

**Restoring Tradition or Protecting Civil Rights: The Media's Discursive Role in the De-legitimization of Same-Sex Marriage through Coverage of Proposition 8**

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**Presented at: Lavender Language and Linguistics Conference XVI  
American University, Washington, DC  
February 15, 2009**

**Abstract**

With the recent passage of California's State Proposition 8, the state's electorate voted to eliminate the rights of same-sex couples to marry, a right recently granted by the California State Supreme Court. This paper uses a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to analyze coverage in the San Francisco Chronicle directly before and after the November 4, 2008 election and illustrates how the media is portraying the issue of same-sex marriage to the public. With discursive power and control of public sentiment largely in the hands of the media, this approach is useful to uncover the message being conveyed beyond the simple reporting of facts. Conclusively, the Chronicle's coverage of Proposition 8 and its aftermath shows how the media's discursive control over the issue of same-sex marriage perpetuates the current social norm of 'traditional marriage', thus creating a de-legitimization of same-sex marriage and its supporters.

*Key Words: Critical Discourse Analysis, legitimization, media discourse, Proposition 8, same-sex marriage.*

## **1. Introduction**

The 2008 election in California was a bittersweet time for equal rights supporters. In addition to the fervor generated by the historic national election of Barack Obama as our first African American president, California's 2008 general election ballot featured Proposition 8, a ballot initiative placed before voters that, upon passing by a 52-48 percent vote, eliminated the rights of same-sex couples to marry.

Eight years prior in March 2000, California voters passed a nearly identical initiative, Proposition 22, which amended the state's family code to read that “only a marriage between a man and a woman is valid and recognized in the state of California.” Proposition 8 adopted the exact wording, but was this time placed before the voters as an amendment to the State Constitution. Prop 8 came at a very crucial time in California politics: while signatures were being collected to place Prop 8 on the November 2008 ballot, the California State Supreme Court ruled in May 2008 to repeal Prop 22, saying it was unconstitutional and that our Constitution protected the equal rights of all citizens to marry, regardless of sexual orientation. As a result, same-sex marriages began to be legally performed throughout California in June 2008, and by the time of the election, an estimated 18,000 same-sex couples had received marriage licenses.

During the summer and fall of 2008, Proposition 8's supporters and opponents participated in the costliest social issue election contest in American history, spending a collective \$85 million on their campaigns. However, despite the No on 8 campaign raising more than the Yes on 8 campaign (\$45 million to \$40 million), 52% of California voters backed Proposition 8, and for the first time in state history, had voted to eliminate a set of established rights for a minority of the population. Within hours

of the election, grassroots movements began among many within the gay and lesbian community, and the weeks following the election featured several demonstrations and protests throughout the state, and even the nation, in what is arguably becoming this generation's civil rights movement.

Simultaneous with the initial demonstrations and protests, several lawsuits were filed with the California State Supreme Court over the validity of Proposition 8. The court quickly agreed to hear the case, and by late January 2009, briefings had been submitted by both sides. As of mid-February 2009, the State Supreme Court has announced that oral arguments for the case will be heard in their San Francisco headquarters on March 5, 2009, with a final ruling due within 90 days of that hearing.

The inspiration for this paper comes from my own interest in the outcome of Proposition 8, my involvement in the post-election movement, and the realization by several protest groups that the media outlets reporting on the events were misrepresenting facts (specifically rally attendance estimates) related to the after-election rallies and protests. With the media holding an undeniably high level of social, political and linguistic power over the populace, which provides a clear power differential between the media and the public, the media possesses clear discursive control over the information the general public receives. For this reason, this paper employs a Critical Discourse Analysis approach to search media coverage of Proposition 8 to uncover the social inequalities that pervade the media. This paper aims to look at media articles directly before and after the November 4, 2008 election to highlight linguistic evidence that shows how a powerful group in control of the population's perception of social structure can legitimize some groups (in this case proponents of traditional marriage) and de-legitimize other groups (in this case same-sex marriage proponents), regardless of the perceived bias of a particular media outlet.

