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# **NEWS OF AN EPIDEMIC:**

**Exploring the  
Discourse of 'Deviance'  
in the Construction of AIDS**

**Robyn D. Sussel**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Communication Studies**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Masters of Arts (Media Studies) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**September, 1992**

**c Robyn D. Sussel, 1992**



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## **ABSTRACT**

### **NEWS OF AN EPIDEMIC: Exploring the Discourse of 'Deviance' in the Construction of AIDS**

Robyn D. Sussel

Several analysts have argued that the identification of "deviant" groups and behaviours is central to newswork, as is correcting or controlling this deviance. While the news media's emphasis of marginalized groups in the AIDS discourse helps to support this theory, a content and textual analysis of two English Canadian newspapers showed that not all "deviant" groups and behaviours were deemed newsworthy. Specifically, gay men were under-represented in the discourse despite evidence that four out of five AIDS cases in Canada affected this population. English Canadians, therefore, know little of the devastating affect this disease has had on the community hit the hardest.

This study concludes that gay men were poorly and unsubstantively represented in the discourse for two reasons. First, the news media's inability to institutionally "control" or balance certain deviant behaviours, a common news practice, renders them unable to frame the story in an "acceptable" manner. While it was not impossible to construct these stories, newswriters would have to break routines, formulas, and the time-bound rhythm of newswork to frame the story adequately.

Secondly, the inherent values of newswriters and the hegemonic boundaries of our society exclude some deviance from public discourse. The perception of the audience as a heterosexual mass suggests homosexuality lies outside of that which is acceptably "different."

Given the under-representation of one marginalized group in the media's discourse on AIDS, this study seeks to modify the news theory of deviance as central to news to say that deviance, packaged with institutional means to correct the deviance (i.e. the law or police action) and within a window of "acceptable deviance," more clearly describes the essence of newswork.

## ***DEDICATION***

*This thesis is inspired by, and dedicated to,  
Canadians living with HIV/AIDS.*

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## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Neither AIDS nor news actually exist. Rather the terms "AIDS" and "news" group a complex range of realities into simple, reduced concepts: news is the events of the day; AIDS is a fatal illness. Both are used in our culture as nouns descriptive enough to mean or symbolize phenomena for which we have a collective understanding. And both have come to be understood as reality rather than a description of the more complex phenomena to which they allude.

Because this gulf exists between actuality and understanding in both AIDS and news, a study of both concepts becomes a study in how the construction of one influences the construction of the other. That is, how do news practices, operating in tandem with other cultural practices, package the idea of AIDS? And what impact does this double masquerade have on our understanding of real people infected with HIV as well as our understanding of the actual threat of this "disease" to our society?

Robert Hackett says that news is an "*artifact* routinely produced within specialized institutions," (Hackett, 1986, p. 141). This "artifact" offers a slice of reality, entrenched with the values and biases of those who produce it. Gaye Tuchman calls this "slice" a window frame, suggesting that news presents us with a small view of the larger world. She and others have claimed that choosing what falls within this slice or frame is a culturally specific practice (Tuchman, 1978, p. 1).

The term AIDS describes a collection of diseases thought to be facilitated by a virus called the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. In Canada, 6116 cases of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) have been

diagnosed since 1982 when the syndrome was first identified. Three thousand, seven hundred, and forty-six (3746) of these people have died of infections and cancers invited by HIV which appears to devastate the human immune system (*Surveillance Update*, April, 1992, p. 1). In the U.S., Africa, and other parts of the world, the syndrome is much more wide-spread. Some have called it an epidemic, a pandemic, even a plague.

Several characteristics combine to make this epidemic different from other contemporary diseases. First, it is an infectious disease - transmitted via bodily fluids such as blood and semen. Unprotected sexual intercourse, the sharing of intravenous needles, and the infusion of blood and blood products have all been shown to transmit the virus with varying degrees of efficiency.

A second unique characteristic of AIDS is that it is a syndrome - not a single disease. A person with AIDS may have several diseases at once, many of which have no known or at least, definitive treatment. The strict meaning of the term AIDS has changed over the past ten years as more diseases have been grouped under its umbrella. While portrayed by the media as a fixed social concept, AIDS is not a fixed medical concept, but one that has metamorphosed and expanded over time.<sup>1</sup>

A third defining characteristic of AIDS is its stigmatization in our culture. AIDS carries more blame, more fear, and more judgment than most other diseases. It has come to be constructed within our cultural institutions as a disease of deviants: people who lack self-control, who have dependent personalities, who pursue pleasure with hedonistic abandon, people who are morally bankrupt, criminal, perverted:

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, until 1992, many of the most common symptoms experienced by women did not fall under the Centre for Disease Control's definition of AIDS. Due to intense lobbying by activist groups, the AIDS definition now includes these diseases.

**The unsafe behaviour that produces AIDS is judged to be more than just weakness. It is indulgence, delinquency - addictions to chemicals that are illegal and to sex regarded as deviant. (Sontag, 1989, p. 113)**

**AIDS has been construed as a disease affecting marginalized groups for many reasons which include the historical progression of the disease, (affecting some groups more than others) as well as the manner in which this progression has been interpreted by our institutions including schools, the family, religious institutions, legal institutions, medicine, and our cultural institutions, of which the media is a part.**

**The news media's definition of news, and their methods for gathering this news have contributed in part to the stigmatization of this disease. I say in part because news workers do not practice their craft in a vacuum. News is just one of several cultural industries which influence our understanding of the world. And news workers are people steeped in a world of ideology and cultural practices which shape their understanding as much as it shapes our own.**

### **News, AIDS, and Deviance**

**In my research I've discovered that all deviance is not created equal. While I will use existing research to show that deviance is a major characteristic of news, my own research, while also supporting this theory, has shown that some marginalized groups are not acceptable to the news media and are therefore under-represented. For example, while homosexuality and homosexuals fall within the mainstream definition of "deviance," my research on**

two English Canadian newspapers shows that the impact of AIDS on the lives of this group is vastly under-represented. These findings are corroborated by a Canadian study conducted by the Fraser Institute (whose ideological slant is not in keeping with my own) and an American academic study, both of which I discovered after analyzing my own results (*On Balance*, July/August, 1989; and Drushel, in Wolf and Kielwasser, 1991). Both studies found a similar omission of the representation of gay men in Canadian television reports and the American press. And, while not backed by quantitative data, Simon Watney also concludes, using textual analysis of the British press that gay men are indeed, under-represented (Watney, 1987).

While I hope to prove that the impact on the lives of homosexual men is under-represented, I don't mean to say that AIDS is not associated by the news media with gay men, or linked to gay men as those we can blame for the spread of AIDS. According to a study conducted by Ivan Emke, "the link between HIV and homosexuality has remained one of the more predominant themes of the mainstream media discourse" (Emke, (a) 1991, p.325). My research too, showed gay men to be *associated* with the disease in a consistent fashion. But this association is usually made in passing - at the end of the article or in a single phrase suggesting this link. Gay men are usual present in a list of those at "high risk" for getting the disease. For example, in an article about hemophiliacs, prostitutes, or children, gay men, especially in the early 1980's, were still mentioned at the end of the article as among those who "usually" get AIDS. None of these passing references facilitate a reader's understanding of the impact of this disease on this group of people. Rather than a true representation of gay men, we are offered only a label, or perhaps a vessel with the contents hidden or removed. I will argue that this kind of discourse

leaves us with a qualitative under-representation of the impact of AIDS on gay men and a gross over-representation of their culpability for the presence of this disease in our society.

In the *Globe and Mail*, over nine years of coverage, the gay community or gay people were central to just 26 articles. In the *Toronto Star*, only 13 articles discussed the effect of AIDS on this community. Despite the fact that eight out of ten cases of AIDS are attributable to homosexual or bisexual activity (Canadian AIDS Society, 1991, p. 6) this translates to only 3% of *Toronto Star* articles and 6.8% of articles in the *Globe and Mail* focussing on the impact of AIDS on various groups (see Appendix 1).

Perhaps it can be argued that "gay men" are not a group and quite rightly should not be constructed as such. But the media do tend to feature other people infected by HIV as members of groups (about 50% of all articles) - including hemophiliacs, prostitutes, doctors, health care workers, immigrants, mothers, Haitians (in the early 80s), and basketball players (in the early 1990s). These are the media's "risk groups" which they borrowed from the language of epidemiology and science, and perpetuated throughout the AIDS discourse.

The issue of the under-representation of gay men in the AIDS discourse became an important one to me when I noticed a significant gulf between my lived experience in working with people with AIDS, and their representation in the press. In meeting many people with AIDS, and working with those who participate in their lives (doctors, nurses, counsellors, advocates, and volunteers) I found that the reality faced by the gay community in particular did not appear in the news. In addition to my academic interest in the apparent



failings of a piece of news theory, a much more important consequence may be the result of this omission.

For example, the news coverage I've analyzed misleads English Canadians about the devastating effect this disease has had on the very community which has suffered the most.<sup>2</sup> After reading more than 200 articles, I was more informed about the angst experienced by young, HIV negative heterosexuals in practicing safe sex than about the devastating impact of this disease on a group of individuals who have lost community, friends, support, lovers, and lifelong partners, all while living with the illness themselves. If ignorance breeds intolerance, I worry about the result of the substantive omission of the gay community in the context of AIDS. Perhaps if Canadians were presented with information about how this disease has affected the lives of people within this community, the compassion, understanding, and empathy of all Canadians would at least have the chance of being enhanced.

### **The Research Question**

While other studies of deviance and news have been conducted in Canada, (Ericson et al. 1987) as well as other studies of AIDS and news, (Emke, (a) 1991), this study draws on both these fields to explore another question.

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<sup>2</sup> This analysis refers to English media only. An analysis of French newspapers in Canada was beyond the scope of this study. A comparison of the two would make an interesting follow-up to this research.

Given the theory of deviance as central to news, and because of the omission of gay men from the AIDS discourse, I wondered whether or not some marginalized behaviours or groups are more acceptable to the Canadian news media's definition of news than others. I also hoped to discover if our society's ability to correct or reform these so-called "deviant" behaviours, (or at least create the impression of reform), influences the media's decisions about newsworthiness as suggested by Herbert Gans, Richard Ericson, and others. So the question remains: Is all deviance newsworthy? And if not, why not?

