

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

Perception vs. Reality: Comparing actual newspaper coverage of lesbian and gay issues with readers' impressions

by

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The renowned journalist Robert C. Maynard, owner-editor of the Oakland Tribune, once said that the ultimate goal of any newspaper was to become an “instrument of community understanding”. He referred to the obligation of a newspaper to go beyond the superficial, to explore and explain the multifaceted, not always harmonious elements that blend to make any community. The current research attempted to assess whether or not major newspapers were, in fact, achieving this goal with respect to one slice of a community’s life, namely the gay and lesbian subculture. How are gays and lesbians being portrayed in the mainstream press? How do they see themselves as being portrayed? This paper presents research designed to uncover the perceptions of gay as well as straight readers in terms of coverage of lesbian and gay issues and to assess the validity of these perceptions.

To gather readers’ perceptions we traveled to four cities -- Atlanta, Los Angeles, St. Louis and New York. These cities were chosen as representing the four demographic regions of the United States -- the East Coast, the West Coast, the Midwest and the South. In each of these cities we surveyed approximately 40 individuals, 20 gay or lesbian and 20 straight, all of whom read their local paper (The Atlanta Journal Constitution, The Los Angeles Times, The Saint Louis Post Dispatch, or The New York Times) at least four days a week. In a brief three page survey we asked these readers a number of questions about their perceptions of the frequency, quality and type of coverage of gays and lesbians. Subsequent to the survey, we conducted focus

groups of the same readers in each of these four target cities (2 gay and lesbian and 2 straight¹ groups per city). These focus groups allowed us to flesh out the responses to the questions posed in our survey. Out of the readers' survey and focus groups we distilled the following assessment of the coverage of gays and lesbians in the mainstream press:

PERCEPTION 1: NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF GAY OR LESBIAN-RELATED ISSUES IS EXTREMELY SPARSE,

PERCEPTION 2: COVERAGE TENDS TO BE EPISODIC, FOCUSING ON SPECIFIC EVENTS, RATHER THAN THEMATIC,

PERCEPTION 3: COVERAGE TENDS TO BE CONFLICT-DRIVEN,

PERCEPTION 4: COVERAGE TENDS TO FOCUS PRIMARILY ON GAY MEN AS OPPOSED TO LESBIANS, and

PERCEPTION 5: COVERAGE TENDS TO BE NATIONAL RATHER THAN LOCAL.

To test the validity of these perceptions we turned to a content analysis of the four newspapers in question – The Atlanta Journal Constitution, The Los Angeles Times, The Saint Louis Post Dispatch, or The New York Times. The month of October 1999, was selected at random and the complete content of each newspaper was analyzed for each of the 31 days of that month. All stories that dealt with gays or lesbians or their issues were identified and subjected to further coding on a number of dimensions. By comparing the perceptions of our readers to actual stories identified by the content analysis, we can provide at least a rough gauge of the extent to which perception and reality mesh.

¹ In St. Louis, only two focus groups were conducted – one gay and one straight.

PERCEPTION 1: NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF GAY OR LESBIAN-RELATED ISSUES IS EXTREMELY SPARSE.

When asked to estimate the number of gay and lesbian stories that appear in their local newspapers in an average month the most common response among readers in our survey was 2 or 3 (as indicated by the median response column in Table 1)². Interestingly, this estimate did not vary significantly either as a function of the readers’ sexual orientation or the specific city and newspaper in question.

Table 1. Readers’ estimates of the number of gay and lesbian stories appearing in their local newspaper in an average month.

	Straight Readers		Lesbian & Gay Readers		Combined	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Atlanta Journal Constitution	6.89	3	2.22	2	4.62	3
Los Angeles Times	2.89	2	3.36	2	3.15	2
Saint Louis Post Dispatch	2.13	2	2.67	2	2.41	2
New York Times	4.71	3	4.55	3	4.63	3
Overall	.53	3	3.31	3	3.91	3

Perception vs. Reality

How accurate were readers in our 4 cities with respect to the frequency and depth of coverage in their local newspapers? Not very. Table 2 presents the results of a month-long content analysis of The Atlanta Journal Constitution, The Los Angeles Times, The Saint Louis

² The arithmetic mean number of articles (as shown in Table 1) estimated by readers in our sample was somewhat higher due to one or two individuals in each group who estimated substantially higher numbers. Therefore, the median is the most representative response.

