



**MEDIA@LSE**  
Department of **Media** and **Communications**

---

**MEDIA@LSE Electronic MSc Dissertation Series**

Compiled by Dr. Bart Cammaerts and Dr. Nick Anstead

---

**Fleeting Racialisation?: Media Representation  
of African Americans During the California  
Proposition 8 Campaign**

**Tiana Epps-Johnson,**  
MSc in Politics and Communication

---

Other dissertations of the series are available online here:  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/mediaWorkingPapers/>

**Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2010, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Politics and Communication. Supervised by Dr. Bart Cammaerts.**

Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

Copyright in editorial matter, LSE © 2011

Copyright, Tiana Epps-Johnson © 2011.  
The authors have asserted their moral rights.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher nor be issued to the public or circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. In the interests of providing a free flow of debate, views expressed in this dissertation are not necessarily those of the compilers or the LSE.

# **Fleeting Racialisation?: Media Representation of African Americans During the California Proposition 8 Campaign**

**Tiana Epps-Johnson**

---

## **ABSTRACT**

In today's fully mediated society, it is argued that representations in the mass media are pivotal to our understanding of the world (Brooks & Hébert, 2006). Specifically, representation of race, ethnicity, and other social classifications construct, reinforce, and perpetuate our understandings of those classifications within society (Cottle, 2000). This study sought to test popular discourse arguing that African Americans were overwhelmingly represented in the news as homophobic, using the California Proposition 8 (same-sex marriage) campaign as a case study. The Proposition 8 campaign served as a particularly interesting case to study representation of African Americans because of an intensely racialised discourse following the publishing of an exit poll which claimed that 7 in 10 African Americans voted in favour of eliminating marriage rights for same-sex couples.

As there were no prior studies found on the nature of representation of African Americans in relation to same-sex marriage, our analysis was informed by theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to race, ethnicity, and representation of African Americans in news generally. Employing content analysis methodology, we found that in general, race and ethnicity was not a dominant issue in the discourse surrounding same-sex marriage. However, when a racial/ethnic group was discussed, African Americans were the most frequently represented group. Additionally, our findings challenge popular discourse arguing that African Americans are monolithically represented as homophobic and instead found that African Americans were not only represented as having a diversity of opinions on the issue of same-sex marriage (including African American representatives of the faith community), but also in 22 percent of cases were identified as gay or lesbian. Whilst shortcomings were also found, overall, African Americans were represented in a fashion that has capacity to challenge stereotypes rather than reinforce them.

---

*"When you look at the people getting married in San Francisco, you didn't see very many blacks. It's not a distinct issue in the black community."* – Pastor Ray Williams at a pro- Proposition 8 rally (Fulbright & Kuruvila, 2008)

*"It's amazing that seven in 10 blacks in California voted in favor [sic] of Proposition 8. Despite many of us having already received our not-so-subtle voting instructions on this issue in church the Sunday morning before the election, you could have figured that more blacks here would have known better than to inflict discriminatory laws on another minority group."* – Citizen, Opinion Editorial, Los Angeles Times ("The Prop. 8 election irony," 2008)

*"Your comparisons of the passage of Proposition 8 to the civil rights movement is a major insult to blacks. Get a grip."* – Citizen, Opinion Editorial, Los Angeles Times ("The Prop. 8 election irony," 2008)

## **INTRODUCTION**

As a state, California is known for being at the forefront of progressive policy. However, California has long struggled with the issue of whether to grant same-sex couples marriage rights. In 2000, a group of California citizens petitioned to put a referendum on the ballot that, if passed, would explicitly define marriage as an institution reserved for heterosexual couples. Voters subsequently approved the initiative (Proposition 22) by a margin of 61.4 percent to 38.7 percent (Moore, Garvey, & Connelley, 2008). Following the change in law, the California legislature repeatedly took up the issue, and twice passed legislation (in 2005 and 2007), that would have changed California law to allow same-sex marriage (the only United States legislature to pass such a law). However, in both cases Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed the bills, arguing that he wished to uphold the will of the people, and same-sex marriage continued to be illegal in the state (Plante, 2010).

A series of lawsuits eventually brought the issue to the California Supreme Court. During the hearing, in the fall of 2007, an organization called Protect Marriage petitioned to again put the issue of same-sex marriage to a popular vote, this time during the 2008 General Election. The organization sought to amend the California State Constitution, rather than simply California law<sup>1</sup>, to define marriage as an institution solely between a man and woman ("Adventists & California Proposition 8: A Timeline," 2008). The referendum (Proposition 8) successfully made it on to the November 2008 ballot, however whilst Protect Marriage and other organizations were waiting for the general election vote, the California Supreme Court ruled that the standing law violated the state Constitution's equal protection and began to allow same-sex marriages in June 2008 ("Adventists & California Proposition 8: A Timeline,"

2008). The ruling did not, however, apply to the pending vote in November, and on November 4, 2008, with a vote of 52.5 percent to 47.5 percent, same-sex marriage was again made illegal in California (Moore, et al., 2008).

*Proposition 8 and the “Black Vote”*

The feeling of ambivalence for many Californians was palpable November 5, 2008. On the one hand, the night prior Barack Obama had been elected the first black president of the United States. Decades of struggles for equality was seemingly typified in one overwhelming electoral victory, some even arguing that America had entered a post-racial existence overnight. On the other hand, whilst the majority of Californians had cast their ballot in support of sending the Obamas to the White House, a majority also voted in favor of California’s Proposition 8, to eliminate the right to marry for gays and lesbians across the state.

Interestingly, the tension continued in commentary about the historic and disappointing election results. Whilst some were claiming America had become color-blind overnight, commentary was poignantly racialised surrounding the Proposition 8 result, driven by a CNN exit poll claiming that 70 percent of African Americans voted in favor of the proposition eliminating marriage rights. Across the ideological gamut, including among the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community, African Americans were scapegoated for the passage of Proposition 8, where it was argued that the high turnout among African Americans for Barack Obama coupled with the high percentage of African Americans that supported Proposition 8, tipped the scale in favour of eliminating same-sex marriage rights (Dowd, 2008; Walters, 2008).

More careful analyses prompted by the backlash against the African American community not only found that African Americans, which make up approximately 6 percent of California’s population, could not have mathematically tipped the scale, but that the exit poll itself was done with poor sampling, likely biasing the reported percentage<sup>2</sup> (Shannika, 2008; Silver, 2008). Additionally, demographics such as age and religiosity were shown to be the most salient demographics to vote decision across racial categories (Kuruvila, 2008; Silver,

---

<sup>1</sup> This was a strategic decision as there are fewer and more difficult channels available to overturn an amendment to the State Constitution than there are for changing a standing law.

<sup>2</sup> A post-election survey and analysis estimates that approximately 57 to 59 percent African Americans actually voted in favour of Proposition 8. Additionally, while religiosity was an important factor to vote choice, African Americans who attended religious services “at least weekly” favoured the proposition at a lower rate than all other racial/ethnic groups with the same level of religiosity (Egan & Sherrill, 2009).

2008). According to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), a national LGBT media advocacy and anti-defamation organization, people of color, and African Americans in particular, are often represented in mainstream media as monolithically homophobic leading to reporting that feeds, “a cycle of anger, frustration, and distrust on all sides” (*Racial Equity - Funders for LGBTQ Issues*). Additionally, although there is limited academic literature regarding media representation of African Americans in relation to same-sex marriage, studies on media representation of African Americans generally, also argue that African Americans are often discussed as a group with a singular opinion (Entman, 1994).

This paper seeks to examine the place of race within the newspaper coverage of the California Proposition 8 campaign. We will focus on representation of African Americans in particular because African Americans became such a centerpiece of coverage and were argued to be a pivotal part of the electorate as it related to the Proposition 8 outcome. We will seek to understand whether race was a part of the overall coverage (beyond the coverage following the publishing of the CNN exit poll) and how African Americans fit into that coverage, including the positions taken by African Americans in newspaper articles on Proposition 8 and same-sex marriage, the predominant campaign frames in articles where African Americans were sources or discussed, and the amount of space given to African American sources (among other considerations). Throughout this paper we will be working within a tension between the social construction of race, its place in media, and its relevance as a demographic at all, with the fact that the United States in particular use race as predominant tool of classification and often as a political organizing tool.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

“We give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them.” (Hall, 1997, p. 3)

### **Race (and Ethnicity)**

Exploring representations of African Americans first requires a broader understanding of the theorization related to the concepts of race and ethnicity. Classification of persons along the lines of race is something that, at least in the United States, people are confronted with regularly, particularly when any sort of demographic information is collected or presented. However, both within academia and in popular discourse, there has been a long standing debate about whether race actually exists as well as the usefulness and implication of the continued use of such classifications (Louis, 2005).

