediums in order to influence the percentage of Californians who are

currently undecided over the issue of same-sex marriage” as well as stating that “the ingenious appeal of the ad, therefore, is its ability to place a straight person in the shoes of a gay person”; both of which are phrases designed to explain without the use of prejudicial words.

Other writers do a very nice job of directly quoting one of the leaders of an organization involved in the Let California Ring campaign. Several authors cite Geoff Kors, the director of Equality California Institute, as Langewis (2007) does in the article found at PageOneQ:

“You meet someone special. You fall in love and vow to spend your lives together. Maybe you want to get married. Yet every day, lesbian and gay people in California are denied the freedom to marry the person they love.” (Italics in original)

Another director that is quoted is Jody Huckaby, the executive director of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Leff (2007), in the *Oakland Tribune*, explains:

Though the messages are often aimed at heterosexuals who have a personal connection with someone who is gay, the initiatives have a purely practical side. “It’s just a matter of numbers,” said Jody Huckaby, executive director of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. “There are a lot more straight people than LGBT people.”

These two quotes could be considered as examples of using credible sources to further a cause: in this case, using directors who are involved in supporting same-sex marriages to provide information and reasoning behind the commercial and the education campaign as a whole. Furthermore, the citing of these credible sources by a credible source (the newspapers as opposed to a tabloid) gives further credibility to the actions of the

organization being discussed (Let California Ring's commercial and other activities) as well as the movement as a whole.

The last of the neutral presented news media pieces regarding the Let California Ring commercial present a new element into their discussion: they introduce arguments of the opposition. For example, Sanders (2007) writes on both supporters such as the previously referenced Kors: "'The long-term goal is to have the majority of Californians support the freedom to marry—to change the climate here,' said Geoff Kors, executive director of Equality California, which is coordinating the campaign"; as well as referencing opponents of the campaign as a whole:

But Randy Thomasson, president of the Campaign for Children and Families, said, "Most people know deep in their hearts that marriage is a very special relationship between a man and a woman. In the big picture, those house parties and events are only for those loosey-goosey liberals who already support the notion of homosexual marriages," Thomasson said.

Sanders returns to the Let California Ring campaign, the amount of money that they have raised, as well as their list of backers and supporters after the quick counter-argument.

Hamlin (2007) of the *San Francisco Chronicle* cites another leader of the campaign, Seth Kilbourn, Equality California's political and policy director: "This campaign is intended to move the state 'over the tipping point', Kilbourn said. 'We wanted to connect to the people of California on an emotional level, on a level they can identify with.'" And later on cites another opponent against same-sex marriage:

"The homosexual community continues to attempt to attract the emotions of society," said [Ron] Prentice, executive director of the California Family Council, a group that is "committed to promoting Judeo-Christian principles" and is part of an anti-gay marriage consortium called ProtectMarriage.com. "Our home is that society will recognize that the meaning and purpose of marriage is more than an emotional argument."

The transcript entitled “Gay Marriage Push: Special Rings Given To Couples” of the original video news piece “New California Ads Promote Same-Sex Marriage” done by a local CBS channel both reference those for and against same-sex marriage. The major difference is that the actual news video shows more interview time with the previously mentioned Geoff Kors:

“It’s less about showing lesbian and gay people which we’ve done in a lot of contexts, but actually putting straight people in our shoes, to make them emotionally feel what it would be like to be prevented from marrying the person they are now married to, or the person they hope to marry,” said Kors.

They also both reference, of course, the same opposing argument:

We showed the ad to a group opposed to gay marriage, Catholics for the Common Good, based in Daly City. “It’s purely emotional, and it really misrepresents what marriage is all about,” said Catholics for Common Good member William B. May. “What is the public interest in regulating emotional relationships between people? The real purpose of marriage is to build a foundation with a mother and a father for children.”