Post Dispatch and The New York Times. Readers in each of these four cities dramatically underestimated the number of gay and lesbian articles that appeared in their local newspaper in an average month. Even the paper with the lowest number of articles, The Saint Louis Post Dispatch with 23 articles, eclipsed readers’ estimates (of 2 stories per month) by a magnitude of 10.

Table 2. Actual number and type of article by newspaper.

	Story	Brief (3 paragraphs or less)	Review	Total
Atlanta Journal Constitution	18 (58%)	11 (36%)	2 (6%)	31
Los Angeles Times	25 (52%)	15 (31%)	8 (17%)	48
Saint Louis Post Dispatch	7 (30%)	9 (40%)	7 (30%)	23
New York Times	28 (50%)	18 (32)	10 (18%)	56
Overall	78 (49%)	53 (34%)	27 (17%)	158

What might account for this enormous gap between perception and reality in terms of frequency of coverage? One answer might lie in what counted in the content audit as an “article”.

As indicated in Table 2, approximately one-third of the gay and lesbian-related articles were briefs of three paragraphs or less in length. An additional 27% of the stories identified were reviews of movies, books, or plays. It may be the case that readers, in making their estimates, focused on full-length news and feature stories such as those found in the front section of a newspaper.

While both gay and straights readers’ estimates of frequency of coverage tended to converge, their satisfaction with the extent of coverage did not. When asked whether their local paper prints “too many, too few, or about the right amount of gay and lesbian related stories, readers’ responses tended to break down along lines of sexual orientation as seen below in Table 3.

Table 3. Percentage of readers who felt their local paper featured either “too few”, “about the right amount” or “too many” gay and lesbian-related articles.

	Straight Readers		
	“too few	“about right”	“too many”
Atlanta Journal Constitution	28%	72%	0%
Los Angeles Times	44%	56%	0%
Saint Louis Post Dispatch	0%	100%	0%
New York Times	5%	76%	19%
Overall	20%	75%	5%
	Lesbian & Gay Readers		
	“too few	“about right”	“too many”
Atlanta Journal Constitution	78%	22%	0%
Los Angeles Times	82%	18%	0%
Saint Louis Post Dispatch	89%	11%	0%
New York Times	85%	10%	5%
Overall	83%	16%	1%

Perhaps not surprisingly, over three-quarters of the gays and lesbians in our survey felt that coverage was inadequate. This sentiment was echoed in the focus groups:

"They give just enough so heterosexuals won't be threatened and lesbians won't complain." (Gay female, Los Angeles).
"As a community of gay people we have become accustomed to just taking what we can get... we say, well, that's better than nothing."(Gay male, Los Angeles).

Among heterosexual readers the sentiment was far more mixed. Fewer than one-quarter of straight readers in our survey, predominantly those Los Angeles and Atlanta, expressed a desire for more coverage of gay and lesbian issues with comments such as *“The everyday life of gays and lesbians is not represented. I have gay neighbors and I don’t see them represented in the paper” (Straight Female, Los Angeles).* Only a relatively small proportion of straight

readers surveyed reported that their local papers featured “too many” gay and lesbian-related stories. However, a resistance to increased coverage among straight readers became evident in subsequent focus groups as illustrated by the following quotes:

“I don't think too many people want to hear about it. If it's something they wanted to hear about the LAT would print it. (Male, Los Angeles).

“Gay news is news, yeah ... but it should not be front page news. (Male, St. Louis)

The focus groups also revealed an interesting divergence of opinion in terms of whether or not increased coverage would be beneficial. A significant proportion of straight readers viewed a lack of coverage as potentially desirable for gays: ***“They probably like not being covered a lot. Not showing up means things are going well for them.” (Female, St. Louis).*** In St. Louis this “no news is good news” sentiment was shared by approximately half of the gay focus group members. In direct contrast to their counterparts in Atlanta, New York and Los Angeles, a substantial contingent of gays and lesbians in our St. Louis focus groups felt that an increase in coverage was not in their best interest:

“ We're conservative here. If you want coverage you would go to NY or LA. You don't see people holding hands here. We're just a nice quiet low-keyed little town.

“St. Louis is extremely closeted. We don't need people to know our business. Because of my job of 30 years and my family, I can't live a liberal gay life. The paper is geared toward people like me.” (Male, St. Louis)

PERCEPTION 2: COVERAGE TENDS TO BE EPISODIC, FOCUSING ON SPECIFIC EVENTS, RATHER THAN THEMATIC.