Historically race was posited as a biologically inherent characteristic disguising between biologically different human beings (Louis, 2005). However, implicit in distinguishing between purportedly biologically different groups on the basis of race was the use of race as a basis for unequal treatment (Banton, 2005; powell, 2003). Today, at least within academia, race is no longer considered to have any scientific basis, but is instead understood to be a social construction (Banton, 2005; Downing & Husband, 2005; powell, 2003). However, race as system of classification, with implicit meaning to one's place within social hierarchies, continues to be a powerful and widely taken-for-granted ideology (Downing & Husband, 2005).

Ethnicity is a concept closely related to, and often convoluted with, race. In many countries an attempt has been made to move to classifications on the basis of ethnicity, rather than race as, ethnic groups are defined by shared culture and history, among other things, rather than race's contrived "biological" derivation (Downing & Husband, 2005). However many, particularly those engaged with anti-racist ideology, argue that ethnicity is simply a euphemism to condone further use of race-thinking (Banton, 2005).

In the United States, there is tendency toward seeing ethnic categories as sub-divisions of racial categories (Banton, 2005) (i.e. African American as a type of black person). And in fact, "African American" and "black" are often used interchangeably in popular discourse as well as in social science. This supports the idea that ethnicity serves as a euphemism for race, as "being black" is still accepted as largely defining the characteristics of an African American person.

A key tension in the academic literature surrounding race and ethnicity is a question of what the normative outcome would be if society was able to move beyond race-thinking. Particularly the divide is between those who believe a normative society would be colour-blind and those who would prefer to embrace multiculturalism. On the one hand, a colour-blind society is envisioned as privileging the individual and doing away with social categorization (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004). On the other hand, a multicultural society embraces cultural diversity without privileging any particular group (Cottle, 2000). Both have been criticized (see (Kenan Malik, 2005), however recent empirical studies have found that multiculturalism is more positively associated with eradicating racial biases (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000).

*Racialisation and Race-Thinking in the Media*

In its mediating role, the mass media has a key position in the racialisation of representations of people and events, as well as in promoting race-thinking. Racialisation is a term that has been actively deployed in academic literature in diverse ways, often lacking coherency of usage (Murji & Solomos, 2005). Small (1999) uses the terms racialisation to refer to the phenomena of diverse ethnic groups, during the colonisation of America, being homogenously termed either a member of the “white” or “black” race. As well as the institutionalisation of race through laws and policies, and the legacy of this phenomena (Small, 1999). Others use racialisation to describe the process whereby issues are defined along racial terms (Malik 1996 in Barot & Bird, 2001; Murji & Solomos, 2005) as well as the insinuations that people can be defined by the racial group to which they are said to belong (K Malik, 2008; Murji & Solomos, 2005).

Related to Malik’s (1996) use, a body of literature argues that racialisation should be used as the primary theoretical framework to study issues of race and ethnicity. In this body of literature, racialisation is seen as the process of representationally categorizing ‘others’ and argues that studies should look at the how racialised discourses are constructed and their role in constructing, reinforcing, and perpetuating inequalities in society (Cottle, 2000).

Racialisation has been argued to be the “lens or medium through which race-thinking operates (drawing from Malik 1996 in Murji & Solomos, 2005). Downing and Husband (2005) explain that a statement demonstrates race-thinking if it implies or explicitly states that any of the following are true:

1. That mankind is divided into unchanging natural types, recognizable by physical features, which are transmitted ‘through the blood’ and that permit distinctions to be made between ‘pure’ and ‘mixed’ races.
2. That the mental and behaviour of human beings can be related to physical structure, and that knowledge of the structure of the racial label which denotes it provides a satisfactory account of the behaviour.
3. That individual personality, ideas and capacities, as well as national culture, politics, and morals, are the products of social entities variously termed race, nation, class, family, whose causative force is clear without further definition or inquiry into the connection between the group and the spiritual ‘product’ (Downing & Husband, 2005, p. 4).

The news media's power to define the causes, dynamics, and relevant contextualization of events is central to its power to transmit racialised discourse and promotion of race-thinking (Downing & Husband, 2005).

### **Representation and the Media**

Definitions of the concept of representation range in specificity in academic literature concerning media. Stuart Hall, drawing from linguistics and cultural studies, has perhaps most thoroughly and carefully developed the concept. Hall argues, that within a shared culture, representations, through language, provide meaning, where language represents to others our concepts, ideas and feelings (Stuart Hall, 1997a). Hall employs a relativist understanding of representation where he argues that there is no essential, true, or fixed meaning of for example, an event, but instead representation is constitutive of meaning (Stuart Hall, 1997b). Meaning, that an event itself does not have meaning until we speak about it, until it is represented. Additionally, key to understanding that meaning through representations is unfixed, is Hall's assertion that meaning is culturally and historically specific as well as subject to competing definitions and interpretations (Stuart Hall, 1997a).

The body of literature that deals with representation, particularly of race and ethnicity (the literature most relevant to this study) outside of Hall's work, predominantly employs a more straightforward, less conceptually clarified, use of the concept of representation<sup>3</sup> (Downing & Husband, 2005). In most cases, in the literature pertaining to representations of race and ethnicity, the term representation is used to discuss the extent to which people of colour are present in media, as well as judgments about whether those portrayals are constructive or not. Downing and Husband (2005) argue that neither Hall's complex conceptualization of representation nor the more neutral, straightforward use of the term representation is necessarily more appropriate. However, Hall's conceptualization provides a framework to not only explore the texts where representations are present, but also audience reception of those representations (Downing & Husband, 2005).

---

<sup>3</sup> For example: Mastro & Stern, 2003; Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003; Utsler & Edwards, 2008; Ziegler & White, 1990.

### *Representation of African Americans*

With “blacks” being a group that has long been ‘othered’ in American and European society, a focused body of literature exists examining representation of blacks in the media. Empirical studies of representation of African Americans, in news in particular (the focus of the study), have found that people of colour are often represented in significantly different ways than their “white” counterparts. First studies conducted decades apart consistently find that African Americans are rarely visible in news stories (Johnson, Sears, & McConahay, 1971; Poindexter, et al., 2003; Roberts, 1975; Ziegler & White, 1990)}, and when African Americans are visually represented, they are even more rarely interviewed as sources (Poindexter, et al., 2003; Roberts, 1975).

Additionally, studies of representation of African Americans in news have found that in the instances when African Americans are represented in news stories, they are overwhelmingly represented in particular types of stories. Specifically, blacks are predominantly featured in stories about crime (particularly as lawbreakers rather than as law defenders) (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Entman, 1994; Poindexter, et al., 2003), politics, or as victims; black public figures (including political figures) are often featured decrying racial discrimination or criticizing government inadequacies serving to reinforce social categorization (Entman, 1994). Additionally, African Americans are overwhelmingly visible in stories related to sports compared to main news or any other type of news story (Utsler & Edwards, 2008). Whites are also argued to be represented in more varied and positive ways than blacks (Entman, 1994). Specifically, African Americans are often found to be represented in a monolithic fashion, where African Americans in news are presented as representing all African Americans, a trend that is not the case for their white counterparts (Entman, 1994).

### **Framing**

Studies of representation, and particularly studies of representation of African Americans, use framing theory as a guide to understanding the power and influence of texts (Entman, 1993). Throughout literature on representation, different definitions of framing are employed. In an attempt to strengthen and improve the cohesiveness of framing research, after extensively reviewing published literature on framing, Entman (1993) argued that to frame is, “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment and recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p.

52). Framing is thus a place where contestation of meaning making occurs and in fact, in much of the literature is used almost interchangeably with the term representation.

Gamson et al (1992) argues that media message can act as teachers of values, ideologies, and beliefs without requiring conscious construction of the frameworks for meaning making (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). In agreement, Entman (1994) argues that often times the inexistence or skewed and stereotyped representations of African Americans in news coverage does not result from conscious biases of news makers, but instead is the result of the interplay between journalistic standards and norms (for example “newsworthiness”) and political and social reality, where potentially journalists ability to represent the “reality” of black America is hindered by journalist practices that push journalists to cover the most catchy stories (Entman, 1994). This highlights the importance of evaluating framing in news stories as, “journalists may follow the rules for “objective” reporting and yet convey a dominant framing of the new text that prevents most audience members for making a balanced assessment of a situation” (Entman, 1993, p. 56).