On the other hand, what this paper does not aim to do is seek to provide a critique of the data source's bias nor create a claim on the beliefs of the newspaper or its staff writers in regards to the social issue of same-sex marriage, the passage of Proposition 8, or the gay and lesbian community as a whole.

The structure of the paper is as follows: I will first give a background of the CDA paradigm, including its usefulness in media discourse (especially regarding this specific set of data) , followed by a detailed methodology of what I looked at and why I looked at it. I will then present and analyze the data and give interpretations and conclusions based on the data analysis presented.

## **2. Background**

Critical Discourse Analysis operates under several assumptions that will be used in this paper to facilitate analysis. Fundamental to a CDA analysis is the assertion that there is no true representation of a value-free science, as all science is “*inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction*” (van Dijk 2001). Instead of attempting to avoid value judgments, CDA argues that this social interaction is entirely relevant for the discussion of scholarly works within their socio-political situations, as they are unavoidably influenced by them. CDA uses this framework as they address their concerns with analyzing and highlighting social power structures, especially where there are social inequalities of dominance between the group(s) in power and the group(s) subjected to that power and dominance.

Taking van Dijk's (1995) definition that “*social power is usually defined as the control of actions, or access to scarce resources of one, dominated group, by (members of) a dominant group,*”

we can look at the media as being the holders of social power through their placement in society as a discursively dominant force, controlling not only what information we receive but how it is perceived as well. The combination of this inherent power structure and the language used to present a public discourse forms the duality of micro level and macro level analysis necessary to provide a complete Critical Discourse Analysis. While the text itself may be a micro-representation of Proposition 8 in California, the discourse provides a larger macro-context of the dominant definition of marriage in American society.

In addition to the social power and dominance held by the media, by reporting on a political event (Proposition 8 in the California general election), and presenting information about the components of the event (viewpoints for and against proposition 8), the media must also be seen as participating in Political Discourse. If nothing else, this can be defended by the simple reality that many Americans receive the bulk of their information of political and other current events through the lens of the media. Regardless of whether this occurs consciously or not, the staff writers of the Chronicle, and thus the Chronicle itself, are responsible for the dissemination and perpetuation of dominant social structures and ideologies, legitimizing the viewpoints of the dominant majority at the expense of the dominated minorities, in this case same-sex marriage supporters.

### **3. Methodology**

This paper focuses on data from the San Francisco Chronicle, utilizing only print edition articles from November 1-20, 2008. Only articles written by Chronicle staff writers were included, and for an article to be included, its headline needed to state either "Prop 8" or "Same-sex marriage". In addition,

all online-only articles, opinion or editorial pieces, and any Associated Press (AP) feed stories were purposely omitted. This helped to create a more succinct data set, and also limited the data to articles in the Chronicle that would be most likely to be interpreted by readers as 'news-only' and 'neutral'.

The dates were chosen to provide a context to analyze if any difference existed between pre- and post-election coverage, and to provide enough time after the election to collect data regarding the several protests, rallies, and judicial actions being reported on. One article that fit all criteria was ultimately not included because while the headline, “Pelosi says voters misunderstood Prop. 8,” suggested coverage of Prop 8, it instead provided only a brief mention of Pelosi's response to Prop 8 before continuing into a lengthy discussion of other issues surrounding the general election.

The San Francisco Chronicle was also chosen as a focus because of its place in the state's media spectrum. In addition to being one of the state's largest circulated papers (and indeed, the Bay Area's largest), it was of interest because, while it is considered state-wide to be the most liberal of the major newspaper publications in California, it is a middle-of-the-road publication among San Francisco area publications, and provided a way to display that even a 'liberal' news source provides a platform for power inequalities and the perpetuation of social disparities through discourse.

As mentioned above, I will use the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis to look at both macro and micro representations within the text by using initially a top-down approach to uncover the main, overarching themes found within the data. From there, these recurring themes are looked at separately with a bottom-up approach, relying on various syntactic and semantic resources such as agency, framing, lexical choice, presuppositions, and more. Through this combination of discourse level and sentence level analysis, I will show how these data 1. are used to perpetuate, defend, and

restore a 'traditional' definition of marriage to the social discourse; 2. place blame on same-sex marriage proponents for losing while simultaneously giving credit to the Yes on 8 supporters, using syntactic agency to do so; and 3. downplay the efforts of both the No on 8 campaign and those who demonstrated against the passage of Prop 8 after the election. In addition to these, I will include some additional discursive strategies and themes as they serve to de-legitimize same-sex marriage.

