ARTICLES IN ENGLISH

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THE MEDIA'S CONSTRUCTION OF LGBT PRIDE PARADES IN RUSSIA

This article analyses media representations of LGBT social movements, taking the case of Saint Petersburg LGBT pride parades. The analysis is developed through the use of framing theory, which views the media as an arena where interest groups promote their own interpretations of particular issues. Frames juxtapose elements of the text in such a way as to provide the audience with a scheme within which to perceive the message. Social movements are viewed as interest groups that introduce new frames in public debate. Two types of frames can be distinguished: collective action frames and status quo frames. In this study, the usage of two collective action frames (equality frame and victim frame), and two status quo frames (morality frame and propaganda promoting homosexuality frame) were examined. Additionally, the sources of quotes used in news stories were analyzed. The study focuses on articles dedicated to Saint Petersburg LGBT pride marches in the years 2010–2017 in the most popular local Internet websites. The analysis shows that the coverage of LGBT pride marches can be divided into two distinct periods: 2010–2013 and 2014–2017. In the first period, LGBT activists dominated the coverage, quoted about twice as much as government officials. Equality and victim frames were prevalent. In the second period, activists were cited significantly less often, with the propaganda promoting homosexuality frame dominating the discourse. However, contrary to findings of previous studies on social movement representation, across the whole period under consideration, LGBT activists were quoted more often than government representatives. This finding calls for a further exploration of

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the conditions which allowed for such coverage in the context of political heterosexism and homophobia.

Keywords: framing, media, LGBT pride marches, Russia, Saint Petersburg

LGBT movements all over the world strive to promote and defend the rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people. Russia is no exception to this trend, although the context in which the movement functions has its specific features. First and foremost, its very existence in the public space has become possible only since the abolishment of article 121.1, which had criminalized consensual male homosexual intercourse. While criminal charges disappeared, the stigma surrounding homosexuality has continued: LGBT people are portrayed as 'deviant' and their problems are not recognized (Kondakov 2013; Isaev 2013). As Alexander Kondakov (2013: 414) has argued, 'Homosexuality was erased from the law, but its aura of illegality, of being prohibited and censored, was not dismantled'. Legislation on the 'propaganda of homosexuality to minors' was introduced at the federal level in 2013 and represents a continuation of the marginalization and silencing of homosexuality.

Nevertheless, the LGBT movement in Russia is rather active, and one direction in which it has been working is the organization of LGBT pride marches. Moscow LGBT pride marches and the figure of Nikolay Alekseev in particular have received the attention of researchers (Stella 2013). However, much of the LGBT movement's activities takes place in Saint Petersburg. The city is regarded by many as 'the gay capital of Russia' (Efimov 2012). The LGBT movement has been frequently allowed into the public space on equal terms with other social and political groups. Saint Petersburg LGBT pride marches are held annually in the summer months. Since the first pride march in 2010, activists have organized the rally every year, irrespective of permission from the local authorities. These events have made it into the news on occasion. In 2011–2012, LGBT started attracting the interest of news agencies (Sozaev 2013). However, participants in the parades are still relatively few in number, and advocacy for LGBT is still absent from/not part of federal-level politics.

Several studies have explored the characteristics of media discourse on homosexuality in Russia. They have found that homosexuality is stigmatized in both legal and media discourse. It is often described as 'sinful' and 'deviant' behavior, and only rarely as a 'normal' sexual orientation (Pronkina 2016; Tolkachev 2016). Research attention has been drawn to examining discourse in general, which is clearly dominated by traditionalist interpretations of homosexuality. However, none of the studies concentrated on media representation of events that have a potential for media portrayal of the LGBT movement in a positive, constructive manner. This article fills this gap by considering images constructed by the media in coverage of pride marches, which are designed to promote the claims of LGBT to

their rights and dignity, an important way of appearing in the media in a positive way. The article also draws attention to the changes in media discourse as changes in the representation of annual LGBT pride parades over a period of seven years.