Ivan Emke recently completed a thorough overview of Canadian media coverage of AIDS in a doctoral dissertation in which he analyzed the coverage of AIDS in mainstream texts, counter-cultural texts, and the gay press (Emke, (a), 1991). Rather than provide an overview of all types of AIDS coverage as he did, I've selected a single "site" of representation - gay men in AIDS - in which to explore a single point of news theory - the relevance of the theory of deviance in the news.

While selecting a specific site, I realize that the representation of any group cannot be attributed singularly to the news media. Rather, all meaning is constructed through our social institutions, all of which contribute to the signification process.

If the news media do feed on the marginalization of certain behaviours and groups, AIDS offers a smorgasbord of story angles. Firstly, because it is a disease, AIDS deviates from the norm of "health" (Emke, (a) 1991, fn 269, p. 245). And because its main "risk groups" have grown over the past ten years to include drug abusers, prostitutes, the poor, homosexuals, prisoners, people of colour, and non-North Americans, AIDS offers a banquet of media-defined

deviance.<sup>3</sup> This is in contrast to the minimal coverage of breast cancer which afflicts a homogeneous (and largely silent) portion of the population, or lung cancer which affects what the media define as the "general population."

Media researchers including Stuart Hall, John Hartley, Herbert Gans, and most recently, Richard Ericson have each developed arguments for explaining the emphasis on deviance in the news. Hall refers to the coverage of deviance in the news as seeking out anything that offers a "breach of expectations." Herbert Gans says that newswriters rely on identifying four kinds of "disorder" (what I read to be his notion of deviance) for a good story: social, technological, moral, and natural. According to this definition of deviance, earthquakes, car crashes, demonstrations, strikes, and homosexuality all fall under the umbrella of a good news story.

Richard Ericson takes the point even further by calling deviance the single most important ingredient in a news item: "Deviance in myriad forms is the essence of the things or persons journalists concentrate on in producing the news" (Ericson et al. 1987 p. 4). Ericson, a criminologist, defines deviance as anything that disrupts institutional order. He says that it's the construction of the negative, which highlights all that is deemed positive in our society. Given this theory, and using AIDS and HIV as a case study, I set out to determine if some forms of deviance fall outside or go beyond the media's definition of newsworthiness.

My analysis shows that the news media do rely on the marginalization of groups and behaviours and the identification of deviance to construct the news. In the context of HIV/AIDS, intravenous drug users, prostitutes, people

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<sup>3</sup> By "media-defined" deviance, I mean those groups which the media position as apart from the mainstream culture. This will be discussed at greater length later.

of colour, and prisoners received significant attention in the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* - in varying degrees. However, because of the neglect of Canada's largest marginalized group in the context of AIDS in the pages of Canada's largest daily newspapers, I hope to support the argument that deviance, - packaged with a means of control and within a window of acceptability - more clearly describes the essence of news.

In order to support this theory I will explore the boundaries between acceptable deviance and unacceptable deviance focussing on the news media's attempts to correct the deviation from the norm.

Using news theory that suggests newswriters help us "order" our worlds through newswork, which identifies imbalance and corrects it as proposed and supported by Herbert Gans and Richard Ericson, I hope to determine if this angle would help to explain my findings. That is, is the coverage of marginalized groups usually coupled with ways and means to correct or reform the deviation? Or does this "reform" coverage serve to reassure those who conform to society's "norms" that they are among the morally correct, a message which may also serve to reinforce their socially acceptable behaviour? And if this is true, how do the parameters of newswork restrict the ability of the newswriter to construct deviance when its retribution is not institutionally prescribed?

## **Deviance, Marginalization, and Stigma**

Deviance is a term much studied by the disciplines of sociology and psychology.<sup>4</sup> To offer a brief explanation of what has come to be the theory of deviance in news, I looked at the theories of stigma, marginalization and deviance in the sociological literature, particularly as they pertain to illness and sexual difference. Erving Goffman, Howard Becker, and A.K. Cohen all wrote extensively on the subject, often using illness (and madness) as examples of deviance.

Starting with some definitions of the historical notion of deviance, Erving Goffman says that:

...the very general notion of a group of individuals who share some values and adhere to a set of social norms regarding conduct and regarding personal attributes, one can refer to any individual member who does not adhere to the norms as a deviator and to his peculiarity as a deviation. (Goffman, 1963, p. 141)

Cohen simply calls deviance "behaviour that violates the normative rules, understandings, or expectations of social systems," (Brody, 1987, p. 35).

People who violate normative rules, or who, for what ever reason, do not meet majority expectations, are marginalized by that majority. H. Becker has a similar view, seeing deviance as "the product of a transaction that takes place between some social group and one who is viewed by that group as a rule-breaker" (Becker, 1963, p. 10).

Goffman makes a distinction between "in-group deviants" and "social deviants." "In-group deviants" are usually single individuals whom, for one

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview see Howard S. Becker, Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, 1963.

reason or another, become the "black sheep" of the group, whether it be a family, workplace, or total institution. Goffman says that while these individuals are regarded as deviant within the group, the group tends to protect the individual if attacked from outside the group.

The "social deviants," Goffman says, "constitute [the] core" of the inquiry into deviance:

If there is to be a field of inquiry called "deviance," it is social deviants as here defined that would presumably constitute its core. Prostitutes, drug addicts, delinquents, criminals, jazz musicians, bohemians, gypsies, carnival workers, hobos, winos, show people, full time gamblers, beach dwellers, homosexuals, and the urban unrepentant poor - these would be included. These are the folk who are considered to be engaged in some kind of collective denial of the social order. (Goffman, 1963, p. 143-144)

The references to jazz musicians, beach dwellers, and show people in Goffman's 1963 publication, shows how the identification of deviance adapts to a changing ideological world; that which is acceptable and unacceptable changes over time.

Other theories identify deviance as "something essentially pathological, revealing the presence of a 'disease'" (Becker, 1963, p. 5). The metaphor of a disease has been applied literally to those who suffer from sickness and madness. These individuals have been traditionally regarded as socially and physically diseased. And, as Sander Gilman asserts, if the disease is acquired sexually, the sufferer is seen as morally diseased as well (Gilman, 1988, p. 258).

While many sociologists have written extensively on the various ways to identify the "deviants" of our society, people situated within the margins have little difficulty identifying themselves. They say that marginalization is the

process "by means of which certain people and ideas are privileged over others at any given time," (Tucker in Ferguson et al. 1990, p. 7). Some further simplify this definition saying that marginalized peoples include any individual who is not "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure." (Audre Lorde in Ferguson, et al, 1990, p. 9)

Within the context of media, John Hartley says that the 'deviants' of the western world are the 'dissidents' of totalitarian regimes:

Of course there are groups and individuals in 'our' society who also act outside the official channels. But they are not seen as dissidents: they are seen as deviants...The terms used to characterize strikes, direct action and other expressions of dissent concentrate on notions of irresponsibility, irrationality, and either mindlessness or bloody-mindedness....Exactly whose society is being so threatened is not an open question, since the consensual model requires 'society' to be everyone. Dissidents then, are mad or malicious." (Hartley, 1982 p. 84)

The "consensual model" to which Hartley refers and Stuart Hall developed is described as a social system which, while accepting plurality, reduces all needs and interests to a common denominator - those of the majority. Hall says that "this view denies any major structural discrepancies between different groups or between the very different maps of meaning in a society..." (Hall in Hartley, 1982, p. 83) So anyone who falls outside the constructed consensus, "are seen as deviant and marginal, be they skinheads or strikers" (Ibid).

It is evident from this discussion that while there is consensus on the general definition of the term "deviance," there remains a range of thought on who is in fact deviant, and why. I feel it is important for those of us who use this term, even when drawing on the theories of other analysts as I've done (Gans, Ericson, and Hartley), to clarify the meaning of the term in the context of the issue at hand.

## **The Use of the Term "Deviance" in this Thesis**

I had the opportunity to present a short out-take of my thesis at the "Second Annual National Conference on HIV/AIDS Research" in Vancouver on May 28th, 1992. My audience included scientists, social scientists, and members of the HIV+ community and their advocates. The reaction to my findings was generally enthusiastic and positive. However, one member of the Vancouver Persons With AIDS Society, Peter Donovan felt quite strongly about my use of the term "deviance" to refer to gay men. He sent me the following note directly after my presentation:

Might I suggest a change of wording for your presentation/thesis? The groups of people discussed (i.e. IVDUs, prostitutes, inmates and gay/bisexual men) might more accurately be denoted by the terms MARGINALIZED/ DISENFRANCHISED...The language of your presentation seemed to inextricably link deviance as justly definitive of the above-mentioned groups. As an HIV positive gay man, it is a further insight to me personally that it is this type of language usage which contributes to the marginalization and disenfranchisement which these communities suffer...

In discussing the issue later with Peter, we talked about the history of the theory of deviance in the news. He acknowledged that my intentions weren't at issue, but that I should be wary of unintentionally perpetuating the idea that gay men are indeed deviant. Clearly, I do not want to suggest that homosexuals or any of the other marginalized groups I discuss in this thesis are in themselves "deviant." Ericson says that "Deviance is not inherent in a person or his specific acts, but in the social reaction to the person and his behaviour" (Ericson et al, 1987, p 5). The Canadian AIDS Society says that:

To be gay, lesbian or bisexual is to be discriminated against, both by other individuals and by institutions. To be gay or lesbian is to be



defined as "other," "sick," "deviant," "abnormal," "criminal." For lesbians, gays, and bisexuals, one's own experience is not "other." Nor is it sick, deviant, abnormal or criminal. Being bisexual, gay or lesbian is not the problem; homophobia and heterosexism are the problems.<sup>5</sup>

However, when referring to the behaviour of certain groups over and over again as "deviant", I can see that the meaning risks becoming lost.