#### **4. Data Presentation and Analysis**

With power and control of one or more groups by a socially dominant group serving as a central component of CDA, a discussion of the dichotomy of 'we vs. them' must therefore also be key to a Critical Discourse Analysis. While the overarching 'we vs. them' of this data is between those who support Proposition 8 vs. those who don't, this dichotomy is expressed in several different ways, each serving specific purposes toward the ways 'traditional' marriage remains legitimized as same-sex marriage is ultimately de-legitimized.

In the data, there were three major ways that Proposition 8 was being discussed:

1. Defending/Restoring Tradition – The data shows a perpetuation of and preference for a return to 'traditional' marriage in social discourse, which downplays the validity of and creates a perception of subversion toward same-sex marriage.
2. Agency, Blame, and Credit – The data credits religion with a victory while placing blame on same-sex marriage proponents, simultaneously forcing agency on No on 8 supporters and removing it from same-sex marriage opponents.
3. Coverage of Post-election Protests – which downplayed their importance and portrayed the

events and participants in a negative light.

These different discursive approaches each serve to further the de-legitimization of same-sex marriage in a different manner, and will be discussed in the following three sections. Additionally, there are some secondary topics, such as thematic frames and the use of demographic data of voting patterns that appear throughout the data to support the hypotheses found through the three larger strategies. These will be discussed in the fourth section of the data analysis.

#### **4.1 Defending/Restoring Tradition**

The linguistic means by which same-sex marriage is and continues to be de-legitimized begins simply with the perpetuation of the current definition of marriage as “traditional”:

*Example 1: “Prop 8 wasn't the only victory for backers of traditional marriage Tuesday.” (Wildermuth 6 Nov)*

*Example 2: “For many Christian groups and other supporters of traditional marriage, Prop. 8 is a desperately needed firewall...” (Wildermuth 2 Nov)*

Continuing to proclaim the socio-historical definition of marriage as traditional and family oriented – and therefore defending Proposition 8 as “restoring the traditional definition of marriage” (Egelko 20 Nov) – creates a discourse that suggests that same-sex marriage is (and was) subversive and damaging to the current social norms.

The data repeatedly refer to opposite-sex marriage as the norm and as traditional. This simple equation of traditional as normal places anything described as traditional in a more positive light and gives it the default legitimization within the context of our heteronormative society and related social

discourse. One way the data uses this to further downplay the importance of validating (or legitimizing) same-sex marriages is through the choice of quotes embedded in the articles:

*Example 3: "I never took gay marriage as something that would stay in place because this country is so wound up about sex and marriage, [Mike Cohn] said." (Zito 5 Nov)*

*Example 4: "they considered themselves married long before the state made it legal," (Egelko 1 Nov)*

*Example 5: "'people ask me if I'm married,' said Peper, a 52-year-old psychologist. 'I'll say yes, regardless of Prop. 8.'" (Egelko 1 Nov)*

The vast majority of the quotes by same-sex couples who have married or would like to marry suggest that the institution of marriage is unimportant for the views they have of their relationship. What is lacking proper coverage is the discussion of the importance of marriage as a social institution and the socially important benefits that come from being married that do not come with the legal benefits provided through other civil partnerships. This is showing the readers only the point of view of gay couples who "consider themselves married" even without the social institution of marriage, whether through the state's previously existing domestic partnerships or otherwise, and that "it doesn't really matter" what the outcome of Proposition 8 is. The reader is given cause, then, to assume that there is no point in challenging the norms of "traditional marriage", because the couples who would benefit from it themselves don't even find it important enough. This framing and choice of which points of view to include clearly reduce the chance for same-sex marriage to gain legitimization.