Social movements and the media

In order to achieve social change, the primary goal pursued by social movements, widespread support needs to be generated for the problematized cause. Since the public's attitudes towards a social movement are rarely constructed in interpersonal interactions with its representatives, it is important to consider the images which the media construct to represent these social movements. This section presents the framing theory perspective on the interaction between social movements, the media and the society, which is then applied to the case of media framing of Saint Petersburg LGBT pride marches.

In order to be heard by the general public, social movements need to have their activities appear in the mass media. Merely appearing in the news is, however, insufficient for the promotion of the movement's claims. Only favorable coverage allows the movement to 'mobilize members, construct a viable public identity, or to build a public policy agenda' (Barker-Plummer 1995: 3). Social movements, as well as other groups of interest, participate in the process which scholars have labeled 'struggle over meaning' (Gamson, Wolfsfeld 1993: 119), 'meaning work' (Benford, Snow 2000: 613), 'the politics of signification' (Hall 1982, cited in Benford, Snow 2000: 613). In essence, it implies that various actors construct cultural meanings of social reality and strive to promote them over other competing interpretations. Mass media is one arena where these symbolic contests occur (Gamson, Wolfsfeld 1993).

To promote preferable meanings, social movements, counter-movements, governments, business, and other interest groups produce meaning structures called frames. Frames are defined as 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse' (Gitlin 2003: 7). According to Robert Entman (1993: 52), framing entails the selection of certain issue aspects and raising their salience 'in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'. Journalists then construct news articles, both reproducing meanings relayed to them by the interest groups, and contributing with their views on how to better package the story (Brüggemann 2014).

Frames structuring media discourse can either support the prevalent cultural understandings of certain phenomena or challenge these dominant perceptions. There is ample evidence that news media tend to support the state of affairs when representing social movements (Entman, Rojecki 1993; Gitlin 2003; Smith et al. 2001). I will refer to the type of frames constructed in such media coverage as *status quo frames*. The status quo can be promoted through the

construction and promotion of alternative frames and/or by undermining the movement's claims. The first type is found in the same-sex marriage debate, for example, where claims to equal rights are countered with the morality frame, which interprets marriage in exclusively heterosexual terms (Hull 2001). On the other hand, a movement's credibility can be challenged by portraying it as deviant and disturbing the social order, thus emphasizing the violence employed by the protesters, or marginalizing them on the basis of their insufficient numbers or the nature of their claims, which are presented as immature and childish (Kenix 2011, Schwartz et al. 2014).

A distinct type of status quo frame is produced by various government structures and groups affiliated with the power elites (Noakes 2000). These frames are fairly pervasive, since standard routines induce journalists to quote official sources, as they are reliable and increase the efficiency of journalists by providing commentary quickly (Gans 1979; Sigal 1973). The concentration of cultural, material, and political resources in elites' hands makes framing contests fundamentally unfair, leaving the challengers with fewer opportunities to promote their claims. At times the issue is constructed in ways that disregard social movements' perspectives entirely, such as when only sources supporting the status quo are cited (Altheide, Grimes 2005; Reese, Buckalew 1995).

Nevertheless, in most cases, the struggle over the definition of social reality remains a dynamic process where status quo frames do not dominate entirely (Noakes 2000). Movements construct *collective action frames*: 'action-oriented sets of beliefs that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization' (Benford, Snow 2000: 614). David Snow and Robert Benford (1988) distinguish three main framing tasks that the movements have: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. The first two tasks are inherent in all frames, constituting what Entman (1993: 52) terms 'causal interpretation' and 'treatment recommendation'. The motivational task, however, is a distinctive feature of collective action frames, as social movements strive to attract new members and supporters and strengthen their position in the public debate.

Status quo frames and collective action frames, which appear in media reports about social movements' activities, have the potential to influence people's perceptions of social movements. To what extent this potential is realized depends on whether these frames appear in the media coverage of a particular event at all, their visibility, and on how prominent they are in the coverage. The next section describes prominent status quo and collective action frames available in the signification of the LGBT-movement in Russia, and the analysis section traces their usage in the coverage of Saint-Petersburg LGBT pride marches.