Curiously, gay and lesbian readers were no more accurate in their assessments of frequency of coverage than their heterosexual counterparts. A priori one might have predicted that gays and lesbians who are seemingly starved for increased coverage would be paying closer

attention and, consequently, generate a more accurate assessment. One clue may be that the gays in our focus groups consistently reported that they did not “see themselves” reflected in the sensationalistic coverage of crimes and crises such as the Andrew Cunanan shooting of Versace. Rather, they expressed a longing to be portrayed as “the boys next door” and to be featured engaging in more mundane, everyday activities such as grocery shopping or buying a house.

There was the widespread perception among readers that coverage of gay issues tended to focus on specific “hot button” issues or events. This is similar to Iyengar’s distinction between “episodic” or event-driven coverage that tends to involve breaking news as opposed to “thematic” or more in-depth, analytical news coverage. As one focus group member commented: ***“The everyday life of gays and lesbians is not represented. I have gay neighbors and I don’t see them represented in the paper” (Female, Los Angeles).***

This feeling that their local paper is not providing sufficient depth and context is reflected in readers’ estimates of the extent to which they feel their local paper has helped them better understand lesbian and gay issues. As clearly illustrated in Table 4, approximately two-thirds of our readers – both gay and straight – feel that their local newspapers have completely failed to further their understanding of gay and lesbian issues.

Table 4. Extent to which readers felt their local paper helped them to better understand gays and their issues.

Straight Readers			
	“not at all”	“somewhat”	“a great deal”
Atlanta Journal Constitution	78%	22%	0%
Los Angeles Times	73%	27%	0%
Saint Louis Post Dispatch	78%	22%	0%
New York Times	25%	70%	5%
Overall	61%	38%	1%

Lesbian & Gay Readers			
	“not at all”	“somewhat”	“a great deal”
Atlanta Journal Constitution	58%	42%	0%
Los Angeles Times	67%	33%	0%
Saint Louis Post Dispatch	88%	12%	0%
New York Times	52%	43%	5%
Overall	62%	37%	1%

Perception vs. Reality

Table 5. Percent of stories that were event-driven or “episodic” as opposed to indepth, analytical or “thematic”.

	Episodic	Thematic	Mixed
Atlanta Journal Constitution	61%	33%	6%
Los Angeles Times	46%	33%	21%
Saint Louis Post Dispatch	83%	4%	13%
New York Times	46%	46%	7%
Overall	54%	34%	12%

Our month-long content analysis of four major newspapers did reveal a preponderance of episodic articles that tended to focus on the details of a specific event. To give credit where credit is due, however, 46 percent (34 percent thematic and 12 percent mixed) of the 158 articles

attempted to go beyond rote repetition of the facts and to provide more in-depth or analytical context. It should also be noted that this tended to vary widely by newspaper with the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times containing a far higher proportion of thematic or mixed articles than the Saint Louis Post Dispatch.

Interestingly, the New York Times, the paper that featured far and away the greatest percentage of strictly thematic stories about gays and lesbians (46%), was also the paper that was viewed most favorably by its readers. Seventy percent of straight New York Times readers said that it furthered their understanding of gay and lesbian issues “somewhat”. This is between two and three times the rate for readers of the other three papers in our study. Gay and lesbian readers of the New York Times were far less satisfied with over half (54%) saying that the paper did not contribute at all to their understanding of gay and lesbian issues. Consequently, the paper’s success must be viewed in context: our data suggests that the New York Times appears to be the best of a relatively mediocre lot in terms of in-depth, analytical coverage of gays and lesbians.

PERCEPTION 3: COVERAGE TENDS TO BE CONFLICT-DRIVEN.

In addition to a tendency to focus on events, the majority of readers in our survey felt that coverage of gays and lesbians in their local paper was conflict-driven. As one straight focus group member in St. Louis observed: *“They are always portrayed as in a battle, facing obstacles.”* Gays and lesbians were substantially more likely than straight readers to express this opinion (74% among gay readers compared to 55% among straight readers). There did not appear to be wide differences in opinion by city.

Table 6. Percentage who felt coverage of gays and lesbians is conflict-driven.