#### *Stereotyping, Framing and the Implications of Representations of African Americans*

Research of representations of race and ethnicity often evaluate the cause for specific representations in the media (as discussed above), as well as the implications of particular representations. A predominant critique of the representations of African Americans is that media representations often serve to construct and/or reinforce stereotyped images of African Americans that facilitate race-thinking. Hall (1997) argues that “stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’ ... It divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then excludes or expels everything which does not fit, which is different ... [representation] is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order” (Stuart Hall, 1997c, p. 258)

One of the key ways stereotyped representations are argued to be transmitted is through the treatment of African Americans in a singular, monolithic fashion (Entman, 1994). Another is through uncritically presenting stories, often by fanning issues in such a way that race is perceived to be a salient factor, but instead other socio-demographic characteristics are more telling or the issue does not singularly effect African Americans (Entman, 1994). Additionally, African Americans have been found to predominantly be used as experts on “black” issues, where they are interviewed to speak on behalf of the African American

community. This is argued to “ghettoize” the expertise of those interviewed. However, instances where the racial/ethnic identity of African Americans are interviewed as expert on subjects where race is incidental are argued to positive representation (Entman, 1994).

The implication of stereotyping is the promotion of racial prejudice. Entman (1994: 517) argues:

The essence of racial prejudice is homogenizing and generalizing about the disliked out group: a tendency to lump most individual members of the out group together as sharing similar undesirable traits, whilst seeing one’s own group as a diverse collection of clearly differentiated individuals

Another body of literature argues that stereotyped representation simultaneously reflect and distort the ways in African Americans view themselves (Hudson, 1998), how African Americans are perceived in society (hooks, 1992; Poindexter, et al., 2003) and how other groups will respond to African Americans based on the media representation (hooks, 1992).

### **Framing of Same-sex Marriage Campaigns**

Because we are examining representation specifically as it relates to same-sex marriage, it is also important to understand the dynamics of a same-sex marriage campaign. Because the fight for same-sex marriage rights falls is part of the larger social movement surrounding LGBT rights, framing literature that focuses specifically on social movements and collective action framing are particularly relevant to this study. Framing, along with resource mobilization and political opportunity, is integral to the proliferation of social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000). Collective action framing is different from framing generally because of the deliberate intention actors to mobilize constituencies. Social movements, using collective action framing, seek to remedy or alter some problematic situation first by focusing blame or responsibility for the problem (the attribution process) second by articulating a solution for the problem (prognostic framing), and then a call to arms (motivational framing) (Benford & Snow, 2000). Successfully framing in the context of social movements serves a link between the identity of desired constituencies and actual participation in the social movement (Benford & Snow, 2000).

In the case of same-sex marriage campaigns, a number of frames are found when studying elite and popular discourse surrounding the issue. The predominant conflicting frames on the issue of same-sex marriage are the pro-same-sex marriage frames that define marriage as a civil right that should be afforded to all persons regardless of sexual orientation, and the

anti-same-sex marriage frame that argues that marriage is an institution deriving its legitimacy from the church and morality, where same-sex relationships are immoral and should not be condoned (Brewer, 2003; Hull, 2001). Other prominent frames include arguing that gay and lesbians should not be subject to intolerance because of their sexual orientation, whilst the continued defeat of referenda to allow for same-sex marriage has produced a prominent anti-same-sex marriage frame arguing that the will of the majority should be respected on the issue (Hull, 2001).

### **Diversity of LGBT Equality Movement**

A key strategy in the social movement toward marriage equality has been the utilization of media to bring attention to the fight for equal rights for same-sex couples (Liebler, Schwartz, & Harper, 2009). Coverage of LGBT issues has increased over time and professionalisation of campaigns for LGBT rights has increased as well (Liebler, et al., 2009). With an increased professionalisation of LGBT rights campaigns, and same-sex marriage campaigns in particular, is increased control over media output from LGBT rights activists and specifically those who represent the LGBT community in the media. In an effort to frame the LGBT movement as mainstream (Moscowitz), representative of the LGBT community in the media have been argued to feature, “the least offensive variety (to the ears of the dominant groups): well-spoken, upper-middle-class, and probably white” Barnhurst (2003, p. 24 in Liebler, et al., 2009). However, there is evidence that there has been deliberate efforts, in the face of the criticisms of a sort-of whitewashing of the LGBT movement, of increased inclusiveness of diversity in LGBT campaigns and outreach to communities of colour (Racial Equity - Funders for LGBTQ Issues).

However, despite efforts made within the LGBT community to diversify representation, there is a great deal of popular discourse that argues that news portrayals of the LGBT rights movements perpetuates the stereotype, “that all gays are white and all Blacks are homophobic” (Cannick, 2008, p.1). Rashad Robinson of GLAAD argues that people of colour are often rendered invisible in the news related to LGBT rights and when people of colour are represented it is often in a one-dimensional way (Racial Equity - Funders for LGBTQ Issues) (a critique consistent throughout the literature on race and representation). In an empirical study, Moscowitz (2010) examined, among other things, the racial diversity of same-sex couples in news and found conflicting results about the frequency of representation of same-sex couples of colour. On the one-hand, Moscowitz found that mixed-race people of colour were represented in about 15 percent of news stories examined and were given the greatest amount of speaking time. However, couples where both members were persons of colour

were represented in less than 3 percent of stories and given no speaking time at all (Moscowitz, 2010).

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

Whilst an extensive body of literature exists pertaining to representations of race and ethnicity in the new and the implications therein, little has examined the frequency of representation of African Americans in relation to same-sex marriage. In addition, even less academic literature was found that examines the nature of the representation of African Americans in relation to same-sex marriage. In light of the racialisation of media content following the California Proposition 8 campaign and the call for increased engagement of communities of colour in the fight for LGBT equality, a critical examination of media representation of African Americans is a necessary starting point. This is because as Liebler (2009) argues, a change in public attitudes toward same-sex marriage is likely dependent upon media framing (Liebler, et al., 2009).

This paper seeks to use content analysis to systematically analyse the following research question:

RQ: How were African Americans represented by mainstream newspapers in stories related to same-sex marriage during and immediately following the 2008 Proposition 8 campaign in California?

Our research question will be analysed both in light of the productiveness of representation in the context of issues of race and ethnicity, as well as for the advancement of LGBT equality.

Popular discourse that argues that in relation to LGBT rights issues, African Americans are represented as monolithically homophobic, coupled with empirical literature that argues that African Americans are rarely represented in news and when they are it is in a way that lacks complexity, have informed the following hypotheses:

H1: African Americans will rarely be represented in newspaper articles.

H2: African Americans interviewed will overwhelmingly oppose same-sex marriage and favour Proposition 8.

H3: African Americans will not be identified as LGBT or as representatives for the LGBT rights movement.

H4: When African Americans are sources, regardless of their position, they will predominantly be representatives of the faith community.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

We agree with Downing and Husbands judgment, that neither Hall's complex employment of the concept nor the more common straight-forward use of representation is more appropriate, and will draw primarily on the straightforward understanding of representation for the development of our methodology. However, we will rely on Hall when drawing conclusions about potential implications of media representation of African Americans to examine in further research. Race and framing theory will also inform the analysis of the potential implications of the results found.

Finally, it should be noted that throughout this paper we will predominantly use the term African American whilst employing theories surrounding both race and ethnicity to analyse representations. This is informed by the nearly interchangeable usage of the terms black and African American in discourse in the United States, in part because of an attempt by leaders of the black civil rights movement to re-appropriate race into a positive and empowering part of the identities of African Americans (Martin, 1991). The convolution of race and ethnicity in the case of African Americans makes judgements on the positive or negative nature of representations particularly difficult. This is because whilst there may be no biological basis for race, there is a unique shared culture, experience and history among African Americans that many African Americans fight to preserve (Martin, 1991). Thus whilst the portion of the academic literature on race calls for an eradication of racialisation and race-thinking, much of the literature on representation criticizes the lack of distinct visibility of African Americans. The way we chose to navigate through what might be considered a theoretical impasse is by assessing the way in which African Americans are represented primarily through a lens that embraces multiculturalism and thus sees African Americanism as a culture within a pluralist American society that should be visible and in some cases distinct. However, the content of the visibility will be critically evaluated in terms of racialisation as employed by Malik (1996) and race-thinking as explained by Downing and Husband (2005), particularly in the context of whether representations are stereotyped or lead to stereotyping and/or the promotion of inequalities.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

After reviewing the relevant literature pertaining to representation, race, and framing, among other things, content analysis was chosen as the most appropriate method to examining media representation of African Americans during the California Proposition 8 campaign. There were a number of considerations taken into account when choosing content analysis including that content analysis is the primary method used in current academic work on news representation and framing (Entman, 1994; Liebler, et al., 2009; Mastro & Stern, 2003; Moscovitz; Poindexter, et al., 2003; Tadlock, Gordon, & Popp, 2004; Utsler & Edwards, 2008; Ziegler & White, 1990). Additionally, content analysis is a method best suited for analyzing large sample from which, with proper sampling, you can draw conclusions about an entire body of texts, an objective of this study (Bauer, 2000; Hansen, 1998; Krippendorff, 2004).