Also present in the data is a dialogue portraying the passage of Proposition 8 as the culmination of a natural progression of events connecting the present to the past. Discussed in Duranti's 2006 article about political narratives, politicians (or in this case the media, which is partaking in political discourse by providing a representation of a political issue) must create coherence by portraying the present as

being naturally connected to the past through a logical progression. The articles in the Chronicle do this repeatedly in their representations of the history of the same-sex marriage issue:

*Example 6: "Historically, the odds are against the challengers of Prop. 8's constitutionality." (Egelko 19 Nov)*

*Example 7: "Approved by 52 percent of voters, Prop. 8 **restored** the definition of marriage – a union of a man and a woman – that the court had overturned May 15." (Egelko 20 Nov, emphasis mine)*

*Example 8: "People have a strong attachment to traditional marriage, and that's the way they voted." (Frank Shubert, who ran the Prop 8 campaign; in Wildermuth 6 Nov)*

This is contrasted with the illustration of same-sex marriage as rash, civilly disobedient, forceful, subversive, and socially explosive:

*Example 9: "Newsom's rash decision four years ago to allow same-sex marriages..." (Allday 6 Nov)*

*Example 10: "Newsom kicked it off with an act of civil disobedience... the marriage of two women who had been together more than 50 years..." (Allday 6 Nov)*

*Example 11: "...waiting to see what happens next in a social melee that has stretched across the years." (Wildermuth 2 Nov)*

*Example 12: "Newsom set off a political and social explosion when he ordered marriage licenses issued to same-sex couples in the city." (Wildermuth 5 Nov)*

This contrast sets up a dichotomy between the traditional norms, shown repeatedly in a positive light to defend the historically legitimized definition of marriage, and same-sex marriage, described above negatively, through semantically loaded descriptions (words such as "melee" and "explosion", for example) which set up an implied failure on the part of same-sex marriage supporters to provide the level of coherence of past to present that is portrayed in the descriptions of supporters of "traditional" marriage through descriptors such as "restoring" and "strong attachment".

Thus, while the passage of Proposition 8 is discussed as a restoration to the historic norm of

marriage as between only a man and a woman, same-sex marriage attempts throughout the same time frame are shown to be nothing more than an unsuccessful attempt at derailing the traditions of marriage, instead of a logical connection between past and present.

Combined, the articles come to a conclusion that because of these feelings and past events, California voters, like the voters in several other states, “decided they could not support same-sex marriages, writing into the state Constitution that only a man and a woman may legally wed,” (Allday 6 Nov). Not only does this serve to legitimize Proposition 8 at the expense of those who support same-sex marriage, it suggests that despite several attempts in the past, the vote proves that it is only 'traditional' marriage that deserves legitimization, reducing the credibility and legitimization of same-sex supporters from future attempts at changing the current social norms of marriage.

#### **4.2 Blame, Credit, and Agency**

Another important way these articles perpetuate and legitimize the historical definition of marriage is through agency and blame. This is done through removing agency in passive syntactic structures when blame is placed on same-sex marriage proponents, while instead making positive assessments of, or what I will call giving credit to, the Yes on 8 campaign and its supporters. The religious groups, often portrayed as interchangeable with the Yes on 8 campaign, were credited with winning and gaining another victory in the fight to protect traditional marriage, with words and phrases such as “stepping up” to pass prop 8, portraying religious groups as creating “alliances” and “marshaling support” for their cause:

*Example 13: “Catholics, Mormons allied to pass Prop. 8” (Headline, Kuruvila 10 Nov)*

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*Example 14: "Exit polls show that religious views had a profound effect on the result" (Kuruvila 10 Nov)*

*Example 15: "Californians voted their religion... when they pushed Prop. 8 to victory" (Wildermuth 6 Nov)*

*Example 16: "Yes on 8 sought to marshal support among many religions, while the No on 8 campaign often put religion on the sidelines." (Kuruvila, 10 Nov)*

Giving credit and positive association to the supporters of Proposition 8 for its passage thus creates negative associations for the opposing side, putting them on the losing end, and placing the blame on them for not doing enough to sway the public to change their views on marriage. In addition to the inferences that crediting the Yes side creates, the No on 8 campaign and its spokespersons are portrayed as directly responsible for their loss. This suggests that the passage of Proposition 8 is due to their failure to successfully challenge and change the perceptions of the populace toward gay marriage, subsequently complaining about their loss as "sore losers":