In conducting some research, I found that the term "deviance" has long been problematic for social scientists, largely because its meaning has shifted over time from a less pejorative to a more pejorative term, and then to a term used to describe a group as seen by a society - supposedly with a more neutral meaning. Howard Brody made note of this problem when attacking an attack on Talcott Parsons' conception of deviance:

Their [Siegler and Osmond] only quarrel with Parsons is that he refers to the sick role as a deviant role; they apparently fail to see that Parsons uses deviant in a descriptive rather than a pejorative sense...(Brody, 1987, p. 68 fn.)

Perhaps Parsons didn't make it clear what he meant. For this reason, I'm making it clear that I am using "deviance" in a descriptive sense; I'm using it to describe a social reaction to a group of people, not the people themselves. To avoid further confusion, I've decided to use the term "marginalized" interchangeably with the more theoretically recognizable term "deviant." I ask that readers be sensitive to the use of language in this subject area.

---

<sup>5</sup> From the Canadian AIDS Society's 1991 publication, Homophobia, Heterosexism and AIDS.

## **Thesis Outline**

My thesis will corroborate the theory that deviance is the central ingredient of news. Using one of the most popular stories of the past decade - the syndrome known as AIDS - I will show how its mysterious origins as well as demographic and epidemiologic evolution have provided the news media with their requirement for a salable news story. But I will modify the theory somewhat to suggest that some marginalized people and behaviours fall outside of the media's definition of acceptable subject matter for discussion. And that the representation of gay men does not allow for newswriters to balance the story with a means of "control," such as legal or police actions as is the case with most other marginalized groups in the AIDS arena. After this introduction to the concepts of both AIDS and news, Chapter 2 will explain my methodology and introduce the texts I used to arrive at my conclusions.

Before discussing news specifically, in Chapter 3 I will offer an overview of the social construction of AIDS as influenced by all forms of media and communications, including the news. By social construction I mean the process by which our cultural industries (including the news media) have constructed social meaning and associations to help create the syndrome known as AIDS. While much work has been done on the social construction of other illnesses such as madness, TB, and cancer, (which I will review briefly), a new body of literature appeared in the late '80s and early '90s on the social construction of AIDS itself. Douglas Crimp, Susan Sontag, Paula Triefler, Cindy Patton, and Simon Watney are among the most influential analysts of this issue and will serve as sources for an overview of how our society now understands, and

misunderstands, AIDS. After providing this overview, I will explain the place of the news media in the meaning-making machinery in order to position news as a primary definer of meaning in our society.

In Chapter 4 I will turn specifically to the role of newswork in the process of ascribing meaning to issues in our culture. Past research on the constraints, patterns, biases, and routines of news gathering has contributed to our understanding of the hows and whys of the production of many news products. I will highlight a handful of those theories which appear important to the construction of AIDS.

With this foundation in place, in Chapters 5 and 6 I will offer AIDS as a specific example of how the news media weigh newsworthiness on a scale of acceptable deviance. It is here that I will rely on qualitative textual analysis of the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* (as well as my other sources) to demonstrate the degree to which these issues are covered or not, in the context of HIV. The news media's framing of issues of sexual orientation, racism, morality, sex differences, and sexual practices as they relate to AIDS, will show how notions of "deviance" influence our understanding of this disease.

I will conclude with an exploration of the news media's attempt to correct deviance in hopes of explaining the under-representation of gay men in the AIDS discourse and propose a modifier on the theory of deviance in the news. Finally, I will offer my thoughts on strategies to change the representation of marginalized groups and suggest topics for further research.

## Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY

### The Sample: The Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star

#### • *Quantitative Analysis*

I chose the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* as my main texts in this study due to their status as Canada's largest daily newspapers. These publications are also regarded as two of the most reputable and "serious" newspapers in Canada - and ones that have devoted the most coverage to HIV/AIDS. Phil Berger, a prominent Toronto primary care physician recently commented that the "[*Globe and Mail*] has...become a leader in reporting and analyzing the AIDS epidemic" (Berger, 1992, p 378). In an interview with Health Policy Consultant, Art Wood of Toronto, he commented that the *Toronto Star* was one of the most prolific newspapers in Canada on the AIDS issue, usually having at least one reporter assigned to the beat.<sup>6</sup> I chose to use both the *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail* to not only show the generalizability of my conclusions, but to compare and contrast them when appropriate.

In order to ensure a thorough sample of the texts, I performed a CD-ROM search of nine years of *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* coverage between 1983, when the first article appeared and 1991, where I chose to end my analysis. Any story in which the words HIV or AIDS appeared in the title or subject description were documented in the search. From the approximately

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<sup>6</sup> During an interview with Art Wood in Toronto, February 19th, 1992.

2000 titles found, I eliminated those articles which did not offer an individual, a community, or a segment of society as central characters. That is, stories related to scientific breakthroughs, or which framed people with AIDS in a homogeneous way, were eliminated from the sample, leaving approximately half the total in my database. Therefore, I looked only at those articles which discussed the impact of AIDS on specific groups.

In order to obtain a manageable sample of texts, I then selected a number of articles from each newspaper for further analysis. Spanning every year of the sample and trying where I could to include articles from each of the groups (as defined by the media,<sup>7</sup>) I selected approximately 90 articles each from the *Globe* and the *Star*, representing approximately 20% of the total number of "impact" articles found using the computer search. Because of the relatively few articles about the impact of this disease on gay men, and in order to confirm my hypothesis with complete texts, I selected all articles which offered the gay community as central characters.

#### • *Qualitative Analysis*

As discussed, I used quantitative analysis to arrive at my observation that the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* under-represented the impact of AIDS on gay men. At the time when the incidence of AIDS was highest in men infected with HIV through homosexual practices, the reference to how AIDS affected this community appeared to bottom out. The Fraser Institute's study

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<sup>7</sup> These groups are clearly set out in Chapter 5.

of the CBC's *The National* and *The Journal* produced similar results, suggesting the phenomenon is not unique to Canadian newspapers (*On Balance*, July/August, 1989). An American study also found that gay men were vastly under-represented in the news, considering the size of the epidemic in that population (Drushel in Wolf and Kielwasser, 1991).

Using quantitative analysis as a jumping off point, I then qualitatively analyzed media texts in order to assess the place marginalization of certain groups played in each news story. For this, I chose to follow the lead of Teun A. van Dijk who uses discourse analysis of the press to interpret the meaning of individual articles. In his recent paper, "Media contents: the interdisciplinary study of news as discourse," van Dijk provides a (relatively) clear map of the discourse analysis he used to show how the press perpetuates racism (van Dijk in Jensen and Jankowski, 1991, p. 108-120). Because his subject area also related to a marginalized group, I felt that I was treading solid ground in following his lead.

According to this position, to analyze a text three levels can be investigated: its ideological positioning (superstructure), its wording, (style and rhetoric), and its social context (social cognition and sociocultural contexts). By dissecting a news story on each of these three levels or "dimensions," its meanings can be explored. However, the following reminder about my own position in the ideological climate I share with newswriters comes from Gaye Tuchman:

Even when news consumers use interpretive strategies that reject specific news frames, they react to the discourse of their culture. Like reporters and editors, they participate in the creation of news as a cultural response to structural conditions. (Tuchman in Jensen and Jankowski, 1991, p. 91)

## **Background Research**

Over the past year I have performed a thorough overview of the literature surrounding the representation of AIDS in our society. Because the production of news is just one of our many cultural industries, I felt it was important to position news and AIDS within the culture which frames and shapes our understanding.

There is no shortage of literature on this topic, all of it written within the last six or seven years. Much of it is written by academics and artists steeped in the post-modernist tradition because, as one author put it, AIDS is the ultimate post-modern disease (Schechter, 1990, p. 45-52).

In addition to using this body of literature to analyze the relationship between AIDS, news, and deviance in Canada, I also refer to studies conducted in both the U.S. and Canada related specifically to news and AIDS.

## **Supporting Texts**

While the *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* coverage remains my primary database, I will also refer to other media in order to highlight certain points. Or, if I have reason to believe that the *Globe* or *Star* coverage is either contrary to, or representative of other media coverage, I will highlight this by using other texts.

Over the past year, I have collected several texts from other Canadian dailies and news magazines. While using them sparingly, I will refer to a half

dozen articles which illustrated a point more vividly, or more succinctly than my primary sources.

Because my review of this literature was not complete as was my review of *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* articles, these texts are examples only, and cannot be regarded as definitive indications of each medium's coverage.

### **Researcher's Role (Participant/Observer)**

Although I'm not a journalist covering the AIDS beat, I think I may qualify for the label of "participant-observer." My position as head of the communications department of a national, government-funded, university-based AIDS research organization puts me in a role that is peripherally related to the media coverage of this issue. As the Communications Officer for the Canadian HIV Trials Network, my responsibilities include answering all media inquiries and coordinating interviews with scientists and doctors by the media. Where appropriate I often refer the journalist to other interest groups including the pharmaceutical industry, government, and most often, those people living with HIV. When doctors and scientists within our organization are interviewed, I generally brief the interviewee before the interview takes place and am present in the room at the time of the interview. I am also responsible for providing written information to the media about our organization.

Because I have been present at many of the interviews that were eventually included in news stories, I have had the privilege to know the information presented to the reporter, as well as read or hear the reporter's



interpretation of this information. What information is ignored or presented out of context would not be possible to discern without this access to the source interview, which I will refer to in my analysis where appropriate.

### **Methodological Limitations**

I encountered some barriers when conducting this study including limitations of time, resources, and the problems associated with the study of a very new disease. Firstly, while I conducted the most thorough computer search for AIDS articles possible, it is conceivable that the CD-ROM cataloguers were slightly behind the media in their categorization. For example, in the early 1980s, AIDS was simply listed under "diseases," "medicine and health," and "homosexuality/diseases" in the descriptor used to search the overall database. While I cross referenced the words HIV and AIDS in titles, it is possible stories about AIDS were published which did not contain the word in its title, and that were catalogued simply under "diseases." However, because Ivan Emke's study also looked at individual texts, I was able to ensure that I had the first few mentions of the disease in each of the two newspapers. The term "AIDS" was used regularly in the descriptors from April 15, 1985 onward, (in the *Globe and Mail*,) making it unlikely that more than a few articles were missed.<sup>8</sup>

Another limit to my methodology is my own subjectivity which is influenced, I'm sure, by my position within the AIDS research milieu. Ideally,

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<sup>8</sup> While reflecting more on the computer documentation industry than the media, it's interesting to see that AIDS did not become a category unto itself until four years after it was discovered and two years after it first appeared in most Canadian newspapers.