Framing the LGBT movement in Russia

What frames can one expect to witness in the discussion on LGBT rights in Russia? The two frames that have been identified in Russian LGBT organi-

zations' representation are *tolerance* and *equality* (Kondakov 2013). Proponents of the *tolerance frame* promote a strategy of adjustment towards the existing order, helping LGBT people overcome their difficulties without challenging the status quo. This strategy prompts them to speak out against holding LGBT pride parades (Kondakov 2013: 421). Thus, the tolerance articulation cannot be regarded as a collective action frame. The *equality frame*, on the other hand, is used by organizations striving for the politicization of LGBT issues, which claim that 'homosexuality should be equally respected by law' (Kondakov 2013: 421). Therefore, the current state of affairs is questioned and social change is promoted with this collective action frame, which is likely to be prominent in the coverage of LBGT pride parades.

The issue of hate crimes and other kinds of abuses towards LGBT is recognized as a problem by activists and organizations (Dubrovskiy 2013; Kondakov 2017). This makes plausible the use of the *victim frame* in claims aimed at the wide audience. The victim frame is a kind of rhetoric focusing on the identification of victims suffering from an unjust status quo (Benford, Snow 2000). It has been noted that victimization is highlighted in the discourse of LGBT activists in order to provide a link to the human rights discourse (Pronkina 2016).

Status quo frames, on the other hand, oppose articulations of problems provided by the movement seeking social change. It is noteworthy that, in the case of the LGBT movement, status quo frames can be promoted by counter-movements, which also strive to provide a motivational incentive for their targeted population. Thus, they fall under the definition of collective action frames. However, in this study frames opposing the LGBT movement's claims will be understood as status quo frames, regardless of the actor promoting them, whether they are government-related structures or counter-movements.

Having noted this, two possible ways in which opposition to equal rights claims can be constructed are discerned. First, there is a revival of religious discourse in the Russian public sphere, giving 'platforms for religious leaders who opposed LGBT communities on moral grounds' (Pearce, Cooper 2016: 4). The government has also developed and promoted the concept of 'traditional values', which is positioned as essential for the very survival of the Russian nation (Wilkinson 2014). These characteristics suggest the presence of the *morality frame*, which 'puts the event, problem, or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions' (Semetko, Valkenburg 2000: 96).

The second way opposition to the LGBT movement's claims can be constructed is through the *propaganda promoting homosexuality frame*. It defines the actions of the LGBT activists as propaganda of the so-called non-traditional sexual orientations. Its use is predetermined by the availability of this frame in public discourse in the ongoing discussion of bans on public displays of homosexuality. The debates on this legislature started at the regional level in the middle of the 2000s, and culminated in the adoption of a federal law in 2013 (Kondakov 2014: 163). The frame is thus predicted to become increasingly

prominent over time, most actively employed in 2013 when the discussion was at its peak.

It could be argued that the 'propaganda promoting homosexuality' frame resembles the morality frame. Indeed, the justification for this kind of evaluation of LGBT visibility lies in moral and religious judgments. It is, however, specific in two senses. First, it appeals to the letter of the law as well as to moral authority. Secondly, it includes the notion that 'homosexuals' intend to influence the public, namely minors, in such a way that observers turn homosexual. It is intriguing to trace the use of this highly context and issue-specific frame in the battle over social meanings of LGBT pride parades.

Method

The research focused on news items published on the Internet. This choice is justified by the fact that the majority of publications about homosexuality are found online, and not in print media (Semykina 2017; Sozaev 2013). The most popular information portals, which are based or have an editorial office in Saint Petersburg, were examined. The sample was drawn from eleven websites[1]: *Rosbalt Peterburg*, *Fontanka.ru*, *Metro, Baltinfo* (Baltic information agency), *Moi raion*(My district), *TheVillage*, *Gorod 812* (City 812), *Argumenti i fakti* (Arguments and facts), *Echo Moskvi* (Echo of Moscow), *Vedomosti,* and *Sankt-Peterburg.ru*. The website of *Echo Moskvi* offers access publications since 12.09.2010 only, while *Gorod 812* and *Vedomosti* did not publish any articles about LGBT pride parades. The websites were searched by keywords 'gay pride', 'gay parade' and 'LGBT pride'. Only publications devoted to the pride parades in Saint Petersburg were selected, excluding articles about LGBT pride parades in general or in other places. As a result, 364 news items were collected and analyzed.