*Example 17: "Stringfellow said No on 8's relative neglect of religion had a particularly profound effect on Latinos and African Americans." (Kuruvila 10 Nov)*

*Example 18: "Kors and other opponents of the measure also complained about what they considered to be false statements and questionable tactics by the Prop. 8 campaign." (Egelko & Wildermuth 7 Nov)*

*Example 19: "Supporters of Prop. 8 suggested that the opponents were little more than sore losers making a desperate attempt to overturn their loss on election day." (Egelko & Wildermuth 7 Nov)*

This dichotomy between blame and credit not only de-legitimizes the No on 8 campaign as ineffective and unsuccessful, it strengthens the continuing argument for traditional marriage in that it pre-supposes that a burden exists on the No on 8 side to convince the populace to back same-sex marriage, and then portrays it as not being able to succeed in its task to overcome that burden.

In addition, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, who is often portrayed as being the single driving force behind the No on Prop 8 campaign and the same-sex marriage issue as a whole, is repeatedly directly blamed for the same-sex marriage issue's journeys, temporary victories, and

ultimate losses. This blame, however, is consistently done through passive syntactic construction, eliminating agency of who is blaming, and instead focuses only on Newsom as receiving blame:

*Example 20: "Newsom has taken his lumps for the euphoric, over-the-top speech he gave..." (Wildermuth 2 Nov)*

*Example 21: "Newsom has been blamed for a variety of shortcomings related to same-sex marriage"*

*Example 22: "When he refused to listen, he was eventually blamed for the party's failing to win the presidency."*

*Example 23: "Newsom has taken the blame all over again, this time for the loss of same-sex marriage."  
(Ex. 21-23: Allday 6 Nov)*

Placing Mayor Newsom at the forefront of the same-sex marriage issue by removing agency while placing blame squarely on Newsom himself, as well as portraying him as single-handedly responsible for bringing about the social issue of same-sex marriage in the first place moves the focus from the issue of same-sex marriage to the antics that Mayor Newsom performed in the "same-sex marriage saga" (Allday 6 Nov). The lack of agency also serves to protect other groups from the responsibility of placing blame on Newsom and the No on 8 supporters, allowing the positive associations of the other groups to remain in tact while removing credibility and legitimization from supporters of same-sex marriage.

### **4.3 Post-Election Protests**

The third major focus found in the data comes from the articles that report on the protests and demonstrations that arose in the aftermath of Proposition 8's passage. With grassroots demonstrations and protests organized immediately in the wake of the passage of Proposition 8, many same-sex marriage proponents have claimed that we are in the midst of another civil rights movement. However,

events such as protests and demonstrations rely on the media to get their message beyond the scope of those in attendance and their supporters. In this situation, the media has almost exclusive power and control over what is and isn't reported and how the information is shared with the public at large. In all, four articles from the data set are devoted to demonstrations and protests following the passage of Proposition 8. This section will show examples of the use of lexical choice, semantic framing, and an improper balance of coverage in these four articles to downplay both the importance and legitimization of the protesters, and control the perceptions of the protests and protesters.

The choice of descriptors of the protests and protesters is one clear way that the media creates a framework with which to perceive the demonstrations. Throughout the data, the articles describe the protesters as angry, willing to be arrested, causing traffic messes, infuriated, and berating of opponents:

*Example 24: "Walker stood holding a banner across Market Street and said she was prepared to be arrested." (Fernandez 8 Nov)*

*Example 25: "...two African American men infuriated many demonstrators by loudly arguing in favor of Prop. 8. They were berated repeatedly by opponents of the proposition," (Fernandez 8 Nov)*

*Example 26: "The crackling outrage against California's vote to ban same-sex marriage spread across the nation Saturday." (Fagan & King 16 Nov)*

*Example 27: "But the anger over Prop. 8 only seems to be growing." (Wildermuth & Bulwa 10 Nov)*

Although civil rights movements and struggles may involve elements of anger in reaction to the status quo, many do not, and much discussion on remaining peaceful has dominated the protest speeches and dialogue. By placing words that provide a semantic framework of violence and anger, the validity and credibility of the protesters' message is reduced, thus de-legitimizing the protests and portraying them instead as an unsuccessful reaction to the election, not as the beginning of a movement for civil rights.