Still, whilst content analysis is the best method for this particular study, it is not without limitation. Particularly, because content analysis focuses on the characteristics manifest in the text itself (Bauer, 2000), it allows for commentary on the text, but does not explain the production nor the reception of the text (Stuart Hall, 1980; Hansen, 1998). Inferences about implications or causes for representation can still be made when appropriately informed by academic literature, but conclusion cannot be made about the actual implications of the representation, their reception, or production.

A pilot of this study was initially conducted for the MC4MI summative assignment. This assignment both confirmed that content analysis was the best method for this particular research question. Additionally the pilot was used to improve the sampling, corpus, and improving analytic categories for replicability, although many of the analytic categories used in the pilot and the rationale for their usage remains.

### **Selecting Media**

Three California newspapers, the Los Angeles Times, San Diego Union-Tribune, and San Francisco Chronicle were chosen as the corpus from which to sample articles for this study. Content analysis methodology argues that audience size, geographical reach, and ideological diversity are important to sampling in a representative fashion (Hansen, 1998). The Los Angeles Times, San Diego Union-Tribune, and San Francisco Chronicle have the three

highest circulations in California (respectively) (Mondo Newspapers); they are located in cities both in southern and northern California; and whilst Los Angeles and San Francisco have distinctly liberal populations, San Diego is ideologically conservative.

## **Sampling**

Drawing on methodical literature pertaining to unitizing (Krippendorff, 2004), the article was chosen as the appropriate sampling unit for this study, as we are focused on drawing comparisons about content within news stories that pertain to the Proposition 8 campaign and/or same-sex marriage.

Two independent samples were drawn from each newspaper (combined n=165). The first sample was drawn from stories in which a main focus was Proposition 8 and/or same-sex marriage. Articles from the San Diego Union-Tribune and San Francisco Chronicle were drawn from the Nexus UK database using the string: HLEAD:“same sex marriage” OR “same-sex unions” OR “gay marriage” OR “Proposition 8” OR “Prop 8”<sup>4</sup>. Articles from the Los Angeles Times were drawn from the ProQuest database using the same string, as no database contained all three newspapers. Queries limited the search for the string terms to the headline or lead paragraph<sup>5</sup> in order to sample articles where the main focus was Proposition 8 and/or same-sex marriage (Hansen, 1998). Additionally, in order to track media as it evolved over the course of the Proposition 8 campaign (Hansen, 1998), the search was limited to articles published between 1 December 2007 and 1 December 2008<sup>6</sup>. Forty articles were drawn from each newspaper (n=120), and to ensure that a representative and generalisable sample was drawn every n<sup>th</sup> article (dependent on the total number of articles available in each newspaper<sup>7</sup>)(Bauer, 2000) to ensure an evenly distributed sample across time.

It was quickly evident through the pilot study and preliminary analysis of the first sample that there would be a very small proportion of articles where African Americans were

---

<sup>4</sup> The terms African American and black were purposely excluded from the initial sample to ensure that the sample did not over-represent African Americans to allow for unbiased conclusion about representation in relation to the greater population.

<sup>5</sup> Due to different search parameters, the search in the ProQuest database was focused to drawing articles with the relevant search terms in the citation and/or abstract to draw a comparably focused sample to that drawn from the Nexus UK database.

<sup>6</sup> This one-year span covers the time shortly following the initial petition to add Proposition 8 to the ballot in Fall 2007, includes the period when same-sex marriage was legalized in June 2008, and spans through the approximately one-month follow the 2008 November general election when the vote took place (“Adventists & California Proposition 8: A Timeline,” 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Total number of articles available to sample from each newspaper through the search: Los Angeles Times – 283, San Francisco Chronicle – 214, San Diego Union-Tribune – 119.

represented. To bolster the data available for analysis of African Americans, a second sample was drawn from each newspaper where the search included the terms “African American” OR “black” and removed the “HLEAD” parameter (all other parameters remained the same). This decision was informed by over-sampling techniques most commonly use in surveying and polling, a field particularly familiar with over-compensating in sampling of minority and other underrepresented populations<sup>8</sup> (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010). Forty-five additional articles were analyzed (15 from each newspaper, all which in some form contained representations of African Americans. The same sampling procedures discussed above were used to ensure that articles were representative and generalisable as it related to time.<sup>9</sup>

### **Defining analytical categories**

Theoretical, empirical, and methodological literature as well as popular discourse informed the development of analytical categories for this content analysis. Sixty-nine variables were developed for the analysis. General ‘identifier’ categories common in most content analyses were recorded including newspaper, date, word count, and section (Hansen, 1998). Additionally, a nominal variable ‘date in relation to election’ was recorded to allow for analysis of any changes in representation of African Americans as a result of the publishing of the CNN exit poll results.

Variables were constructed to analyze characteristics of sources featured in each newspaper article (up to 5) informed by methodological literature which argues that analysis of sources is vital to understanding the media’s roles in social representation and power relations in society (Hansen, 1998). The race/ethnicity for each source was recorded to allow for comparisons between groups based on the results recorded for other variables. Other source variables included race/ethnicity, primary identification, sexual orientation, position on Proposition 8, position on same-sex marriage, whether the source provided commentary on a racial/ethnic group, as well as total words attributed to each source.

Another set of variables were constructed to analyze the overall content of the article, outside of source commentary and representation. These variables included ‘total number of sources’

---

<sup>8</sup> Whilst over-sampling increases the data available to analyze African Americans specifically, the sampling bias created limits the comparisons that can be made outside of the African American subset (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010). As a result, for results reported specifically about African Americans, data from both samples were pooled for analysis, for results reported about representation compared to the other demographics in the population, only the unbiased, 120 article, sample was used.

and whether the article contained commentary on a racial/ethnic group, and overall tone of the article (a strongly anti- to strongly pro-same-sex marriage five-point scale).

Lastly, a series of variables were developed to determine the presence of pro- and anti- same-sex marriage frames as well as the most dominant pro- and anti-same-sex marriage frame in each article. These frames were adopted from (Hull, 2001)'s analysis of both elite and non-elite discourse during public debates of same-sex marriage in Hawaii, (Liebler, et al., 2009)'s, content analysis of frames by anti-same sex marriage, pro-gay rights advocacy groups, as well as the and presence of frames in media content during the 2004 election cycle when states across the United States had referenda pertaining to same-sex marriage on the ballot, and California specific considerations identified during the pilot of this study.

### **Inter-coder Reliability<sup>10</sup>**

A second-coder was trained to test the reliability and replicability of the variables constructed for analysis (Bauer, 2000). Variables were first tested during the pilot of this study. Unreliable variables were either eliminated or improved (most notably the method for identifying frames). After improving the reliability of problematic variables, the second coder again analyzed a sample of articles (n=30). There was an average agreeability of 89.61 on all variables. Two of the most highly subjective variables (“dominant pro-same-sex marriage frame” and “overall tone”) fell below 75 percent threshold of minimum agreeability (Bauer, 2000). For each variable coding instructions were improved, and both were retained.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Although efforts were made to increase the number of articles that represented African American through drawing a second sample and pooling data, as the findings that follow will discuss, the low amount of data obtained about the race/ethnicity of sources makes chi-square analysis (the proper analysis for the majority of our nominal variables), meaningless because of a large margin of error due to a small sample size (Riffe, Lacy, Fico, & Fico, 2005). As a result, descriptive statistics and frequencies were used when reporting most of the results. The small number of samples available points to improvements that could be made in future studies of this topic. Primarily, coupling analysis of text with analysis of images

---

<sup>9</sup> Total number of articles available to sample from each newspaper through the search: Los Angeles Times – 37, San Francisco Chronicle – 36, San Diego Union-Tribune – 19.

<sup>10</sup> A complete report on inter-coder reliability for all variables can be found in the Appendix.

could enhance the ability to find representations of African Americans based on subjective visual identification of the race of those represented based on phenotypic characteristics. Based on the datasets and resources available to the researcher, only analysis of text was undertaken.

## **RESULTS**

This section will outline the results of the content analysis of the 165 articles analysed to study the representation of African Americans during the California Proposition 8 campaign. When comparing data across racial/ethnic groups, data collected from the primary sample (n=120 articles) will be used as not to skew comparisons due to our choice to over-sample stories with representation of African Americans. When looking specifically at representation of African Americans, the pooled data of the primary sample combined with the forty-five additional articles coded with representation of African Americans will be used (total n=165) to allow for a more robust analysis. Because both samples used sampling techniques that did not create bias across time, the pooled sample will also be used for comparisons across time. Which sample was used will be indicated either in the text or in the title of the corresponding table or graph.