	Straight Readers	Lesbian & Gay Readers	Combined
Atlanta Journal Constitution	48%	70%	59%
Los Angeles Times	52%	75%	64%
St. Louis Post Dispatch	60%	70%	65%
New York Times	60%	80%	70%
Overall	55%	74%	65%

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Table 7. Percentage of gay and lesbian-related articles in which conflict was central or peripheral to the story.

	Conflict		
	<u>Central</u>	<u>Peripheral</u>	<u>No conflict</u>
Atlanta Journal Constitution	74%	7%	19%
Los Angeles Times	71%	23%	6%
St. Louis Post Dispatch	48%	48%	4%
New York Times	68%	23%	9%
Overall	64%	22%	14%

Our month-long content analysis tended to support readers' perception of coverage as conflict-driven. Conflict was coded as being central in 64% or approximately two-thirds of the 158 articles identified and peripheral in an additional 22%. This means that conflict played an integral part of the vast majority of gay and lesbian stories (86% overall). To be fair, however, it is difficult to determine the extent to which conflict or problems form the basis of any news story. In other words, if there were no problem would there be a news story? The very nature of news itself may give special weight to conflict. Indeed, the 14% stories without conflict were largely movie, book or play reviews. One way to address this issue is to analyze whether

conflict plays a similar key role in coverage of other minority groups.

PERCEPTION 4: COVERAGE TENDS TO FOCUS PRIMARILY ON GAY MEN AS OPPOSED TO LESBIANS.

In addition to the dissatisfaction with overall frequency of coverage of gay and lesbian issues there is the sense that lesbians are all but ignored by the mainstream press. This feeling was expressed throughout the focus groups in comments such as:

“Lesbians are limited to the stars. You don’t hear about how ordinary people (lesbians) go about adopting and having a family” (Lesbian, New York).

"They'll talk about HIV or domestic violence. But where do they write about places for women who are in lesbian relationships, or dealing with domestic violence, or substance abuse?" "Is that the LA Times' responsibility? I would say yes because that's the only damn paper we have in LA. " (2 lesbian women in Los Angeles).

In short, many readers (particularly lesbian readers) felt that what little coverage of there was in their local newspaper tended to focus almost exclusively on gay men as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Estimates of the percentage of stories appearing in their local newspaper that deal specifically with lesbians or lesbian issues.

	Straight Readers		Lesbian & Gay Readers		Combined	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Atlanta Journal Constitution	21%	20%	11%	5%	16%	10%
Los Angeles Times	21%	18%	16%	15%	18%	17%
St. Louis Post Dispatch	22%	10%	13%	20%	17%	15%
New York Times	35%	40%	22%	20%	29%	25%
Overall	26%	25%	16%	20%	21%	20%

As illustrated in Table 8, our survey indicated that readers overall estimated that roughly 20 percent of gay and lesbian stories would focus specifically on lesbians or lesbian issues. Heterosexuals were somewhat more generous, estimating on average that 25% or one out of every four stories would feature lesbians or their issues. Interestingly, New York Times readers, both gay and straight, tended to estimate a higher proportion of lesbian-related stories than their counterparts in other cities.

Perception vs. Reality

Of the 158 stories reported in the four newspapers in October of 1999, only 3, or less than 2%, focused on lesbians:

- a story of a New York City cop who was harassed by her fellow police officers when it was discovered she was lesbian (New York Times),
- a story of a murder involving a child custody battle between two lesbians (Atlanta Constitution),
- a photo and brief about Anne Heiche and Ellen DeGeneres (Los Angeles Times).

Thus, in contrast to the frequency of gay and lesbian-related news stories where readers severely underestimated the actual number of articles in an average month, here readers radically overestimated the extent of coverage of lesbians and lesbian-related issues by a magnitude of 10.

PERCEPTION 5: COVERAGE TENDS TO BE NATIONAL RATHER THAN LOCAL.

"They cover more nationally recognized stories rather than local" (Straight male, Los Angeles).

"We're not integrated into the daily coverage" (Gay male, New York)

"With two sports sections why can't they feature the gay/lesbian softball league?" (Gay male, St. Louis)

*"I wish they'd look in their own back yard and see how many great stories there are."
(Gay male, St. Louis).*

As evident from the above quotes, readers felt that with respect to gay and lesbian issues their local papers tended to focus heavily on national, rather than local issues. The predominant sentiment expressed by both gay and straight readers was that their local papers did cover large national stories such as the Matthew Shepard case fairly well. But in the focus groups it became clear that readers understood the distinction between an Associated Press wire story and a staff written piece. Consequently, readers tended to attribute the disproportionate coverage of national issues to a heavy reliance on wire service sources as opposed to a particular paper's own efforts.