But both also reference a unique event that other news media have not, the showing of the commercial to someone whom is a member of the targeted audience, namely, someone who has not yet made up their mind regarding the freedom to marry in California:

At the Manor Coffee Shop in San Francisco’s West Portal Neighborhood, we showed the ad to Katina Foster, who has been undecided about gay marriage. “I thought the commercial was well done,” said Foster. “It brings the point across, but I still haven’t made up my mind one way or the other.”

That is the point where the transcription ends. However, in the actual video news, the viewer learns that Foster, while still not positively one way or the other, is leaning a little more in favor of same-sex marriage, “because the emotional impact, the heartbreak, is

well-demonstrated.” It is curious that the editor of the transcript decided to leave this part of the video out of the transcript itself, this might an example of the editor’s predisposition influencing the reader.

The CNN video of the ad also has a short comment from Geoff Kors: “The ad is designed to put people in the shoes of gay and lesbian people, and understand the pain and hurt that we feel from being denied the right to marry” before giving a bit of background information on the debate of same-sex marriage in California. Afterwards, there is a short comment from Brad Dacus of the Pacific Justice Institute, a conservative organization defending religious freedom which calls the new commercial “propaganda”: “If it’s opened up to two men and two women, it can easily be opened up to protect polygamy or adult incest or any other kind of non-conventional relationship outside of traditional marriage.” After the last comment, the video returns to the CNN commentator who addresses that argument by stating that according to many LGBT-rights advocating organizations, those against same-sex marriage “can come up with any argument not based in fact.”

In the final news piece, Black (2007) from the *Christian Post Reporter*, one can see almost immediately that the author has a negative viewpoint on the same-sex marriage debate. The fact that the article is entitled “Same-Sex ‘Marriage’ TV Ad Attempts to Sway Calif. Voters” is the first example; the word “marriage” is set in quotation marks and indicates that the marriage between two people of the same sex could not be a real marriage. Additionally, it becomes clear that the writer did not interview anyone involved in the debate on the proponent side, as all of the quotes that the writer uses are taken from the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Sacramento Bee*.

This is also the case with all quotes from the opposing side of the argument, indicating that the article, while researched, is not actively pursued by the author.

There are two other quotes to consider as proof of Black's lack of support for the commercial, the organization, and the movement: "In addition to the TV ad, thousands of volunteers are expected to conduct house parties, knock on voters' doors, and give speeches to promote the push and help 'spark a million conversations' about the freedom to wed." This quotation shows the disdain of the author for the people who are willing to help participate in the movement and to achieve the goals of Let California Ring. The last line of note for an example of the author's lack of support is also the last line of the article: "Currently, Massachusetts is the only state where same-sex 'marriage' is legal." This statement has the same primary issue with it that the title of the article did. The fact that the word "marriage" is in quotation marks suggests that it is less-so than traditional marriage between people of the opposite sex. When one considers that the opening and closing of the article has the same word use, it truly shows that author's dislike of the concept being addressed.

One could potentially make the argument that since all of those quoted as being against same-sex marriage are identified as Christian, then all Christians are against same-sex marriage. This is of course not the case; one need only look at the list of financial backers and supporters of the Let California Ring campaign to see the names of a few pro-LGBT Christian organizations. But that issue is only one of a few to consider when examining this research in its entirety.

Chapter 4

Conclusions, Concerns, and Further Research

Conclusion

The intention of this research was to determine if the organization Let California Ring operated in a manner representing the theory that an organization can learn and change its strategies and tactics; if the “Garden Wedding” commercial was an example of a new frame in support of same-sex marriages; and if the news media coverage of the commercial and the organization was balanced. In examining the Let California Ring campaign, it is clear that the organizations working together in this endeavor have had to change their techniques when it came to approaching their targeted audiences. Shifting from a frame of same-sex marriage as an equal right to a frame of same-sex marriage represents honoring the love of same-sex couples is an example of the organization changing their argument to better connect with their targeted audience. In effect the changed frame emphasizes the value of “romantic love” and honor for a marital partner, rather than only the equal rights value theme. The new frame seems to neutralize the morality theme of opposing homosexual marriage, by connecting with the theme of the salience of romantic love.