In addition, though this data does mention that the protesters suggest their purpose is to begin a civil rights movement, they repeatedly describe the events of the protesters as a “backlash” to the passage of Proposition 8 while also including a quote from a professor at UC Berkeley that suggests that the current reaction to Prop 8 is “a backlash, not a movement.”

*Example 28: “The backlash against the state's new ban on gay and lesbian marriage intensified over the weekend, with thousands of people gathering around the Bay Area and California during mostly peaceful protests.” (Wildermuth & Bulwa 10 Nov)*

*Example 29: “Vaisey said he is closely watching the response and said it could be the first state of a larger movement – but that depends on protesters. 'For that, you need to get beyond some of the stuff that is happening,' he said. 'If the focus is a religious group that is not going to change its doctrine and has no power over public policy, then what you get is a backlash, not a movement.’” (Buchanan 15 Nov)*

By offering the distinction between a backlash and a movement while also describing the actions of the protesters as a backlash creates a clear de-legitimization of the attempts by the protesters to create a movement and get their message across to the public. While a subset of the protests were geared toward religious organizations, such as the Mormon church, and a marginal amount of the protesters carried signs responding to the religious involvement supporting Proposition 8, the vast majority of the protests and the protesters were not actively participating in any efforts against religious groups. In choosing to focus on this small aspect of the protests and avoiding a discourse on what was most prominently stated at the rallies (that the message should be one of love, that the protests should remain peaceful, and that we need to look forward to the court cases and not back at who voted what), the vast majority of the public, i.e. anyone who wasn't in attendance at the protests or rallies, only sees the distorted view that is presented to them from the media's coverage and provides a sense of disarray, a lack of purpose, and a de-legitimized view in the public eye.

#### **4.4 Supporting Discursive Strategies**

Besides the three examples above, this data had many other features that served to further de-legitimize same-sex marriage. While there isn't room to discuss each of these in depth, the ones I will cover in this section include: thematic frames such as portraying same-sex supporters as unconfident, as well as using the demographics of the voting patterns to remove validity from same-sex marriage supporters' political base.

The first of these strategies was the ways that the data portray the No on 8 campaign as lacking confidence in themselves and their message. Both before and after the election, the No on 8 campaign is quoted as fearful that the public will not accept what they are trying to do, and thus avoid certain connotations or discussions:

*Example 30: "Prop 8 opponents, worried that many voters were not enamored with the idea of same-sex marriage..." (Wildermuth 5 Nov)*

*Example 31: "Stringfellow believes the campaign was afraid it would get smeared by allegations tying homosexuality to pedophilia." (Kuruvila 10 Nov)*

*Example 32: "No on 8 campaigners were told by strategists not to discuss children, an issue that has particular significance for family-oriented religious groups." (Kuruvila 10 Nov)*

This sense of uncertainty and lack of confidence serves to undermine the credibility of the same-sex marriage supporters, and creates a perception that they themselves don't even feel strongly enough about their message to stand up for their viewpoints. Without a feeling of confidence or strength in their own message, the reader can surmise that the message is not important or valid, and therefore not deserving of their attempts to gain legitimization. Furthermore, it in essence solidifies the viewpoints of the legitimized majority that there is indeed something subversive and negative about the message if the proponents of the message themselves are afraid of it.