*"The big news is always AP. The AJC should send their own people to make it relevant to me in Georgia. The only person they send out it seems to me is the fashion guy.."
(Straight female, Atlanta).*

"The biggest problem is that there are not enough reporters around looking for interesting stories. They run a lot of wire stories and, and do not do enough (local) research." (Gay male, St. Louis)

Perception vs. Reality

Our content analysis contained two separate indicators of the extent of local (as opposed to national or international) gay and lesbian coverage. The first is the percentage of stories appearing in the “Local” or “Metro” section of each of our four newspapers. As indicated in Table 9, of the 158 gay and lesbian-related articles, only 11 or 7% appeared in this section of the newspaper. In two of our papers, Atlanta Journal Constitution and the St. Louis Post Dispatch not a single story appeared during the month analyzed.

Table 9. Number and percentage of gay and lesbian-related stories in the local/metro section

	Number	Percent of total
Atlanta Journal Constitution	0	
Los Angeles Times	4	8.3%
St. Louis Post Dispatch	0	
New York Times	7	12.5%
Overall	11	7%

The second indicator of local coverage was perhaps the most revealing. Here our coders coded whether the story was staff written, taken from the AP wire service or some combination of the two. As shown in Table 10, less than half of the 158 gay and lesbian articles identified in our content analysis were written by staff writers. Obviously, articles lifted directly from the wire service stories are highly unlikely to contain a local connection. Perhaps this explains, in part, the lack of connectedness and relevance reported by our readers.

Table 10. Percentage of gay and lesbian-related stories that were staff written

Atlanta Journal Constitution	39%
Los Angeles Times	52%
St. Louis Post Dispatch	26%
New York Times	54%
Overall	44%

Discussion

The current research attempted to assess whether four newspapers -- The Atlanta Journal Constitution, The Los Angeles Times, The St. Louis Post Dispatch and The New York Times -- in four cities across the United States were, indeed, instruments of community understanding with respect to their coverage of gay and lesbian issues. To do so, we compared the impressions and attitudes of readers, both gay and straight, expressed in a survey and focus groups held in each city, to the results of a content analysis of one month of actual coverage by each newspaper. This allowed us to contrast readers' perceptions of the coverage of gays and lesbians against the reality that existed in black and white.

Perhaps the most striking finding is the level of agreement among both gay and straight readers that by and large their local newspaper had failed to increase their understanding of gay and lesbian issues (see Table 4). Across the four newspapers only 37 percent of readers felt that their paper had increased their understanding of gay and lesbian issues even "somewhat". Perhaps even more significantly, not one of the 120 readers from Atlanta, St. Louis or Los Angeles indicated that their local newspaper had increased their understanding "a great deal" and in New York this response was checked by only two of the forty readers.

Precisely how did these papers fail to meet their mandate of being an instrument of community understanding? In their comments, focus group participants asserted that their newspaper's coverage leaned toward the sensational, focusing on "hot-button" stories of crime, celebrity and conflict. Moreover, they were keenly aware that a large proportion of these largely "event-driven" articles were written, not by local staff, but by a national wire service. Consequently, readers found these stories to be lacking in context, in depth and in personal and local relevance.

Our month-long content audit tended to support these perceptions. More specifically, of the 158 stories identified, our analyses revealed the following:

1. A relatively low percentage of local stories: In the four papers studied the "Local" or "Metro" section contained only a handful of gay and lesbian-related stories (11 stories or only seven percent overall). Moreover, all of these stories were found in two papers (The Los Angeles Times and The New York Times). Neither the Atlanta Journal nor the St. Louis Post Dispatch carried a single gay or lesbian-related story in their Local or Metro section (see Table 9).

2. A relatively low percentage of staff written pieces: The majority of the stories were from a wire service, free lance or opinion (with the exception of the Los Angeles Times where 52% of the stories were staff written as shown in Table 10).

2. A relatively low percentage of stories focusing on lesbians: Of the 158 stories reported in the four newspapers only 3, or less than 2%, focused on lesbians.

3. Lack of depth: Eighty or roughly half of the stories identified were either briefs of 3 paragraphs or less in length or reviews of movies, plays, etc. In St. Louis, 70 percent of the 23

stories identified were either briefs or reviews (see Table 2).