I would have gathered a large number of people together to categorize the articles into the "groups or individuals" that were central to each story, a task which I performed alone. Assembling these people was not practical or possible for me to accomplish due to time and resource limitations. However, because I did obtain two other studies (after arriving at my own results) which also found that gay men were under-represented in this issue, I feel that this study remains a valid one.

### Chapter 3: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF AIDS

...the news is a social institution and a cultural discourse which exists and has meaning only in relation to other institutions and discourses operating at the same time. It cannot be understood in isolation from them and the people involved in making the news have to fit their activities into a complex social network. (Hartley, 1982, p. 8-9)

News is just one of several cultural industries in Canada. As I mentioned earlier, because our cultural understanding is drawn from many arenas, the messages of the news media do not offer a singular source of information. We are bombarded daily with messages from a range of ideologically-based industries that combine to form our consciousness. The news media's coverage of AIDS in Canada fits within the larger arena of the practices of the news media, which in turn is shaped by the cultural construction of this disease:

The news, and the journalists who provide it to us, can't be understood outside the context of the media industry as a whole. If we're off to see the wizard of media oz, we will find no single set of controls, no almighty men behind the curtain. (Lee and Solomon, 1990, p. 3)

The construction of AIDS within these institutions is a critical area of understanding. AIDS, unlike many other diseases or news stories, is highly susceptible to interpretation due to how little we know about the disease. Norbert Gilmore says "AIDS is as much an idea as a disease. It is an epidemic of concepts as well as of disease." (Gilmore, in Klusacek and Morrison, 1992, p. 16) AIDS is an interpretation of an unknown ailment which has assaulted our society. Its meanings are diverse and powerful which suggests that even before opening a newspaper or watching the *Journal*, members of our society are immersed in an ideological understanding and misunderstanding of this disease.

Several social critics and commentators have recognized the importance of the construction of AIDS and have written about the themes and trends found in our social institutions. A study of the portrayal of AIDS in the news cannot be separated from our overall cultural understanding of this disease in Canada.

### **Survey of Social Construction Issues**

When reading the recent literature related to AIDS, media, and culture, several themes became evident. The stigma of the disease as well as the hate and blame entrenched in cultural texts, were preoccupations of many of the books and articles. Critiques of our society's acceptance of science and medicine and our obsession with the sanctity of the heterosexual family unit were also discussed at length. The marginalization of certain groups including homosexuals, women, racial minorities, and other "deviants" is, like in the analysis of news coverage, a constant theme of these cultural analysts.

Paula Treichler, Susan Sontag, Douglas Crimp, Cindy Patton, Stephen Schecter, Simon Watney and many others insist that by attaching meanings to AIDS and using it as a metaphor, it has come to represent more than the physical manifestations of a suppressed immune system. Rather it has come to signify issues of judgment such as immorality, promiscuity, threats to masculinity, punishment for pleasure and more.

The "mysterious" and "unknown" elements of this Syndrome are arguably part of the reason for the layers upon layers of meaning that are now attached to the disease. Susan Sontag, in her treatise on the social metaphors attached

to diseases, suggests that once the puzzle of a disease has been solved, it loses much of the meaning constructed around it.

Using the example of tuberculosis, she says that once its cause was identified, and a cure developed, it lost its social meaning as a disease afflicting "artists" and people of "sensitive dispositions" (Sontag, 1977 p.p. 37-39). She suggests that as long as a disease remains "mysterious," its meaning is invented culturally instead of scientifically. More recently cancer has been linked to people who "lack hope," were "isolated as children," and who were "unable to maintain long term relationships." It struck me that the phenomenon called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has also been linked to personality types in absence of a conclusive physiological reason for the disease.

Sontag easily debunks these "personality" links to TB because of the discovery of the physiological organism which causes the disease. She then discounts the construction of the cancer personality by pointing to the biomedical explanation of TB. The inference is that cancer too will eventually be isolated to a physiological cause. Stephen Schecter, a Canadian analyst concurs with Sontag's analysis of the stigma of certain diseases, saying that our society perceives "illness as a sign of failure, individual and social, to manage our lives." He goes on to suggest that "some things cannot be controlled, should not be controlled, and the recognition of their uncontrollable nature might be the first step in dealing with them intelligently..." (Schecter, 1990 p. 15).

However, Sontag's plea that cultural meaning be removed from disease is not supported by all commentators. Paula Triechler says that the "effort to 'make sense' of AIDS - has to be done." Taking on Sontag directly, she says that it is impossible to not treat illness as metaphor because "illness is

metaphor" (from Crimp, 1988, p. 34). Other researchers, including Treichler and Crimp have insisted that Sontag is hoping for the impossible.

The use of AIDS as a metaphor is almost a universal issue in the literature on social construction of the disease. The use of military metaphors is singled out as among the most prevalent,<sup>9</sup> (as is AIDS as signifying sexual excess, perversion, and indiscretion.)<sup>10</sup> Susan Sontag says that the "militarization" of AIDS is similar to the discourse around disease in general:

...military metaphors have more and more come to infuse all aspects of the description of the medical situation. Disease is seen as an invitation of alien organisms, to which the body responds by its own military operations, such as the mobilizing of immunological "defences," and medicine is "aggressive," as in the language of most chemotherapies. (Sontag, 1989, p. 97)

There is debate however, about whether this military metaphor is a positive or negative one. Sontag argues that the militarization of the disease creates an atmosphere of conflict and violence. "...the effect of the military imagery on thinking about sickness and health is far from inconsequential. It overmobilizes, it over-describes, and it powerfully contributes to the excommunicating and stigmatizing of the ill" (Sontag, 1990, p. 182).

In contrast, Stephen Schecter talks about the interpretation of the military metaphor as empowerment. He summed up the view of one activist who said:

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<sup>9</sup> The fact that AIDS is brought on by a virus may be significant in the military context. Sontag says that "not its infectiousness but its characteristic latency offers a more distinctive use of AIDS as a metaphor." (1989, p. 155) For example, the discourse surrounding the Gulf War saw Saddam Hussein as a "potential" threat to the world. While he was lying latent, like a virus can do for years, he could at any moment begin to reproduce, spilling from one cell (Iraq) into adjacent cells (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya), and eventually take over the whole middle east. At least, that's how the media discourse went...(see Winter, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> While Sontag lays out these points in "AIDS and its Metaphors" written in 1989, Patton, Schecter, Overall, Watney, Crimp and others also talk about these metaphors.

"...presenting AIDS to the public as a war in which everyone has to do his or her part and playing on the military metaphor to press on the government a sense of urgency." (Schechter, 1990, p. 51)

Like Sontag, Schechter is concerned about the meaning of the metaphor, but for different reasons. If adopting the language of warfare to legitimize the "battle" against AIDS, Schechter worries about its negative implications:

Yet metaphors too have a way of exploding, and as Freud taught us about slips of the tongue, words are not innocent. Do people have recourse to war analogies because they feel love is too weak, too allied to the desire that they intuitively know governments are trying to control, too sissy a word for an epoch of such virile rationality and far too complicated? (Schechter, 1991, p. 51)

It seems that AIDS has also become a metaphor for how our society views homosexuality. Gay men and women are characterized as an "incurable disease," a virus that has penetrated the "healthy body" of heterosexual society, and is multiplying to the point where it is threatening the health of the rest of the "body." This in itself has perpetuated their marginalization from the mainstream, as did constant reference to the risk groups of AIDS:

In the context of the AIDS epidemic, where the vast majority of deaths (in Western countries) has thus far occurred among gay men and IV drug-users - groups that are widely perceived as threats to society or at best as marginal members of society - the notions of purity, cleansing, and subversion implicit in this instance of the military metaphor are highly significant. (Patton, in Miller, 1992, p. 276)

While most analysts don't elaborate on how the process works, it is possible that the discourse of "attacking," "fighting," and "combatting" the virus may be extended to an aggressive stance against those who carry the virus.

While I feel, like Triechler, that metaphor cannot be separated from a disease like AIDS, I'm also wary of the military metaphor. Somehow, the

construction of AIDS as a disease of homosexuals risks turning the discourse of a war against AIDS into a battle against those who have it. As I will demonstrate in my deconstruction of news coverage of AIDS, the notion that certain people deserve blame for the spread of AIDS, rather than a virus, may be sustained by the use of hostile metaphors.

When AIDS first came to the public's attention, it was said to attack four main "risk" groups: homosexuals, Haitians, heroin (IV drug) users, and hemophiliacs - soon to be known as the Four H's. Balanced off against these groups was what came to be known as the "general population." This "us and them" scenario has characterized the media's coverage of AIDS from the beginning. The "them" category provides a group to blame for bringing the disease to "us." John Hartley identified this "us vs. them" scenario as common to news construction, creating a platform of acceptability against which "opposition" can be framed (Hartley, 1982, p. 116).

This scapegoating or blaming of the people suffering from illness is not new to AIDS. Susan Sontag, Sander Gilman, and Rose Weitz have pointed out that blame has traditionally been associated with illness:

throughout history social constructions of illnesses have involved moral judgments. From biblical descriptions of lepers' "sins" to modern descriptions of the "cancer-prone" personality, these social constructions have encouraged the healthy to dread the ill and to blame them for their fates. (Weitz, 1991, p. 51)

Sander Gilman says that separating people who are sick from our everyday lives is our way of dealing with "the most deep-seated sense of the self's fragility" (Gilman, 1988 p. 271). By isolating physically and metaphorically designated "risk groups" he says we are able to create an artificial "boundary



between ourselves and the afflicted," creating the dangerous illusion that we, ourselves, are not at risk - regardless of our behaviour.