Table 1
Coding guidelines.

The equality frame	Claiming the same rights as other citizens;
	Citing the ways in which LGBT are treated unequally.
The victim frame	Mentions of grievances caused by the current order;
	Emphasizing cases of derogatory and violent actions towards LGBT.
The morality frame	References to morality, God, or religious tenets;
	References to traditions of the society.
Propaganda promoting homosexuality frame	Evaluations of pride parades as promotion of homosexuality propaganda.

[1] Popularity was measured in terms of how it rated in the Yandex catalogue of Saint Petersburg press: yaca.yandex.ru.

Analysis involved discerning two types of text segments: citations and frames. All citations were assigned to the group whose representative was quoted. Six groups of commentators were distinguished: (1) LGBT activists/NGOs; (2) supporters; (3) government officials; (4) religious activists; (5) opposition, and (6) other. Secondly, the four collective action and status quo frames described in detail above were distinguished in these citations. Table 1 summarizes the coding guidelines for the identification of frames in the texts.

Visibility of pride parades and LGBT movement claims

Figure 1 shows the number of articles published about each LGBT pride march in the period of interest. The overall trend is towards a decline in the number of articles published about the pride parades. This may be due to the fact that each event in the sequence is less newsworthy than the first events. A major exception to this trend is 2012 with a record number of ninety-five articles devoted to the pride parade. More interest towards the rally could be caused by the ban on propaganda promoting homosexuality in Saint Petersburg, which was proposed by the local legislative assembly and signed by the mayor, entering into force in March 2012. Whatever could have caused the interest, one trend is obvious: pride parades are not completely ignored.
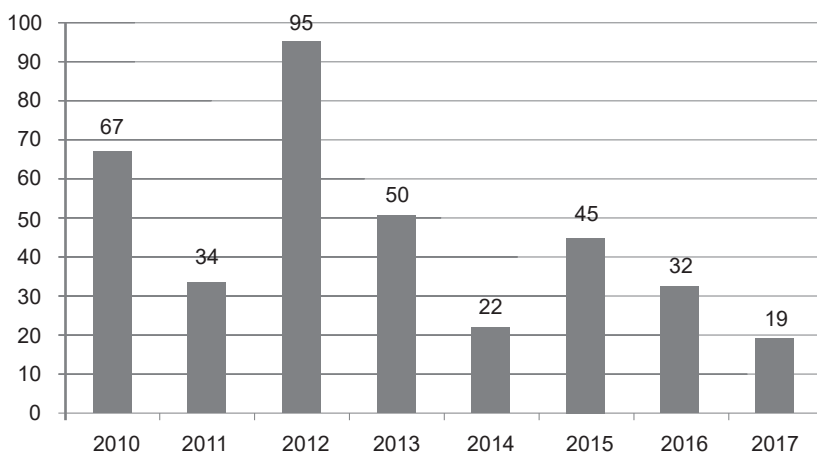

Figure 1. Number of articles about LGBT pride parades.

Table 2 shows the groups cited in the coverage of LGBT pride parades. The table illustrates the dominance of two groups in the discussion: LGBT activists and organizations, and government officials. 76% of articles (276 out of 364) mention the position of activists on the issues discussed, and 40% (145 out of 364) cite government actors. Supporters of the movement were quoted rather

rarely. Those opposing LGBT claims to equality were reported more frequently, but still played a less important role than the two dominant actors. Religious activists commented on the issue of LGBT pride parades in only one article.

Table 2

The number of articles where groups were quoted.