### **Visibility of African Americans<sup>11</sup>**

Data gathered from our primary sample of 120 articles found that African Americans were visible in 21 of the coded stories, amounting to 17.5 percent of all stories analyzed. In each article the race and ethnicity of each source was recorded (up to a total of five sources). In total, data was collected 412 sources. In our primary sample, overwhelmingly race/ethnicity of sources was not identified. When it was, 11 sources (or 2.7 percent) were identified as African American (Table 1).

---

<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of analysis a dummy variable 'Representation of African Americans' was created for to classify articles where African Americans were represented in some form. Articles were classified as containing representation of African Americans if sources were African American or African Americans were discussed anywhere in the article.

	Frequency	Percent
Not identified/not discernable	384	93.4 %
Black/African American	11	2.7 %
White (non-Hispanic)	11	2.7 %
Asian	3	0.7 %
Hispanic/Latino	2	0.5 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

In our pooled sample a total of 66 articles were identified as containing representations of African Americans. When comparing the frequency of articles containing representations of African Americans before and after the November 2008 election, we found a statistically significant increase ( $p < 0.001$ ) in the proportion of stories in which African Americans were represented following the November 2008 election day (Table 2). Whilst 25.0 percent of stories published before (and on) election included representation of African Americans, following the election African Americans were represented in 71.7 percent of stories.

		Date in Relation to Election		Total
		Before or on election day (Nov. 4, 2008)	After election (post Nov. 4, 2008)	
Representation of African Americans	No	84	15	99
	Yes	28	38	66
<b>Total</b>		<b>112</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>165</b>

$\chi^2 = 32.689$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$

Looking at the weight given to each source in terms of word count, in our primary sample quotes attribute to sources identified as African Americans were on average 37 words long (Table 3). Within the group of 27 sources in our primary sample where race/ethnicity was identified, the average words attributed to sources identified as African American were significantly below the average words attributed to a small number of sources identified as Asian, whilst being slightly greater than an equal number of sources identified as white. Using an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test to test for any statistically significant difference in the mean words attributed to sources we find no statistically significant difference in means when sources whose race/ethnicity were not identified/not discernable were included. However, testing for differences in the mean word counts of only sources where race/ethnicity was identified produces a statistically significant result ( $p = 0.002$ ). This is likely because of the high word counts attributed to sources identified as Asian.

**Table 3: Average Words Per Source By Race/ Ethnicity – Primary Sample**

Race/Ethnicity of Source	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Asian	169.0	3	127.330
Not identified/not discernable	71.89	384	118.588
Black/African American	37.00	11	33.365
White (non-Hispanic)	35.09	11	32.054
Hispanic/Latino	10.50	2	7.778
<b>Total</b>	<b>70.38</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>115.855</b>

ANOVA p=0.312

### Locations of Representations

The collection of data pertaining to the newspapers in which articles were found and the corresponding sections where stories were found within newspapers showed that in our pooled sample<sup>12</sup>, articles that contained representations of African Americans were approximately evenly distributed among the sampled newspapers (Table 4).

**Table 4: Articles Where African Americans Were Represented by Newspaper – Pooled Sample**

		Newspaper			Total
		San Francisco Chronicle	Los Angeles Times	San Diego Union-Tribune	
Representation of African Americans	No	34	33	32	99
	Yes	21	22	23	66
Total		55	55	55	165

In terms of newspaper section, Table 5 shows that articles containing representation of African Americans were most frequently found in the Opinion/Editorial sections (18.1 %) and Main News (17.1 %). Representations were also found in Front Page news stories, in the Metro/Local sections of the newspapers, and in the Datebook/Calendar section.

**Table 5: Articles Where African Americans Were Represented by Section – Primary Sample**

	Frequency	Percentage
Opinion/Editorial	18	18.1 %
Main News	17	17.1 %
Front Page	13	13.1 %
Metro/Local	13	13.1 %
Datebook/Calendar	3	3.0 %
Other	2	2.0 %
Lifestyle/Entertainment	0	0.0 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

<sup>12</sup> The even distribution of stories of African Americans across newspapers is consistent in our primary sample as well. The pooled data simply inflates the total number of representation of African Americans by 15 for each newspaper.

Interestingly, when looking at the sections containing representations of African Americans after subdividing the data by newspaper, we find that articles are approximately evenly distributed across sections in the San Francisco Chronicle (Table 6). However, our sample of the Los Angeles Times had no Opinion/Editorial stories containing representations of African Americans whilst having the most (13) articles in the Main News section contain representations of African Americans. The opposite trend is found in the sample of the San Diego Union-Tribune.

<b>Table 6: Sections of Each Newspaper with Articles Containing Representation of African Americans – Pooled Sample</b>				
	Newspaper			Total
	San Francisco Chronicle	Los Angeles Times	San Diego Union-Tribune	
Opinion/Editorial	5	0	13	18
Main News	4	13	0	17
Front Page	4	5	4	13
Metro/Local	4	4	5	13
Datebook/Calendar	3	0	0	3
Other	1	0	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>66</b>

### **African American: An important demographic?**

Four variables were designed to capture whether race/ethnicity was explained to be a relevant factor to Proposition 8 and the issue of same-sex marriage for some groups rather than others, or at all. Two of these variables asked whether each source coded provided commentary on a racial/ethnic group and if so, whom. The second set of variables asked whether the articles, outside of source commentary, discussed a racial/ethnic group(s) and if so, whom. The vast majority, 94.6 percent, of sources in our primary made no commentary on a racial/ethnic group (Table 7). However, of the 26 sources who did speak about race/ethnicity, half spoke about African Americans alone, 3 spoke about Whites and African Americans, and 7 spoke about another combination of racial/ethnic groups<sup>13</sup>.

---

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted, that whilst no exhaustive data was kept on who constituted the “Other” category, in nearly every case that “Other” was recorded, African Americans were one of the groups mentioned (this is true for both the variable coded for source commentary as well as for article content).

	Frequency	Percent
Not Applicable	389	94.6 %
Black/African American	13	3.2 %
Other	7	0.8 %
White and African American	3	0.7 %
Hispanic/Latino	2	0.5 %
Asian	1	0.2 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>100.0</b>

This means that in at least 61.5 percent of the instances where commentary was made about a racial/ethnic group, African Americans were discussed. Our variable looking at commentary on race outside of source contributions found that 18 of the 120 articles analysed in our primary sample (18.0 percent) contained discussions of a racial/ethnic group (Table 8).

	Frequency	Percent
Not Applicable	102	85.0 %
Other	7	5.8 %
Black/African American	5	4.2 %
Hispanic/Latino AND Black/African American	3	2.5 %
White and African American	2	1.7 %
Not identifiable/discernable	1	0.8 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100 %</b>

African Americans were discussed in 5 stories alone, in 3 stories where Hispanic/Latinos were also discussed, and 2 stories where whites were discussed. That equates to African Americans being discussed in at least 8.4 percent of all stories and at least 55.6 percent of all stories where race/ethnicity was discussed.

### **Monolithically Homophobic?**

The position of every source on same-sex marriage generally and Proposition 8 generally, was recorded (up to five). In our pooled sample contained a total of 27 sources identified as African American/black. The results in Table 9 show that a total of 13 sources identified as African American (44.4 percent) opposed same-sex marriage, whilst 12 (or 43.8 percent) indicated that they were in support of same-sex marriage.

	Frequency	Percent
Opposed	13	44.4 %
Favour	12	43.8 %
No position indicated	2	6.3 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

On the other hand, 59.3 percent of sources identified as African American opposed Proposition 8, which would have made same-sex marriage illegal, whilst only 18.5 percent of sources identified as African American indicated that they supported Proposition 8 (Table 10). Whilst data that shows that both a majority of sources identified as African American indicated that they opposed same-sex marriage but the a majority of the same sources indicated that they opposed Proposition 8 is seemingly contradictory, it is a nuanced position perhaps most prominently held by then-Presidential candidate Barack Obama. Specifically, President Obama supported civil unions for same-sex couples, but did not support same-sex marriage. There is nothing to indicate that the sources in this study either did or did not hold the same view. The sexual orientation of all sources was also recorded. Of the 27 sources in our pooled sample, 40.7 percent were identified as heterosexual, whilst 22.2 percent were identified as gay or lesbian (Table 11).