The commercial “Garden Wedding” presents this new frame in such a way as to truly connect with the audience; by putting heterosexuals who have married or who would like to get married in the shoes of a group of people who are denied the freedom marry the ones that they love. This new frame connects better with an audience who are more apt to think about their wedding day with a sense of romanticism rather than with plans for protecting their loved ones legally. Morgan’s (2006) theoretical paradigm focusing on the “organization as brain and learner” appears to be manifest in the framing transformation of “Let California Ring” and the Garden Wedding television video. What will “Let California Ring” learn from the upcoming referendum on the fall, 2008, ballot, relevant to this video presentation as a framing mechanism?

In terms of how the news media reacted, when one examines the sample taken from the internet archives of these newspapers and news programs, one can see that the pieces were neutral for the most part. The fact that, of the two supportive articles, one came from an LGBT newspaper reflects the rest of the society’s confliction with LGBT issues; LGBT issues have to be presented in a neutral tone and only those who can outwardly show their support are already members of the LGBT community or are straight allies. It is also interesting that the one negative article showed little in the way of first-hand investigation and was pieced together by using neutral sources for quotes mixed with the author’s own words.

There are two key policy implications to note. In the first case, one should recognize that the use of new technologies such as the internet, with the access to blogs, websites, and their content, is an example of how organizations learn to think. In the process of loop-learning, organizations have “learned” to make use of the rapidly

changing technology in order to better present their argument. Furthermore, if an organization continues with double and triple-loop learning, the use of the new technology prepares and enables them to change their arguments as quickly as they need to. This is a technique not limited only to LGBT advocacy organizations, but any advocacy organization seeking change.

In the second case, should the voter referendum in November against same-sex marriage fail to pass the voters, it could signify a new frame for multiple LGBT advocacy organizations. After winning the freedom to marry, organizations advocating other issues, such as same-sex couple adoption of children, could present a new, emotional-based frame such as the power of love between a mother or father and child, to the undecided public along with continuing to use their previous arguments. Again, this would be a new technique for multiple advocacy organizations, such as interest groups and lobbyists seeking welfare reform. For after having seen that an emotional frame can be used to make change in one area of public policy, they can use it in other areas as well.

Concerns

The primary area of concern in this research stems from the articles investigated for the news media reaction research. The sample was not taken randomly, nor is it clear that it is an entirely representative sample. The sample was collected several months after the initial event (the appearance of the “Garden Wedding” commercial) by searching the internet for news reports on the commercial. As a result, newspapers that did not have an internet archive, or only posted a story about the commercial in the print edition could not be researched, as could be the case with many smaller newspapers. However, considering that the commercial was only shown in four major cities and their

immediate surrounding areas, smaller towns farther away may not have even covered the story because it was simply not in their demographic.

Another area of concern is the lack of information regarding how well the commercial may have done its primary objective, that of changing the minds of people who were undecided on the question of same-sex marriage. Only two resources (one news broadcast and the other its transcript) even mentioned showing the ad to an undecided member of the population and finding out that person's reaction.

Future Research

It would be very interesting to learn how long the commercial continued to play in the aforementioned cities along with doing possible surveys regarding the targeted audience's reactions to the commercial. Considering that the election in the fall of 2008 carries yet another voter referendum blocking same-sex marriages from being performed and recognizing only marriages between members of the opposite sex, it is still a very contentious topic in California along with the rest of the United States.

Future researchers on this topic should try to ascertain the exact amount of influence that the commercial had on California's undecided citizens. This could be researched through surveys, perhaps even interviews with people after their vote. The fact also remains that the actual vote in the upcoming election could provide more information about such framing initiatives based on the result of the proposed referendum.

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