The second of the supporting arguments found throughout the data is that of the demographic contrasts of the voters. Indeed, many examples of 'we vs. them' are posited to show who voted in favor or against Prop 8, such as: Bay Area (No on 8) vs. the rest of California (Yes on 8), actively religious (Yes on 8) vs. not religious (No on 8), young voters (No on 8) vs. older voters (Yes on 8), and whites (No on 8) vs. minorities (Yes on 8). Crucially, however, there is a repeated mention that the one dichotomy that did *not* decide the outcome of Proposition 8 as would have been expected was the difference between liberals and conservatives. In the ten days following the election, two entire articles dedicate themselves to demographic information, and prominently feature the 'expected' outcome of liberal being for gay-marriage and conservative being against it as false, instead allowing both liberals and conservatives to be against gay-marriage:

*Example 33: "This issue is very separate from what we usually think of as liberal and conservative,' he said." (Knight 14 Nov, quoting David Latterman from the San Francisco Department of Elections)*

*Example 34: "Californians voted their religion, not their political party, when they pushed Proposition 8 to victory and banned same-sex marriage in the state," (Wildermuth 6 Nov)*

*Example 35: "While Obama publicly backed the 'No on Prop. 8' effort, African American voters had no trouble voting overwhelmingly for the man who will be the nation's first black president and then voting 70 percent in favor of Prop. 8" (Wildermuth 6 Nov)*

*Example 36: "Both Barack Obama and Joe Biden could give 100 percent support to the campaign's efforts to preserve rights, even though neither of them supports same-sex marriage." (Wildermuth 5 Nov)*

The Obama quotes drive home this viewpoint, especially in the portrayal of Obama, whose campaign's central component was the concept of change, as not wanting to change the definition of marriage, despite vocal support for the efforts of the No on 8 campaign. This provides a way to create distance between the liberal ideologies that many of its readers (as well as many Obama supporters) hold fast to and the issue of same-sex marriage. Further, it allows the Chronicle to maintain its

coherence and perceived status as a relatively liberal news source while simultaneously de-legitimizing the attempts to change the institution of marriage to include same-sex marriages. While demographic information is, to some extent, mere fact, and useful for both sides of the issue, the distinction the Chronicle makes between liberal and conservative goes beyond that of official demographics, and uses the demographics in a subjective, analytical way that departs from the direct reporting of statistics.

## **5. Interpretations and Conclusions**

Throughout this data, a Critical Discourse Analysis of syntactic, lexical, semantic, and thematic elements shows how the San Francisco Chronicle de-legitimizes same-sex marriage and its attempts to gain support and equality in our society. This is done, as we have seen, through several concepts, such as perpetuating traditional social norms, downplaying the importance of same-sex marriage as a social institution, downplaying the viewpoints of supporters of same-sex marriage, and de-legitimizing the efforts of the demonstrators protesting the passage of Prop 8.

It is also important to note that the Chronicle's coverage accomplishes this while maintaining their status in the public eye as a liberal news source, distancing the idea of being liberal from the issue of same-sex marriage, which further weakens the message of same-sex marriage supporters who rely on liberal and progressive political ideologies to garner support and seek further legitimization of their message.

Through the data, a complex set of roles appears to be simultaneously played by the media. While the media is, on the surface, simply reporting events, they are also managing to perpetuate the legitimization of 'traditional' marriage as well as reacting to the desire of same-sex marriage proponents

to use the media's reporting of events to alter our societies current ideologies surrounding same-sex marriage (van Dijk 1995). In addition, they use their discursive power to control the perception of events surrounding Proposition 8, including the protests and the lawsuits filed in the wake of Prop 8's passage. By downplaying the importance or support for these viewpoints, they dominate discourse in a way that suggests same-sex marriage should not be legitimized, and that it isn't important enough of an issue to change the current definition of our social institution of marriage.

With Critical Discourse Analysis ultimately concerned with bringing to light how discourse supports and perpetuates power inequalities and social disparities, the hope is that an analysis that displays this clearly will serve to educate those who otherwise would not have recognized or noticed the inequality. Without making an inequality known, nothing can be done to remedy it, and only through time and allowing a discourse to take place that addresses these inequalities can they be reversed and allow for both discursive and social equality.

While we have made significant progress from the past, this analysis highlights the fact that there is still a lot of work ahead to truly achieve equality in a society that has such profound ideologies to create a dichotomy between legitimized groups and de-legitimized groups in terms of civil rights and marriage. Even in media coverage serving an area known for its progressive liberal politics, socially established power relationships and macro views of our society still provide a way to de-legitimize a group of individuals seeking equality in all areas of their lives.

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