Due to the initial construction of AIDS as only affecting "others," particularly the homosexual, immigrant and intravenous drug using (IVDU) communities, commentators have pointed to the media's constant reference to the sexual orientation and ethnic background of "victims of the disease." And, as Cindy Patton points out, even if the disease is contracted through non-stigmatized behaviour, the stigma associated with AIDS itself prevails. She says that "the insistence that AIDS is somehow a mark of perversion transforms infected persons into "queers," regardless of their exposure route..." (Patton, 1990, p. 117).

Even more disturbing in the area of meaning construction are the right-wing groups that sprang from the woodwork during the Reagan era. These groups saw AIDS as a justification for their racist and homophobic policies. Finally armed with a so-called "reason" for their beliefs, Rose Weitz says that:

the right wing's position on HIV disease essentially argues for reaffirming right-wing beliefs in marriage, heterosexuality, and a literal Christian tradition - beliefs that they feel have been abandoned or at least threatened by feminism and liberalism. (Weitz, 1991, p. 21)

The concept of the "family unit" as the most effective way to combat AIDS is demonstrated again and again by social activists and commentators on AIDS. This is underscored by the media's push to institute monogamy as the best way to avoid AIDS, rather than to promote safer sex, or eroticize non-penetrative sex, as advocated by the gay community (such as Klusacek and Morrison, 1992).

While often left out of the social commentary on AIDS written by homosexual men, women (both lesbians and heterosexuals) have a substantial stake in the debate about the AIDS discourse. Cindy Patton, a dedicated AIDS activist, identified AIDS as an issue for all homosexuals - men and women. As a lesbian, and thus a member of one of the lowest risk groups, Patton still feels that AIDS is her issue due to the implicit homophobia and attack on homosexuality in the popular discourse surrounding AIDS.<sup>11</sup> She also points to the power difference between the sexes:

...gay men, in general, can define sexual self-determination as a community... Women, however, do not have the access to sexual decision-making or equality either in sexual partnerships or in the legal, medical, and social support structures which could promote rapid and positive changes to safer sexual practises. (Patton, 1990, p. 2)

The notion that women are not in decision-making positions would be considered an understatement by Christine Overall who sees nothing less than "misogynous themes in AIDS policies, commentary, and education..." (Overall and Zion 1991, p. 27). It's her contention that the cultural construction of AIDS and women dwells on the classic themes of women as either mothers or whores. That is, the disproportionately high number of media stories about AIDS and women invariably talk about a mother infecting her baby, or a prostitute spreading the disease to men. That the mother and the prostitute are suffering is seldom the focus of media commentaries - they are rather, conduits for the suffering of others.

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<sup>11</sup> Rose Weitz says of lesbian's risk of STDs in general: "sexually transmitted diseases are extremely rare among lesbians because lesbian activity is an ineffective transmitter of infections." Living with AIDS, p. 15

This issue of innocent vs. guilty people with AIDS is also evident in the "homosexual vs. other groups" construction of the disease.<sup>12</sup>

So it is with AIDS, where time and again you hear across dinner tables, see reported in the papers, and encounter in stories relayed from professional conferences, the professed sympathy about the innocent victims of AIDS, the children, as if gay men who caught AIDS were somehow less victims, less innocent (Schechter, 1990, p. 47).

Schechter is saying, as others have said, that just as the prostitute deserves what she got, so too do gay men.

Many other themes were discussed by these deconstructors of cultural meaning. AIDS is also entrenched with our disdain for the promiscuity and perceived hedonism of gay men (Douglas Crimp, 1987, Introduction). Activists and commentators have pointed to the consistent homophobic representations and messages in our cultural institutions.

In a document that is as much a "working-guide" as it is a scathing attack on the "heterosexism" of Canadian society, the Canadian AIDS Society documents the persistent marginalization of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals and explains the double jeopardy of those who have AIDS:

The impact of heterosexism within the context of HIV/AIDS has been deeply felt by both gays and lesbians; the struggle for self-acceptance has become more challenging. The notion of AIDS as a punishment for homosexuality and the generally sex-negative messages of institutions in relation to AIDS throws up new barriers to adopting a proud and visible gay identity. (Canadian AIDS Society, 1991, p. 21)

A final theme in the social criticism surrounding AIDS is the veneration of science and scientists who are also, as I will outline shortly, the "authorized

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<sup>12</sup> Watney (1987) is just one of several commentators to dwell on this issue. See also Patten (1985), Crimp, and Weitz.

knowers of our society." Where our ability to understand all of the ramifications of AIDS ends, we suppose that science and scientists must have the answers:

...medicine is a privileged site in the interpretation of AIDS and the response to people with AIDS. And since the continued life of the body is a preoccupation of all but the suicidal, medicine's claims to authority grip us all at a very fundamental level. (Emke, (a) 1991, p. 57)

Some analysts went further than just citing our drive to maintain our lives and the lives of loved ones for our veneration of science. For many in our culture, science has become our religion; it is what we believe in. When someone close to us is ill, perhaps near death, we often don't pray to a god, but rather hope (and pray) that science will intervene to save him. Perhaps even more compelling is Cindy Patton's argument that science is more than religion; it is our culture:

We approach the end of the twentieth century, not so much as "technological man" robbed of emotionality and cultural depth, but as cyborgs for whom science is our culture, our mode of constructing identity. (Patton, 1990 p. 53)

And because we are so used to being "cyborgs," the possibility of science not being capable of repairing our bodies is foreign. We can't accept that AIDS is an unknown or worse, unknowable.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that the science of AIDS is, to a large extent, unknown, much of what popular discourse contains about HIV/AIDS is lifted from establishment journals such as Britain's *Lancet* and the United States' *New England Journal of Medicine* - the Bible of the worlds of science and medicine.

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<sup>13</sup> For an in-depth discussion of AIDS and its relationship to science (and cyborgs) see the final chapter of Donna Haraway's Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, 1991.

The results of studies printed in these journals are uniformly accepted as the "word of God", as Cindy Patton points out:

Media reports on the vast new research industry devoted almost entirely to HIV narrativised the "progress" being made in the "fight" against AIDS...Media accounts of the breakthroughs and 'forward march' of research are largely an uncritical reproduction of science's self-narration. (Patton, 1990 p. 26)

The meaning of AIDS in 1992 has been shaped by all its representations over the past decade. All of these images, biases, and condemnations influence how we feel about people with HIV/AIDS and how we feel about the threat of HIV to ourselves and to our society.

### News as a Constructor of Meaning

As one of our many cultural industries, it is important to position the news on a continuum of media, communications, and the other culture producers.<sup>14</sup> Many observers have argued the news is a particularly powerful voice in a choir consisting of other media and culture institutions including film, television, magazines, theatre, books, music, and advertising.<sup>15</sup> Its power rests with its perception as an "objective" and "balanced" provider of information about the world. While a book or film is expected to present fiction - no matter how realistic - the news is expected to be void of opinion and

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<sup>14</sup> James Winter says that media institutions can not account for all production of knowledge and bias: "...I agree that there are other manifestations of the problems, the other major one being the education system." While our institutions also include the family, religion, science, and so on, he insists that the media are "predominant" producers of ideology and have thus far "escaped adequate analysis." (Winter, 1992, p. 264)

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Manoff and Schudson's Introduction, to Reading the News, 1986.

offer a crisp and clear mirror of reality. This expectation, no matter how far from the truth, places the news media in a particularly powerful position.

With this expectation of "objectivity" comes the assumption of knowledge and authority. Richard Ericson states that "news is crucial to the constitution of authority in the knowledge structure of society," (Ericson, 1987, p. 23) suggesting that consumers of news defer to the "expert" sources offered up by journalists. On complex issues like AIDS, news consumers have no choice but to believe that Dr. X or the Honourable Y knows more about the issue than they ever could.

News also offers its consumers a "window on the world." More than any other cultural product, news provides the illusion of the exchange of cold, hard information; and the illusion that watching the news means knowing the world beyond our direct experience. This is despite evidence that shows, at least in the case of television, that watching news does not necessarily increase knowledge. In their chapter about the coverage of the Gulf War, Lee and Solomon refer to a study conducted at the University of Massachusetts that found that "the more television people watched, the fewer facts they knew; and the less people knew in terms of basic facts, the more likely they were to back the Bush administration" (Lee and Solomon, 1990, p. xvii).

Absorbed uncritically, and with deference to the authorities presented, the news media construct meaning and order in our lives. Working in concert with all other cultural industries, the news and news workers provide our primary way of knowing about the world. Richard Dyer writes about the very real consequences this way of knowing can have on groups represented in media constructions:

The mass media in particular have a crucial role to play, because they are a centralized source of definitions of what people are like in any given society. How a particular group is represented determines...what it can do in society (from Watney, 1987, p. 9)

Canadian polls suggest that our "knowledge" source for AIDS and HIV is centralized. A survey by the *Ottawa Citizen* in 1987 says that, "77 percent of respondents cited the news media as their primary source of information about AIDS" (Emke, (a) 1991, p. 259). While other sources may have become available since 1987, (such as government and medical pamphlets or face-to-face advice from doctors to their patients,) it is likely that the majority of Canadians continue to dip into the media's reservoir of seemingly never-ending information about AIDS to further their own "knowledge" of the issue. Another study conducted by the *Family Practice Magazine*, suggests that doctors too, glean most of their information about AIDS from mainstream media institutions such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (February 17, 1992).

To sum up, within the social construction of AIDS, the news media have become primary definers of our society's understanding of the disease. Through these messages AIDS has come to be understood as a disease afflicting deviant populations; those regarded as outsiders, or marginal members of our society. This was shown to be common to many illnesses of the past which were regarded as diseases of "others," whether they be foreigners, the poor, or anyone else that deviated from the majority. In the case of AIDS, even heterosexual women are portrayed as vectors of disease who threaten to infect the favoured majority - the "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure" (Ferguson, et al. 1990, p. 9).

Through its cultural construction, AIDS has also been constructed as a disease of fear, of blame, of punishment. It is constructed with language of

war and violence and a discourse of retribution. It has come to represent hypersexuality, weakness, addictions, homelessness, and death. All this from a microscopic virus which means nothing more than the sum of its genetic parts. The factors influencing how the news media portray this virus are complex. Steeped in patterns of social practices, and ingrained values, newswork is accomplished within very specific parameters, as I will now discuss.