**Table 10: African American Sources Position on Proposition 8 – Pooled Sample**

	Frequency	Percent
Opposed	16	59.3 %
No position indicated	6	22.2 %
Favour	5	18.5 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

**Table 11: African American Sources Sexual Orientation – Pooled Sample**

	Frequency	Percent
Heterosexual	11	40.7 %
Gay/Lesbian	6	22.2 %
Not Identified	10	37.0 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

### Diversity of Roles?

The primary identity of all sources in all coded articles was recorded in order to examine the affiliation of sources represented in relation to the issue of same-sex marriage and Proposition 8. Of the 27 sources in our pooled sample identified as African Americans, an equal number (37.0 percent) were either representatives of the faith community or Identified as a citizen or “ordinary person” (Table 12). Interestingly no sources identified as African Americans were primarily affiliated with a pro-Proposition 8 advocacy organization, whilst two were primarily identified as representatives of anti-Proposition 8 advocacy organizations.

**Table 12: Primary Identities of African American Sources – Pooled Sample**

Church or Other Religious Affiliation	10	37.0 %
Citizen/Ordinary Person	10	37.0 %
Politician	5	18.5 %
Anti-Prop 8 Activist	2	7.4 %
Academic	0	0.0 %
Political Professional	0	0.0 %
Pro-Prop 8 Activist	0	0.0 %
Legal Professional	0	0.0 %
Other	0	0.0 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

**Salience of Frames**

Finally, a series of variables were constructed to identify the campaign frames present in each article coded, as well as the dominant pro- and anti- Proposition 8 frames in each article and finally the tone of each article on a five point scale from strongly pro-Proposition 8/anti-same-sex marriage to strong anti-Proposition/pro-same-sex marriage. Table 13 contains the results of the tallying of frame frequency for articles that also contained representations of African Americans. The frame contending that same-sex marriage is a civil right was the most frequently present frame in articles where African Americans represented (present in 75.8 percent of articles). The frame contending that marriage is an institution specifically the reserved for the union of one-man and one-woman was the most prevalent anti-same-sex marriage frame presented in articles where African Americans were represented. These frames were also the most prevalent pro- and anti-same-sex marriage frames in articles where African Americans were not represented.

**Table 13: Frequency of Each Frame Per Article – Pooled Sample**

	Number - Yes	Percentage
<i>Anti-Marriage Frames</i>		
One-Man, One-Woman	33	50.0 %
Immorality/Unnaturalness	27	40.9 %
Critique of Tactics of Opponents of Same-sex Marriage	23	34.8 %
Will of the Majority	20	30.3 %
Protecting Family/Children	12	18.2 %
Rights Counter Frame	10	15.2 %
<i>Pro-Marriage Frames</i>		
Rights Frame	56	75.8 %
Tolerance	37	56.1 %
Comparison to Other Oppressions	35	53.0 %
Critique of Tactics of Opponents of Same-sex Marriage	21	31.8 %
Protecting the Minority	16	24.2 %

Table 14 shows the results for the most dominant anti-same-sex marriage frames in articles where African Americans were represented. Whilst one-man, one-woman was the most frequently present anti-marriage frame, the campaign frame that argues that a gay or lesbian

same-sex orientation generally and same-sex marriage specifically are immoral and/or unnatural was the most common dominant anti-same-sex marriage frame in our pooled sample. One-man, one-woman, rather than immorality, was the most common anti-marriage dominant frame in articles where African Americans were not represented (26.3 percent of stories, immorality only 16.2 percent of stories).

	Frequency	Percent
Immorality or unnaturalness of same-sex relationships and same-sex marriage	14	21.2 %
No anti-same-sex marriage frames presented	10	15.2 %
Will of the majority	13	19.7 %
One-man, One-woman	11	16.7 %
Critique of tactics of proponents of same-sex marriage	8	12.1 %
Protecting the family/children	6	9.1 %
Right counter-frame	3	4.5 %
Unable to determine	1	1.5 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The rights frame was found to be the most frequently dominant frame in articles where African Americans were represented followed by a frame where the fight for same-sex marriage is compared to past struggles for equality such as the fight for women’s rights and the African American civil rights movement (Table 16). The rights frame was also the most common dominant frame in articles in which African Americans were represented (46.5 percent of stories), whilst comparison to other oppression only present in 5.1 percent of stories where African Americans were not represented.

	Frequency	Percent
Rights frame	30	45.5 %
Comparison between denial of same-sex marriage to other oppressions	13	19.7 %
Tolerance	11	16.7 %
Critique of tactics of opponents of same-sex marriage	7	10.6 %
Protecting the minority/counter will of the majority	3	4.5 %
No pro-same-sex marriage frames presented	2	3.0 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Finally, Figure 1 captures the tone distribution of articles where African Americans are represented. Of the 66 total articles analysed, 33.39 percent had a tone that was considered to be pro-same-sex marriage/anti-Proposition 8, whilst 37.88 percent were determined to be balanced. No articles were determined to have a tone that was strongly anti-same-sex marriage, but 12.12 percent of articles were determined to be strongly pro-same-sex marriage.

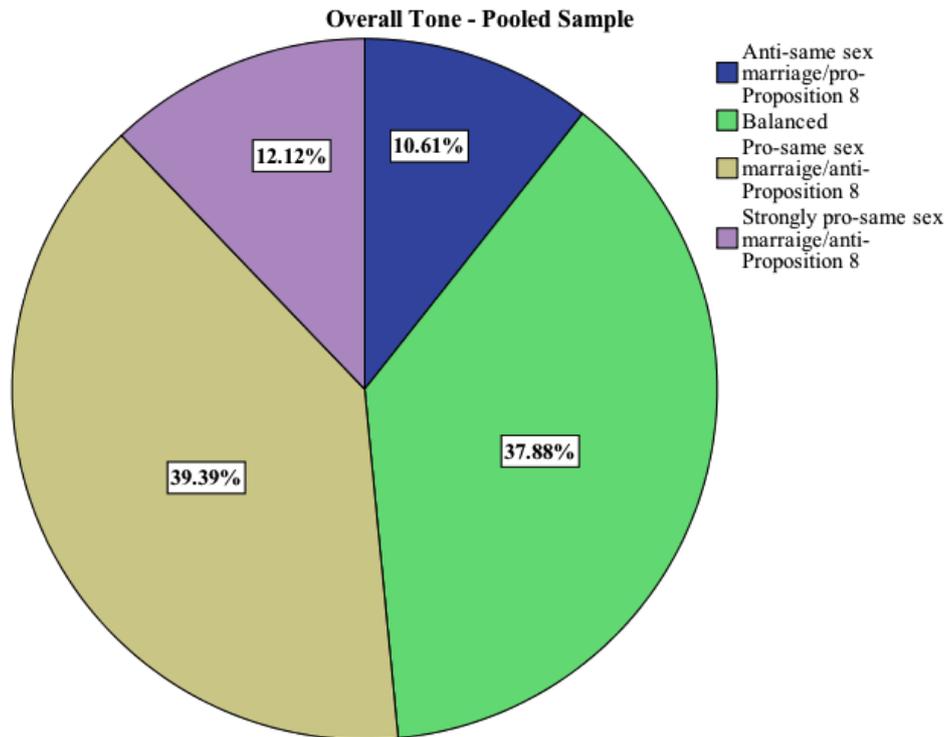


Figure 1: Overall Tone -- Pooled Sample

## DISCUSSION

In the following section we will evaluate our research question, related hypotheses posited in our conceptual framework, and results informed by the relevant theoretical and empirical literature as well as popular discourse.

### Relatively Frequent Representation

Hypothesis 1: “African Americans will rarely be represented in newspaper articles,” was informed by empirical studies of representation of African Americans which argue that African Americans are rarely visible in news stories (Johnson, et al., 1971; Poindexter, et al., 2003; Roberts, 1975; Ziegler & White, 1990) and when visible, are even more rarely utilized as sources (Poindexter, et al., 2003; Roberts, 1975). In the case of newspaper text, visibility is connoted by the identification of a source as African American or the discussion of African Americans in the text. At first glance our results confirm H1, as African Americans were represented in only 17.5 percent of all stories analyzed and of the 412 sources identified in the primary sample only 11 (or 2.7 percent) were identified as African American.

However, the notion of “rarely” visible is a term that is relative to some sort of standard of visibility. Often times in studies of race and ethnicity the standard of comparable visibility is

to white citizens, particularly when analyzing visual images, or to actual population statistics. Using the former measure, in our analysis, there was only one additional story where whites were represented in the article text and an equal number of sources identified as white. Additionally, with the exception of the sources identified as Asian, African American sources were given comparable weight (measured by word count) to white sources (although less than the average unidentified source).

The equal representation of whites and African Americans in text is interesting in comparison to demographics of the general California and United States populations. In California, 76.4 percent of the population identifies as white whilst only 6.6 percent identifies themselves as black or African American (United States Census Bureau, 2009). In the United States as a whole, 79.6 percent of the population identifies as white (not of Hispanic origin), whilst 12.9 percent of the population identifies themselves as African American. This means that if we take population demographics into account when analyzing the number of times African Americans are represented compared to whites, our data shows that there is an overrepresentation of African Americans compared to whites. Still, likely the most telling result of our analysis as it relates to frequency of representation, is that in the vast majority of stories related to same-sex marriage, race/ethnicity is not discussed.