	2010	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*2017*	*Total*
LGBT activists/NGOs	63	25	81	32	13	28	26	8	276
Supporters	7	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	9
Government officials	15	15	53	17	7	21	15	3	145
Religious activists	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Opposition	2	0	5	7	3	5	1	2	25
Other	1	1	20	2	1	1	0	2	28
Total	128	53	225	87	35	76	68	22	694

Note: The total number of articles in this table exceeds the number of articles analyzed (N = 364), as one article could cite several groups and was put into several categories. The darker the color of the cell, the more articles quoted a group in a certain year.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the movement is regarded by journalists as a reliable source of information. In fact, every year activists were quoted more regularly than government officials. Therefore, we cannot establish underrepresentation of activists at this level. There is still a possibility that despite quoting LGBT movement representatives, journalists failed to promote the frames constructed by activists, quoting them solely for the purpose of relaying factual information, or the phenomenon of frameless quotes (Benson, Wood 2015).

Table 3 presents data on the number of articles mentioning one of the frames considered in the current analysis. First, it is noticeable that only 196 out of 364 articles (54%) feature at least one frame. This points to the factual nature of most of the articles, where no commentary or sources are provided. In other cases, sources are cited, but only in order to provide factual information on the newsbreak, refraining from offering any interpretations. Nevertheless, the data demonstrates that when interpretations are used in the articles, the most prominent frames are the equality frame, featured in 25% of texts, and the propaganda promoting homosexuality frame, in 18% of texts. The other collective action frame, the victim frame, and the status quo morality frame, are less prominent.

The coverage of LGBT pride parades seems to be divided into two periods: 2010–2013 and 2014–2017. In the first period, Russian LGBT activists took the lead by introducing equality arguments and victimization amplification into the discussion. In 2011, only collective action frames were featured.

Even in 2012, when the debate on banning 'propaganda promoting homosexuality' was at its peak, the movement's interpretations were twice as prominent as government officials' statements.

Table 3

The number of articles mentioning frames

	2010	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*2017*	*Total*
Equality	26	11	33	9	3	1	7	0	**90**
Victim	3	1	8	6	1	2	0	5	26
Morality	4	0	4	3	0	2	1	0	**14**
Propaganda	5	0	16	4	6	15	18	2	**66**
Total	38	12	61	22	10	20	26	7	196

Note: Total number of articles in this table exceeds the number of articles analyzed (N = 364), as one article could cite several groups and was put into several categories.

The second period is marked by weaker publication activity on the topic of LGBT pride parades. Activists are cited significantly less often, with the propaganda promoting homosexuality frame dominating in the discourse. The morality frame is cited only in three articles during this period. This decline could be explained by the fact that the propaganda argumentation partly contains claims to morality, but also entails a legal justification of the speaker's position. Increasingly available in the discourse and powerful in the sense of combining two logics amplified by the power of a legal statute, rhetoric on 'propaganda promoting homosexuality' made pure morality claims redundant.

Conclusion

Overall, the analysis showed that LGBT pride parades and their organizers' claims are present in the media. First, Saint Petersburg pride parades consistently attract media attention, inducing varying amount of publications every year. Secondly, the position of LGBT is rather prominent in the coverage. Journalists ask LGBT activists and NGO representatives for comments more often. Government officials are the second most popular source of information and opinions about the pride parades, but they are quoted in half as many articles as activists are. Thirdly, although less firequently over the last four years, media messages succeed in communicating the equality frame, in which most of the activists' claims are formulated, and the victim frame. Its close contestant, the 'propaganda promoting homosexuality' frame, is also

present and has been prevalent lately, but is by no means a universal way of understanding how LGBT pride parades are presented to the audience. The morality frame can be regarded as a prerequisite of the propaganda frame, as its use was reduced heavily after the legislature banning propaganda of homosexuality was introduced.

The prevalence of LGBT activists' quotes during the whole period is both counterintuitive and contradicts previous research which suggested the dominance of official news sources in reports on social movements' activity (Entman, Rojecki 1993; Gitlin 2003). The finding is especially surprising given that the movement's goals are highly anti-status quo, taking into account the rise of traditional values rhetoric in the Russian public sphere (Wilkinson 2014). Moreover, the context in which the Russian LGBT-movement functions is one of institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism. Nevertheless, the coverage of Saint-Petersburg LGBT pride parades was rather favourable, especially in the years 2010–2013. Further research is necessary to examine the conditions which allowed for such coverage.

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