## **Chapter 4: NEWSWORK**

News is not the objective reporting of events. Instead, it is the result of a complex web of relationships, training, practices, ideological consensus, work ethics, time constraints, political biases, individuals' struggles, and economic imperatives. The manner in which an issue like AIDS is covered, like all other issues, is determined by this combination of co-factors.

The way in which journalists recognize news is a pivotal issue in this thesis, as is the way they communicate the event or issue thus identified. "News occurs at the conjunction of events and texts," according to Robert Karl Manoff, "and while events create the story, the story also creates the event" (Manoff and Schudson, 1986, p. 228). The following chapter delves into several complementary explanations of the way "events" are identified and "texts" structured to create that which we accept as "news." They include: news organizations; owners and advertisers; news routines and formulas; journalistic values and professional practices; sources; hegemony; agency (role of the journalist); and finally, audiences. While each of these eight influences of newswork merit detailed analysis, my goal is to simply offer an overview of several of the forces which combine to determine the form and content of the news product and to determine what makes a story "newsworthy."

### **News Organizations**

The news room is like any other work place. It involves the forced coexistence of a variety of people who may or may not be compatible. It also

involves a hierarchy of roles, a shortage of time and money, and competition for the best assignments - all issues common to many office work places across the country.

Despite (or perhaps because of) these similarities to the average work place many sociologists and ethnographers have studied news institutions and written about their organizational structures (Altheide, 1976; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1980; Ericson et al. 1987).

Beginning with "who's who" in the news room, Herbert Gans' work in the U.S. offers a particularly succinct synopsis of the hierarchy in most news work places:

The national news organizations all include the following roles, listed in order of decreasing rank and power: policy makers, top editors (or producers), section heads, reporters and writers (or film makers), and researchers. These are complemented by various supporting staffs, some of which play an indirect role in story selection. (Gans, 1980 p. 84)

Richard Ericson offers a description of the number of hands a news text will actually travel through before arriving at the printing room. No less than six people on average (city editors, copy editors, slot editors, and night editors) will massage the copy researched and written by a reporter into a suitable length, language, and format. These groups of people usually work as teams with various degrees of good will, (as competition is always a factor), depending on the people and the newsroom (Ericson, et al 1987, p. 99).

Within news organizations, the hierarchical arrangement of the news gathering staff has serious implications for news gathering. Gaye Tuchman,

Interactions within the bureaucratic hierarchy, reporters, and editors jockeying with one another, may determine what is identified as news. Reporters compete with one another for assignments. Editors compete

with other editors to get assignments for their reporters and then negotiate to get their reporters' stories in the paper or on the air. (Tuchman, 1978, p. 25)

Tuchman suggests that whether or not a story is considered news may have as much to do with "office-politics" as any other influence of news gathering.

Aside from the personal interactions within a news organization, financial imperatives are also widely acknowledged as an organizational contributor to the news gathering process. Nowhere else is the phrase "time is money" so apt. The effort to economize is very often the largest determinant of what is, and what is not news.

One of the main organizational factors related to minimizing expenses and maximizing profits is the reliance on what Lee and Solomon call, "pre-fab news." This is news which is generated by a substantial and sophisticated public relations machine which pumps out a daily diet of news releases, press conferences, pre-formatted editorials, and now, even complete television-quality news clips, with voice-over, footage, and the illusion of objectivity required by news outlets.<sup>16</sup>

A study in the U.S. showed that 40 percent of newspaper news content was generated by the public relations industry.<sup>17</sup> And a content analysis performed in Canada showed that "80 to 90 percent of the stories reflect official news such as government coverage, press conferences, speeches, press releases, crimes and the courts..." (Winter, 1992 p. 42). Reliance on "free copy" helps any news outlet minimize costs. And the orchestration of any

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<sup>16</sup> For an in-depth discussion of how the public relations industry influences news content, see Joyce Nelson's Sultans of Sleaze, 1989. For a discussion of how PR affects the reporting of scientific issues, including AIDS, see Dorothy Nelkin's, Selling Science, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> From a study conducted by Scott M. Culip, ex-dean of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Georgia, from Lee and Solomon, 1991, p. 66.

media event such as a news conference, allows the media to cover a predictable event at a minimum cost.

Other factors related to the shortage of money is the shortage of technology, available personnel and space (or, in television and radio, time). While it can happen in print, the television medium is particularly susceptible to the availability of camera crews and in-studio equipment. In his discussion of the 1988 Federal Election, William O. Gilsdorf writes:

Much discussion in meetings and between the National Editor and management concerned which equipment and which editing facilities were available, or whether there was an uplink available for getting stories back to Toronto. Results of these discussions had obvious consequences on which stories would be assigned and which ones aired. Other studies of news organizing have placed resource decisions under the category of constraints that limit the practices of news workers. (Gilsdorf, 1989, p. 18)

Time, because it is also related to money spent on human resources, can mean the difference between an event being a news item or not. In organizing a national press conference in May, 1992, a CBC freelancer asked me if he could attend the conference to contribute to a news documentary. Not wanting to step on any toes, I called the CBC Radio newsroom in Vancouver to find out if they were considering covering the story. "Well, Yvonne Gall broke her arm yesterday and one of our other reporters broke his leg. So I don't know," said the voice on the other end of the line, "if Vander Zalm's trial winds up, there's no way. Otherwise, maybe."<sup>18</sup> Events are therefore dependent on the availability of staff, or replacement staff, to be identified as newsworthy.

Once the story is assigned, the money spent and the resources allocated, (regardless of whether or not a story actually exists), the team is expected to

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<sup>18</sup> Based on a telephone call made to the CBC Radio news room in Vancouver on May 25, 1992.

come back with a story. For example, during an AIDS conference in Vancouver, a CTV national news crew arrived to cover a story about an alternative method for detecting the AIDS virus in blood. This procedure was neither particularly new or exciting. Rather it was an incremental development in basic science. I had discussed the story earlier in the week with bureau chief, Mark Fisher who wanted to cover the conference, but had to come up with an angle for his producers in Toronto. I gave him as much information as I could - including the angle that the test was particularly helpful for new born babies.

However, during the interview, it became clear that the Toronto producers had assigned another story to the team. During the interviews, the reporter tried to get three different researchers to comment on the ethical considerations of the process (ie. detecting HIV in fetuses). All three avoided the question and instead talked about the value of the procedure for newborns. The reporter did not get the angle I assume had been assigned to him. But instead of chalking it up to a story that didn't happen, the piece aired anyway - without any reference to ethics.<sup>19</sup> The news crew did not get what Toronto considered to be "news", but because CTV had devoted the resources of an entire news crew for an entire day, the un-story became a story.

Also in the pursuit of minimizing costs, mainstream news organizations in North America have come to operate with the input of other news organizations. Whether it be through newswire services, affiliated stations, syndication, or re-prints from other publications, there is a significant amount

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<sup>19</sup> The story aired on CTV National News, Thursday, May 28, 1992. Incidentally, one of the scientists interviewed, Dr. Martin Schechter received a call directly after the story aired in Canada from CBS news in New York asking him for a comment on the ethical considerations of the test. He did not return the call.

of sharing of text, images, and story ideas. And, as Gaye Tuchman argues, this has led to a decline of competition and therefore, the centralization of the news. In her in-depth study conducted in the U.S. in the mid-seventies, she notes that methods were carefully developed, particularly wire services, which allowed various media to pool information:

All...testify to the growth of centralization as a method of getting as much information as possible for the minimal investment possible. Together, these wire services eventually formed a worldwide net, capturing occurrences in the mesh. Today they are the primary connectives between the news media and the world they claim to blanket... (Tuchman, 1978, p. 20)

So in addition to the influence of individual news rooms on the production of news, we can see a complex infrastructure of news gathering outside of the average newspaper or television news room. And, while she reproduces the claim that these news services "blanket" the world, Tuchman insists later that rather than a "news blanket" which, when tossed around the events of the day, gathers everything in its path, a net is full of holes, and therefore gathers only partial information. Tuchman uses this analogy to explain how this net of news organizations gathers only a fraction of what's happening in the world due to some of the constraints I have outlined above (Tuchman, 1978, Chapter 2).

The input of these "structural" limitations on the coverage of the AIDS story may be significant. Considering the number of hands a news story must pass through, the chances of a marginally alternative viewpoint of the AIDS issue escaping the homogenizing influence of up to six newswriters, is slim. Figuratively speaking, the process of "refining" the story means knocking off any sharp points or rough edges in order to slide the story into an acceptable news mould.

The media's reliance on "pre-fab" news also skews the amount and type of coverage to those groups who can afford to produce the information in a manner acceptable to news workers. Those with money therefore, have more power to set the agenda for an issue.

Within AIDS, the pharmaceutical industry holds the most financial power of all stakeholders. In Canada, in addition to their own extensive public relations departments, the companies' advocacy association, the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association of Canada, also has a staff of public relations executives as well as the ongoing services of one of the world's largest PR firms, Hill and Knowlton. In contrast, the Canadian AIDS Society, while still including the posting of a Communications Officer into their structure, have been unable to fund this position for over a year.

The quantity of information coming out of the pharmaceutical industry is immense. Reporters are regularly flooded with very sophisticated texts, photographs, and video clips which, while not always overtly, represent the interests of the organizations producing them. The other stakeholders in AIDS in Canada cannot compete.

### **Owners and Advertisers**

In addition to being workplaces like all others, the media also have a financial imperative like other businesses. The theory that the content of the news media is directly influenced by their owners has a great deal of support among media researchers. While hegemony and ideology play a fundamental

role in establishing the boundaries of news production as I will discuss later, a more direct and specific influence also takes place.

This influence, some argue, stems from the owners of the media who are also members of the larger "corporate elite." Wallace Clement in his book *The Canadian Corporate Elite*, discovered through empirical research that the owners of the media and the owners of the largest corporate interests in Canada are one and the same (Clement, 1975). Ben H. Bagdikian found the same concentration of ownership in his American study of the handful of conglomerates who own the majority of media outlets in the United States (Bagdikian, 1983).