The implications of these finds are conflicting. First, they demonstrate that race/ethnicity was not a dominant issue in the overall discourse surrounding same-sex marriage during the time period analysed. However, in the few instances when it was discussed, African Americans appeared to be a relatively important demographic for discussion. This conclusion was also supported by our variables that were designed to capture whether race and ethnicity was presented as a salient factor to Proposition 8 or same-sex marriage. Again in this case, whilst race/ethnicity may not have been discussed widely, when commentary was made about a racial/ethnic group, African Americans were the most often discussed.

One of likely reasons for discussion of African Americans (aside from the exit poll) was the presence of both the pro-same-sex marriage rights frame and the frame comparing the struggle for marriage equality to past struggles for civil rights (the latter of which was particularly dominant in the articles containing representation of African Americans). Martin (1991) argues that the LGBT rights movement in many ways mirrors the civil rights movement and the collective action framing reflect these similarities. These real similarities privileged the likelihood that African Americans were discussed in relation to same-sex marriage and in fact, it is arguably surprising that there was not more frequent discussion of African Americans.

### **Fleeting Racialisation**

Looking at the statistically significant increase in representations of African Americans following the election indicate that the exit poll claiming that 70 percent of African Americans voted in favour of Proposition 8 likely spurred the increased attention to African Americans in relation to Proposition 8 and taken together with other evidence (Blow, 2008; Dowd, 2008; Hertzberg, 2008; Kobert, 2008; Kuruvila, 2008; Manjoo, 2008; Shannika, 2008; Silver, 2008; Walters, 2008) led to a racialised discourse around the referendum. It can reasonably assumed newsworthiness of such an overwhelming poll, rather than conscious intentions of racialising the issue of same-sex marriage, was at play. Yet, the real backlash against African Americans after the release of the poll indicates that reporters must be increasingly critical of the information they publish and the contextualization they provide.

### **Challenging Popular Discourse**

Hypothesis 2 “African Americans interviewed will overwhelmingly oppose same-sex marriage and favour Proposition 8,” was drawn from popular discourse that contends African Americans are often represented as monolithically homophobic, perpetuating a stereotype that being African American means that one is overwhelmingly likely to be intolerant of LGBT rights (Cannick, 2008; Racial Equity - Funders for LGBTQ Issues). Additionally this hypothesis was informed by Entman (1994) and Ziegler & White (1999) that African Americans are often represented in unvaried ways.

The nearly even split among sources identified as African Americans on the issue of same-sex marriage as well as the majority of sources identified as African Americans stating a position in opposition to Proposition 8 challenges the discourse that African Americans are overwhelmingly represented as opposed to LGBT rights. The diversity in opinions may reflect a real diversity of opinions (although the exit poll would say differently) and/or may be a reflection of the increased efforts by LGBT rights organizations to reach out to communities of colour (Racial Equity - Funders for LGBTQ Issues). They also demonstrate an interesting nuance in positions held by persons identified as African American, where sources were simultaneously not in support of same-sex marriage nor in favour of eliminating marriage rights.

Hypothesis 3: “African Americans will not be identified as LGBT or as representatives for the LGBT rights movement,” was also challenged. First, 22 percent of the sources identified as African American were also identified as gay or lesbian. In light of the stereotype that, “all

gays are white” (Cannick, 2008) in combination popular discourse arguing that African Americans are homophobic, finding that 6 of the 27 sources identified as African American were also identified as gay or lesbian was perhaps the most surprising finding. Additionally, two African American sources were identified as anti-Proposition 8 activists. Whilst this number is not overwhelming, this is contrasted to the fact no African Americans were identified as pro-Proposition 8 activists, and “Anti-Proposition 8 activist” was one of only four primary affiliations attributed to African American sources.

Taken together, analysis of H1 and H2 demonstrate that although African Americans were not represented as overwhelmingly pro-same-sex marriage, African Americans were also not represented as monolithically homophobic. The heterogeneity of positions of African Americans represented has the capacity to challenge stereotypes related to African Americans and LGBT rights rather than to reinforce a homogenous view of the positions of African Americans on such issues. Additionally, to the extent that white Americans are also seen as having a diversity of opinions on same-sex marriage and LGBT rights, representation of African Americans as also having a variety of opinions pushes back against possible othering of African Americans as a group. Furthermore, to the extent that media images and frames have the capacity to invite audience members to create a link with a social movement, and that there is an African American group identity, representations of gay and lesbian African Americans may also pushback against the argument that LGBT rights is not an issue relevant to the African American community (i.e. (Kuruville, 2008). Still, the backlash reported after the release of the 70 percent exit poll may demonstrate that when there are competing representations (i.e. African Americans represented as having a diversity of views over the entirety of the campaign versus framing African Americans as overwhelmingly homophobic immediately after the election), race-thinking, racialisation, and othering is a more readily accepted discourse.

### **Salience of Morality**

Hypothesis 4: “When African Americans are sources, regardless of their position, they will predominantly be representatives of the faith community,” was confirmed through this analysis. Of the 27 African Americans interviewed as sources in our pooled sample 10 had were representatives of the faith community (37 percent). There are two primary conclusions that can be drawn from these results. First, whilst the African American religious representatives had a variety of opinions on same-sex marriage and Proposition 8 (5 opposed Proposition 8, 4 favoured the Proposition, and 1 indicated no position), the fact that they were representatives of religious organizations has the effect of implicitly framing the

issue of same-sex marriage as a moral issue, particularly for African Americans. Additionally, morality was also the most dominant frame anti-same-sex marriage frames in articles containing representation of African Americans. but not in articles that without representations of African Americans. This demonstrates an explicit, in addition to the implicit, framing of same-sex marriage as a moral issue for African Americans. To the extent that anti-Proposition 8 activists sought to frame same-sex marriage as a civil rights issue, media representation of African Americans coming primarily from the faith community may have undermined the rights frame.

At the same time, Steenland, Futrell & Cook (2010) argue that it is vital to forge relationships with faith communities when fighting for LGBT rights because LGBT rights are not just civil rights, but also human rights (Steenland, Futrell, & Cook, 2010). They argue, “Not to claim religion as intrinsic to this struggle is to miss the mark and allow opponents to monopolize the moral high ground” (Steenland, et al., 2010) . In the cases where African American members of the faith community supported same-sex marriage, the most dominant frame they presented was the rights frame. Taking Steenland, et al. (2010) into account, the lack of an explicit pro-same-sex moral frame may be impeding the fight for marriage equality.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In today’s fully mediated society, representations in the mass media are pivotal to our understanding of the world (Brooks & Hébert, 2006). Popular discourse arguing that African Americas are overwhelming represented in the media as monolithically homophobic, in combination with the overt racialisation of the post-2008 General Election results, prompted our empirical enquiry into the nature of representations of African Americans in relation to same-sex marriage throughout the Proposition 8 campaign. Our findings show that overwhelming race and ethnicity was not a prominent part of the discourse surrounding same-sex marriage in California. However, when race and ethnicity was discussed, representations of African Americans were prominent. Our findings challenge popular discourse, as African Americans were represented as having diverse views on the issue of same-sex marriage, creating a space to challenge stereotypes of African Americans in relation to LGBT rights as well as increase space for identification of African Americans with LGBT rights issues. Despite these promising results, there is room for improvement as the backlash against the African American community following the racialisation of Proposition 8 vote was likely facilitated by both the privileging of ‘newsworthy’ content without proper scrutiny by media producers and the easy acceptance of racialised discourse among the American public.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

There is a wealth of knowledge still to be gained as it relates to representation of race and ethnicity broadly, and representations of African Americans specifically, and the interplay of these representations with the advancement of LGBT equality. An evaluation of newspaper images as well as television news broadcasts has the potential to paint a richer picture of representation of African Americans in relation to same-sex marriage.

LGBT activists must also engage in a rigorous evaluation of this, and other, campaigns. Framing may be a particularly appropriate start. Hull (1997), following her evaluation of discourse surrounding same-sex marriage in Hawaii (and particularly non-elite discourse), argued that the civil rights frame was politically limited. Building upon Hull, and in light of the Proposition 8 results, activist must reflect on how to better deploy the rights frame and engage expanded constituencies in the LGBT rights movement. Additionally, given the prevalence in the media of representatives of the faith community who support same-sex marriage rights, activist should work to better engage directly with moral discourses and develop frames therein.