4. A relatively high percentage of event-driven stories: The majority of stories, between 52 to 88 percent, were “episodic” or event-focused, as opposed to “thematic” or more indepth or analytical (see Table 5).

5. A relatively high percentage of conflict-driven stories: The audit also found that 86 percent of the gay and lesbian-related stories involved conflict (see Table 7).

Thus, at least for October of 1999, coverage of gay and lesbian issues by The Atlanta Journal Constitution, The Los Angeles Times, The St. Louis Post Dispatch and The New York Times was lacking in indepth analysis, coverage of lesbian issues and a local viewpoint while being long on conflict and event-centered accounts. These findings were in keeping with the perceptions of readers of those papers. But there was one reader perception that did not receive empirical support from the content analysis. Readers perceived the frequency of coverage to be extremely sparse. Both gay and straight readers estimated that their local paper carried an average of no more than 3 lesbian or gay-related stories in a typical month. In fact, the content analysis revealed that the papers studied were including a far higher frequency, ranging from a low of 23 at The Saint Louis Post Dispatch to a high of 56 at The New York Times. In short, readers in each of these four cities dramatically underestimated the number of gay and lesbian articles that actually appeared in their local newspaper by at least a magnitude of 10. This was true not only for heterosexual readers who, one could argue, may be less interested in such articles, but for gay and lesbian readers as well.

What might account for this enormous disparity between perception and reality in terms of frequency of coverage? Why are the vast majority of stories not hitting readers' radar screens? A partial answer might be found by examining factors such as depth, placement, and content. As noted previously, approximately one-third of the gay and lesbian-related articles were briefs of three paragraphs or less in length. An additional 27% of the stories identified were reviews of movies, books, or plays. Perhaps readers, in making their estimates, focused on full-length feature stories such as those found in the front section of a newspaper. Which brings us to placement. During the month in question each paper printed only one gay and lesbian story on the front page (St. Louis: Boeing extends same-partner benefits; Atlanta: President Clinton reaches out to gays and lesbians; New York: Facing old age; and Los Angeles: Gay chorus in Russia.). Finally, event-driven stories focusing on conflict and controversy may be the bread and butter of newspapers but, as Iyengar determined, readers often have trouble seeing discrete stories as connected. So, for example, specific instances of gay bashing may not be woven in the minds of readers into a conceptual whole. Part of journalism's obligation may be to help readers connect the dots.

These data resonate strongly with a recent national survey of gay and lesbian mainstream journalists, entitled "Lesbians and Gays in the Newsroom: Ten Years Later". This survey of 363 print and broadcast journalists rated their own organizations highest in their coverage of episodic or spot news of "hot-button" stories. Their lowest scores were reserved for their news organization's coverage of the local gay and lesbian community. In addition, nearly three-fifths of the journalists interviewed reported that conflict or problem issue stories were prevalent in the

coverage of gays and lesbians.

The current analysis is not, however, without obvious limitations. For example, our sample size per city surveyed is relatively small (40). Furthermore, we only analyzed a month of newspaper content and then only for four specific papers. But while not definitive, this research hopefully provides some insight into the current status of journalism with regard to gay and lesbian issues. In closing we offer the following recommendations:

1. More indepth coverage

Although overall frequency of coverage of gay and lesbian-related issues was higher than one might have expected it is clearly not registering with readers. At the end of the day, as Marshall McLuhan noted “perception is reality.” Thus, news organizations must concern themselves with not only actual frequency of coverage but also with the fact that their efforts are going largely unnoticed -- even by their gay readers who report themselves to be highly interested in gay-related articles.

2. Coverage that links discrete events to a larger conceptual frame

This is a corollary to the above. For example, reporting on the Matthew Shepard case could provide an opportunity for a more in-depth examination of hate crimes and gay bashing generally.

3. More local coverage

Readers were sensitive to the fact that much of the coverage was not generated locally and did not have a local tie-in. They reported that this made the articles less personally relevant. Readers suggested including a local “gay beat” or, failing that, an index identifying the location of

relevant stories throughout the newspaper for interested readers.

4. More of a focus on “everyday issues and stories” and less focus on conflict

On a similar note, gay readers did not see themselves reflected in the often sensationalistic coverage of high-profile crimes or controversies.

5. More coverage of lesbian issues

This was particularly true among lesbian readers who felt completely ignored by the mainstream press.