These experts and others have concluded that the influences surrounding the production of news are not all organizational or ideological, but can be, and are influenced by the conscious and unconscious political biases and economic priorities of the owners of the mass media:

In reality, the mainstream mass media...overwhelmingly reflect their corporate owners' belief in state-subsidized 'free-enterprise' and related ideology. Meanwhile, the information overload of human interest trivia and unrelated events both inhibits the public from realizing the capitalist bias, while largely preventing coherent oppositional discourse from taking shape. (Winter, 1992, p. xvii)

Some of these analysts believe that conscious decisions are made by a powerful sector of the media elite to influence the content of news coverage. In a recent study of news sources in the U.S., Martin Lee and Norman Solomon conclude the control of the media by owners is not an assumption, nor unsubstantiated speculation. Quoting documents produced by the advertising industry and media censors, the authors show a very direct link between the holders of the purse strings and the ensuing messages:



The truth of the matter is that financial interests play a major role in determining what we see - and don't see - on television. Most of the top network sponsors are powerful multinational corporations. These global mammoths dominate our broadcast and print media far more extensively than most people realize. They exert tremendous leverage over the media industry because they are its principal source of revenue...(Lee and Solomon, 1991, p. 59)

The theory of corporate control of content of the news media flies in the face of a myriad of contrary but pervasive assumptions about the "liberal press." Coupled with the media's perceived role as "watchdogs" and socially responsible defenders of the "little guy," these perceptions do not support the view that journalists are mouthpieces of the monied establishment.

While I'll leave my discussion on hegemony to later, observers of the media point to the above liberal notions of the media and news workers as "myths" that are actively perpetuated by those in power:

...believing the media is on the side of the "little guy" we tend to trust and believe them more. But the reality is very different. In fact, mainstream journalists generally reflect the dominant values in society....the hardiness of the myth of a socially responsible media should be taken as another sign of the media's ability to perpetuate self-serving and false images. (Winter, 1992, p. 72-73)

Winter substantiates this argument using the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement as an example of collusion between corporate interests and the media. He devotes a well-documented chapter to illustrating how Canadian news media supported the free trade initiative, echoing the "jobs, jobs, jobs" message of the private sector and the government.

In this discussion, Winter also points to the intense concentration of ownership of Canadian media institutions (citing Wallace Clement's work) as

perpetuating and entrenching the link between owners and messages as well as limiting the possibility of alternate messages making it to the public agenda.

Evidence also suggests that the business interests of the media owners' other companies are seldom compromised by negative reports on its own television networks or newspapers. While Bagdikian says that it is often difficult to prove direct links to what's not in the news, he does report on a poll conducted in the U.S. showing that "33 percent of all editors working for newspaper chains said they would not feel free to run a news story that was damaging to their parent firm" (Bagdikian, 1983, p. 30). He then offers several examples of direct intervention of media owners in the content of newspapers across America - usually revealing how owners repressed news of the corporation's other interests. So as Lee and Solomon point out above, what is omitted from our news diet is as significant as what is publicized by the corporate elite.

Another direct economic impact on news content is the views of advertisers who support all news media. In order to maintain the sponsorship dollars of their advertisers, each media outlet takes pains to avoid offending these companies. Journalists themselves have documented direct influence of advertisers on their news products:

The automobile industry is a major advertiser in the [*New York Times*], and consequently *Times* coverage of auto safety and pollution has been skewed. According to a *Times* staffer, the paper of record ran stories "more or less put together by the advertisers," as the industry lobbied for looser safety standards in the 1970s. (Lee and Solomon, 1990, p. 64)

Eleanor McLean cites a Canadian example:

Journalists point out that any Canadian newspaper's clippings file on Eaton's will show how carefully the media treat large advertisers. Stories are always very carefully written, and usually highlight some

charitable or community-related aspect of the giant business. However, in addition to the favourable coverage of the company, there are also obvious gaps in coverage. (McLean, 1982, p. 65)

In the AIDS milieu, the impact on the conservative values of advertisers has been considerable. While its more difficult to find documentation of advertisers' influence on individual news items, the iron fist of advertisers has been documented in the field of television drama. At ABC, one of the three American networks, an Associated Press article reports that an episode of *thirtysomething*, an evening drama, featured "two gay men talking in bed." Due to the advertiser reaction, the Network decided not to re-run the episode:

ABC entertainment President Bob Iger says advertisers are to blame for his reluctance to repeat the thirtysomething segment. Half of the episode's commercials were pulled, costing the network more than \$1 million, he said. A thirtysomething segment last month that showed the two gay characters talking at a party resulted in advertising losses of \$500,000, Iger said. (*Globe and Mail*, January 31, 1991).

The article continues that ABC has decided to press on with the subject matter and produce a TV movie with an AIDS theme starring Ann-Margaret and Julie Andrews as mothers of two gay men, one of whom is dying of AIDS:

Actually, network executives say they hope *Our Sons* will be more "palatable" to advertisers and the American public because Ann-Margaret's character has shunned her gay son and is unable to accept his lifestyle. (Ibid)

While the evidence for the deference to the interests of owners and advertisers is well documented in both Canada and the U.S., the manner in which this comes about, whether consciously or unconsciously on the part of journalists and editors is more complex. Journalistic values, acceptable sources and the

hegemony of our society's elite ideology can each contribute to our understanding of this process.

### **News Routines and Formulas**

Another factor influencing the news products we consume is the day-to-day gathering and processing of the events and information feeding into the news process. In order to produce news for regular dissemination (hourly, daily or weekly - depending on the medium) news workers must develop routines and formulas to help minimize the complexity of their tasks. That is, the adherence to news routines and formulas serves a practical purpose of providing newswriters with a set of codes and practices to facilitate and speed up their work. These codes and practices include producing certain types of stories, gathering certain types of information, and completing certain tasks in a certain order to arrive at a finished news product - on time, and in an acceptable format.

News routines are experienced by newswriters as little more than "the-way-you-produce-a-story," just as they were taught in journalism school. Getting the assignment, choosing the angle, "rolodexing" the sources, lining up interviews, producing the copy - these are all task-oriented routines of newswriting (Lee and Solomon, 1990, p. 30).

These routines are framed by the ever-present pressure of time. Except for news products requiring in-depth analysis, most news is produced on a daily, 24 hour cycle (Tuchman, 1978, p. 42) which places important constraints on the newswriter. For example, in the daily press, reporters must

identify a news item early enough in the day that he or she has time to conduct interviews, do research, and write a story in time for a copy deadline.

On a day-to-day basis, most newspapers and evening newscasts have deadlines of late in the afternoon. That means events occurring early in the work day (and during the regular work week) are most likely to be targeted for coverage in order to meet these demands. In my own experience, a news conference set for 10 am (not so early that the reporter can't have a coffee and a chat at the news room), is far more likely to be identified as newsworthy than a four o'clock news conference which couldn't be written and filed until the next day - making it old. Gaye Tuchman came to a similar conclusion:

...the news media carefully impose a structure upon time and space to enable themselves to accomplish the work of any one day and to plan across days. As is the case with the spatial news net, the structuring of time influences the assessment of occurrences as news events. (Tuchman, 1978, p. 41)

Another routinized way to meet daily deadlines is to produce "cookie-cutter" or formula news. This formula is a specific series of routines which allow newswriters to package seemingly endless amounts of information into a small, digestible package. By identifying the "type" of story in which to package the event, newswriters simply fill in the blanks of a formula. Through my research, I've identified three types of formula stories, (although there are many more) and offer examples of each.

During an observation day at a Montreal television newsroom, a reporter was assigned a story about some new gun control legislation coming out of Ottawa. Her assignment editor told her that he wanted "a reaction piece," a code she appeared to understand immediately. She explained to me that, in

this case, a reaction piece was the provision of a "reaction" of local sources to a national story.

The reporter then performed a series of tasks, one after the other, in a well paced routine. After checking that days' local paper for sources, she consulted the central newsroom's rolodex for a match. She found two names of people belonging to local gun control organizations that had been previously interviewed on the subject. She called them, set up interviews, and, in consultation with the assignment editor, decided on a tentative angle. Both interviews were conducted by 2 pm, (with a well planned lunch break in between) leaving enough time to edit the images together, write and record a brief voice over, and combine the pieces. The tape was delivered to the line up editor at 5:20 pm, in time for the newscast at six pm, and in time for the reporter to head home after an eight hour day.<sup>20</sup>

Other examples of formula news are the familiar point-counterpoint stories. In this formula, a reporter frames a story by interviewing two sources who offer differing accounts of the same issue - preferably, as Ericson points out, a "hardliner" and a "liberal" (Ericson et al, 1987, p. 229). In AIDS discourse, this is a common formula with which to frame announcements of scientific advancement. For example, a researcher who offers the media an alternate way of approaching the study of AIDS, is countered by a scientist who toes the mainstream line in its study.<sup>21</sup> Or, the announcement of a government funding program is countered by the reaction of a "legitimate" AIDS community group as to whether it is enough money, or money well spent.

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<sup>20</sup> This information was gathered at CFCF-12, a Montreal CTV affiliate in February of 1991.

<sup>21</sup> See for example a story in the Globe and Mail, 'Is HIV the only culprit', May 11, 1991.

Another formula story, and perhaps the most relevant to this discussion is the "crime and punishment" story. That is the identification of some sort of transgression of social norms (ie. a robbery, a murder, insider trading) and the provision of the manner in which the transgression is being corrected. Using an example from the *Globe and Mail*, a story about the contamination of the blood supply is balanced by efforts to control the man accused of wilfully committing the crime: "Man donated blood after testing positive for AIDS virus" (February 22, 1988); "Crown investigating: police hunt donor of tainted blood" (February 23, 1988); "Ottawa police seizing medical files of man who donated tainted blood" (February 24, 1988). In the first story, the legal recourse to find the donor was said to be in progress, and this story was followed up with the manner in which the deviation was being corrected.

The most significant fallout of the tendency of reporters to adhere to news routines and news formulas is that events or people who are not easily packaged within this formula or those who resist being packaged in predictable ways, may be excluded from the coverage, a point I will return to later in my thesis.