---

## REFERENCES

- Adventists & California Proposition 8: A Timeline. (2008, 26 October). Retrieved 9 April, 2010, from <http://progressiveadventism.com/2008/10/26/california-proposition-8/>
- Banton, H. (2005). Historical and Contemporary Modes of Racialization. In K. Murji & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (pp. 51-68). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barot, R. and Bird, J. (2001). Racialization: the genealogy and critique of a concept. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24(4), 601-18.
- Bauer, M. W. (2000). Classical Content Analysis: a review. In M. W. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound : a practical handbook* (pp. 131-51). London: Sage.
- Benford, R. D. and Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual review of sociology*, 26,]: 611-39.
- Blow, C. (2008, 29 November). Gay Marriage and a Moral Minority. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/29/opinion/29blow.html>
- Brewer, P. (2003). Values, political knowledge, and public opinion about gay rights: A framing-based account. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67(2): 173.
- Brooks, D., & Hébert, L. (2006). Gender, race, and media representation. *The Sage handbook of gender and communication*, London: Sage, pp. 297-317.
- Cannick, J. (2008, 20 May). Gay Marriage, the Black Church & the Mainstream Media. *New American Media*.
- Cottle, S. (2000). *Ethnic minorities and the media : changing cultural boundaries*. Buckingham [England] ; Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Dixon, T., & Linz, D. (2000). Overrepresentation and underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as lawbreakers on television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2): 131-54.
- Dowd, M. (2008, 23 November). Marriage on the Rocks. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/23/opinion/23dowd.html>
- Downing, J. and Husband, C. (2005). Representing 'race' racisms, ethnicities and mediapp. xiii, 241 p.). Available from <https://www.dawsonera.com/guard/protected/dawson.jsp?name=https://lse.ac.uk/idp&dest=http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781847871213>
- Egan, P. and Sherrill, K. (2009). *California's Proposition 8: What Happened, and What Does the Future Hold?* : National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.
- Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Entman, R. (1994). Representation and reality in the portrayal of blacks on network television news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 71(3): 509-20.
- Fulbright, L. and Kuruwila, M. (2008, 22 October). Prop. 8 rivals seek support in black faithful; Competing rallies in S.F., Oakland, L.A. attempt to influence critical bloc of voters whose turnout at polls is expected to be high. *The San Francisco Chronicle*.
- Gamson, W., Croteau, D., Hoynes, W. and Sasson, T. (1992). Media images and the social construction of reality. *Annual review of sociology*, 18(1): 373-93.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Culture, Media, Language* (pp. 128-138).
- Hall, S. (1997a). Introduction. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: SAGE.
- Hall, S. (1997b). *Representation and the Media*. Paper presented at the Media Education Foundation: Challenging Media, USA.
- Hall, S. (1997c). The Spectacle of the 'other'. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 223-78). London: SAGE.
- Hansen, A. (1998). Chapter 5: Content Analysis *Mass communication research methods* (pp. 91-129). New York: New York University Press.
- Hertzberg, H. (2008, 1 December). Eight is Enough. *The New Yorker*.
- Hooks, B. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

- Hudson, S. (1998). Re-creational television: The paradox of change and continuity within stereotypical iconography. *Sociological Inquiry*, 68(2), 242-257.
- Hull, K. E. (2001). The Political Limits of the Rights Frame: The Case of Same-Sex Marriage in Hawaii. *Sociological Perspectives*, 44(2), 207-232.
- Johnson, P., Sears, D. and McConahay, J. (1971). Black invisibility, the press, and the Los Angeles riot. *American Journal of Sociology*, 76: 698-721.
- Kobert, K. (2008). Blaming Black Voters for Prop 8 Loss is Wrong and Destructive. Retrieved from <http://www.pfaw.org/issues/equality-for-all/blaming-black-voters-for-prop-8-loss-wrong-and-destructive>
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis : an introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Kuruwila, M. (2008, 16 November). Singling out black Prop. 8 vote ignores larger issues. *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Retrieved from [http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi\\_0199-9568026/Singling-out-black-Prop-8.html](http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-9568026/Singling-out-black-Prop-8.html)
- Liebler, C. M., Schwartz, J. and Harper, T. (2009). Queer Tales of Morality: The Press, Same-sex Marriage, and Hegemonic Framing. *Journal of Communication*, 59(4): 653-75.
- Louis, B. S. (2005). Racialization in the 'Zone of Ambiguity'. In K. Murji and J. Solomos (Eds.), (pp. 29-49). Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Malik, K. (2005). Making a difference: culture, race and social policy. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 39(4): 361-78.
- Malik, K. (2008). Mistaken identity. *New Humanist*.
- Manjoo, F. (2008, 10 March). Props to Obama: Did he help push California's gay-marriage ban over the top? <http://www.slate.com/id/2203912/>
- Martin, B. (1991). From Negro to Black to African American: The power of names and naming. *Political Science Quarterly*, 106(1): 83-107.
- Mastro, D. and Stern, S. (2003). Representations of race in television commercials: A content analysis of prime-time advertising. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47(4): 638-47.
- Mondo Newspapers. Highest Circulation California Newspapers. Retrieved 10 March, 2010, from <http://www.mondonewspapers.com/usa/circulation/california.html>
- Moore, M., Garvey, M., and Connelley, S. (2008, 6 November). Gay marriage ban: A tale of two votes. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/politics/cal/la-2008election-prop8prop22.0.6153805.htmlstory>
- Moscowitz, L. M. (2010). Gay Marriage in Television News: Voice and Visual Representation in the Same-Sex Marriage Debate. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 54(1): 24-39.
- Murji, K. and Solomos, J. (2005). Introduction: Racialization theory and practice. In K. Murji & J. Solomos (Eds.), (pp. xii, 307 p.). Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2010). *Samplign Methodology: Oversamples*: Pew Research Center.
- Plante, H. (2010, 7 August). Prop. 8: Governor tacks on same-sex marriage. *San Francisco Chronicle*. Retrieved from [http://articles.sfgate.com/2010-08-07/opinion/22210246\\_1\\_gay-marriage-marriage-licenses-activist-judges](http://articles.sfgate.com/2010-08-07/opinion/22210246_1_gay-marriage-marriage-licenses-activist-judges)
- Poindexter, P. M., Smith, L. and Heider, D. (2003). Race and Ethnicity in local Television News: Framing, Story Assignments, and Source Selections. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47(4): 524-36.
- Powell, K. A. (2003). *Race - The Power of an Illusion: Interview with John A. Powell*: Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).
- The Prop. 8 election irony. (2008, 7 November). *Los Angeles Times*.
- Racial Equity - Funders for LGBTQ Issues. Media, myths & inclusive representation: Interview with Rashad Robinson. *Perspectives* Retrieved 9 April, 2010, from <http://www.lgbtraciaequity.org/perspectives/perspective.cfm?id=11>
- Richeson, J. A. and Nussbaum, R. J. (2004). The impact of multiculturalism versus color-blindness on racial bias. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 40(3): 417-23.
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Fico, F. and Fico, F. (2005). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research*: Routledge.
- Roberts, C. (1975). The Presentation of Blacks in Television Network Newscasts. *Journalism Quarterly*.

- Shannika. (2008, 27 July). Facts Belie the Scapegoating of Black People for Proposition 8. <http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2008/11/7/34645/1235/704/656272>
- Silver, N. (2008, 8 January). Prop 8 Myths. <http://www.fivethirtyeight.com/2008/11/prop-8-myths.html>
- Small, S. (1999). The Countours of Racialization: Structures, Representations and Resistance in the United States. In R. Torres, L. Miron and J. Inda (Eds.), *Race, identity, and citizenship: A reader*: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Steenland, S., Futrell, N. and Cook, M. (2010). Faith and Family Equality: An Analysis of Arkansas's 2008 Battle Over Same-Sex Adoption. *Center for American Progress: Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative*.
- Tadlock, B. L., Gordon, C. A. and Popp, E. (2004). *Framing the Issue of Same-Sex Marriage: Traditional Values Versus Equal Rights*. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association, Chicago.
- United States Census Bureau. (2009). California - People QuickFacts. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06000.html>
- Utsler, D. M. and Edwards, V. (2008, 12 March). *Right Before Your Very Eyes: Photo Coverage of African Americans in Major College Newspapers*. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Chicago, IL.
- Walters, D. (2008, 11 Novemeber). Surge for Obama sealed Prop. 8's victory. *Sacramento Bee*. Retrieved from <http://www.kitsapsun.com/news/2008/nov/15/dan-walters-obama-surge-sealed-prop-8-victory/>
- Wolsko, C., Park, B., Judd, C., and Wittenbrink, B. (2000). Framing interethnic ideology: Effects of multicultural and color-blind perspectives on judgments of groups and individuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(4): 635-54.
- Ziegler, D. and White, A. (1990). Women and minorities on network television news: An examination of correspondents and newsmakers. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 34(2): 215-23.