### **Journalistic Values and Professional Practices**

All journalists share some fundamental influences as well as a shared culture. Firstly, most Canadian journalists formed their expectations of news, as we all did, through osmosis or immersion before they became adults. It's likely all expectations of the news media's role and function in our society are formed by a common force: that which has come before. This communality

provides for a common expectation of the news; so common, it forms an ideological consensus on acceptable news formats:

Of course news values are neither natural nor neutral. They form a code which sees the world in a very particular (even peculiar) way. News values are, in fact an ideological code...(Hartley, 1982, p. 80)

Most journalists also share a common education; their skills honed and their ideas shaped by the institutions charged with teaching people where to look for "news" and how to report it. Issues like objectivity and newsworthiness are offered as fixed and achievable concepts and news is presented as the outcome of a process, rather than the construction of a slice of a biased reality (Tuchman, 1978).

This informal and formal training of journalists, combined with other influences, help to shape what analysts have called the "values" of this collectivity. In the context of the coverage of a judgment-soaked story like AIDS, the values of journalists are particularly critical to our own understanding of the issues:

If a news story deals with activities which are generally considered undesirable and whose descriptions contain negative connotations, then the story implicitly expresses a value about what is desirable. In the process, the news also assumes a consensus about values that may not exist, for it reminds the audience of values that are being violated and assumes that the audience shares these values...Much news is about the violation of values... (Gans, 1980, p. 39-40)

A journalist's first introduction to the news product as a consumer is informal and usually, uncritical. From there, a potential journalist receives formal training to become a news worker. While Ericson's study shows that journalists did not value their university and college educations (rather crediting on-the-job training for their skills, (Ericson et al, 1987, 125-127))



other analysts have suggested that formal training programs contribute to the process of defining and naturalizing certain roles and responsibilities of the press.

The first value absorbed by the journalist during her training, is the pursuit of objectivity, or at the very least, balance in news reporting:

The notions of objectivity, balance, and fairness embody the assumption that journalists are neutral and non-partisan agents who base decisions on uniform technical criteria. The techniques include preventing the intrusion of personal bias; separating fact and opinion; including opposing viewpoints; and constructing texts in a narrative form that brackets out historical or explanatory frameworks which give an explicit interpretive basis (and bias) for construing truth. (Ericson et al, 1987, p. 105)

The problem with the pursuit of balance in the news is that it creates an illusion of representation. By offering two opposing opinions on a single, uncontextualized event, news consumers are restricted to a small slice of the potential range of views. Ericson also finds this issue problematic in saying the "truth,...taken to reside somewhere between what two opposing sources say about a matter, can be a way of avoiding the truth or constructing damaging untruths...(Ericson et al, 1987, p. 109)

So Ericson has said that in addition to learning to "balance" the information presented in the news product, journalists are trained to identify and report on points in time rather than provide context for the event. Therefore a second implicit "truth" for journalism students is that news is just that: new. Events are isolated and explained within a tight time frame meant to preclude any interpretive intervention on the part of the journalist. But as Todd Gitlin points out, it also only leaves room for consumers to reflect on "what went wrong today, not what goes wrong everyday" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 271).

As well as the concepts of timeliness and objectivity, future journalists are also taught how to "identify" and "frame" news. Many sociological and ethnographic studies have shown the passing down through the ages of certain "how-to's" help to perpetuate what are commonly called "news routines," as discussed earlier (Tuchman, Ericson, Gitlin, Gans). Within these routines lies the key to the uniformity of bias in the news as well as news workers' consensus on the term "newsworthiness."

Looking at more specific values of journalists, Herbert Gans defined eight "enduring values" evident in the American news media: "ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership" (Gans, 1980, p. 42) the last two of which he found particularly striking. For the purposes of this study, his observations about the journalistic values related to social order are particularly relevant. "Social disorder news deals with activities which disturb the public peace and may involve violence...; it also includes the deterioration of valued institutions, such as the nuclear two-parent family" (Gans, 1980, p. 53).

Gans says that the passing of moral judgment by journalists is usually implicit. That is, while disorder, or deviance is sought by news workers, they do not necessarily pass judgment on the behaviour or event. Rather, the solutions offered infer that collective values have been violated. For example, in the AIDS story, rather than directly passing judgment on promiscuity, the media reinforce the "monogamy" message ostensibly to protect members of the

society. As many gay activists have pointed out, the "safer sex" message is passed over in favour of these conservative values.<sup>22</sup>

### **Sources: The Authorized Knowers**

...sources and journalists join together socially, culturally, and on beat locations as interdependent participants in knowledge production and use... (Ericson et al. 1989, p. 385)

Another much-studied news theory is the reliance of news workers on their sources. Lee and Solomon in the U.S and Richard Ericson and James Winter in Canada have each written books in the last three years on the impact of sources on the news gathering process.

The consensus among the three is that a source is not a source unless he (it is usually a "he") is legitimated by an institution - whether it be the government, academia, a mainstream association, or a large business enterprise:

The mainstay of objectivity in journalism is the reliance on "authorized knowers" as sources. These quotable individuals, almost completely drawn from the ranks of politicians, bureaucrats, business leaders, and academics, enable journalists to present a brief quote or "sound bite" in support of the particular angle the journalists themselves have taken on a story. (Winter, 1992, p. xvi)

Winter supports his argument about media relying on an elite group of sources by pointing to a number of American studies and one Canadian study of three Toronto newspapers which found that "80 to 90 percent of stories reflect

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<sup>22</sup> For an excellent discussion of this issue see Homophobia, Heterosexism, and AIDS: Creating a More Effective Response to AIDS, The Canadian AIDS Society, 1991.

"official news" such as government coverage, press conferences, speeches, press releases, crime and the courts rather than coverage stemming from the newspapers' own initiative."<sup>23</sup>

While it is important to consider that the news media do not generate the majority of their information, many analysts have pointed to the power and legitimacy of those who do provide the information. Elites, legitimated by an institution make up the majority of source quotes and journalists usually seek out a legitimate source before they consider the event or situation to be newsworthy. When other sources are infrequently accessed, observers say, they are framed in a specific way:

Although sometimes representatives of women's groups, or labour, or Native peoples are called on to comment, they are outside of the regular channels, and represent "special interest" groups rather than the "national interest." (Winter, 1992, p. xvi)

An example of this phenomenon occurred recently in Canada, following the demonstration by Torontonians against racism. The government of Ontario hired Stephen Lewis, former Canadian Ambassador to the UN and a white, middle-age man, to conduct a study to determine if racism is a problem in Ontario. The day his report was released, it seemed that every major news outlet in Canada reported its findings: yes, indeed racism was rampant. That night on the CBC's *The National*, three black leaders lamented the fact that it took a white man to legitimate that which they had been trying to communicate to the media and the public for years. Stephen Lewis was a credible, legitimate source, backed by a legitimate institution (the Ontario government) which made the story that racism was alive into news.

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<sup>23</sup> From a study in Content Magazine, by John Miller, "Rethinking old Methods", Sept/Oct. 1990.

However, it should be noted the rule of reliance on elite sources does have exceptions - especially in the context of AIDS in Canada. This is one of the few issues where non-mainstream groups used their knowledge of media structures and biases to make in-roads into the source "rolodex". This is especially the case for the Canadian AIDS Society who are now often quoted as counterpoint to comments by governments and researchers. However, in the hierarchy of legitimate AIDS institutions, the Canadian AIDS Society has become the legitimized and authorized knower for all people with AIDS in Canada - perhaps even coopted into the elite. Many other AIDS groups, many of which offer less "sanitized" positions, continue to be silenced because of the media's preference for authorized, legitimate knowers.

While the notion of "authorized knowers" as sources is common to each of the three analysts mentioned above, Winter suggests that reporters simply seek out sources who corroborate the angle they themselves have decided upon: "...journalists, editors and producers actively frame their stories and then seek out sources who will support their perspective" (Winter, 1992, p. 41). Lee and Solomon, while too writing about the tyranny of source bias, suggest that the reporter does not control the story:

It happens all the time: A government official says something, reporters take down every word, and whatever is said - whether truth or lie - ends up as a sound bite on the evening news or a quote in hundreds of newspapers and magazines. A lot of journalists apparently feel that government officials are there to dish out the facts, and reporters merely have to come and get them....Journalists often act more like stenographers than reporters, duly transcribing lies, half-truths, disinformation and propaganda without attempting to put remarks in perspective... (Lee and Solomon, 1990, p. 45)

I think Richard Ericson and his colleagues would say that neither of these two perspectives is quite accurate because the process is considerably more complex.

Ericson acknowledges that reporters are often portrayed as 'conduit pipes' and 'secondary definers' of the news (Ericson et al, 1989, p. 378). However, he maintains that the news media can and do hold a significant amount of power over key sources. He concludes that while the news gathering process relies heavily on the input of legitimate sources, these sources need the news media as much, if not more than the media needs the source:

...all news outlets have some fundamental assets that put them in a powerful position: the power to deny a source any access; the power to sustain coverage that contextualizes the source negatively; the power of the last word; and, the power of translation of specialized and particular knowledge into common sense. (Ericson et al, 1989, p. 378)

A fourth perspective, and one with which I think Ericson would agree, comes from an experience in my work in AIDS research. I've observed that the complexity of the story and the knowledge and experience of the reporter is key to who holds the power in a journalist-source relationship.

In AIDS, there are very few "authorized knowers." In the media's definition, these knowers include the doctors and researchers who work with the human immunodeficiency virus and people who have HIV. Within this group there are even fewer who are able to provide information in a language usable in media texts. Still more rare, are reporters who understand more than the basics of HIV/AIDS. In my experience, these circumstances combine to give power to the source.

The balance is even further skewed when you also consider the benefit to the source. Many doctors feel the risks (inaccurate reporting being the largest) are not worth the gain of some legitimacy, fame, and perhaps some indirect promotion of themselves, their research, or their institution.

This means that reporters (particularly the beat reporters) are completely dependent on the one or two sources who will talk to them. Due to the overwhelmingly positive coverage I've observed of "legitimate" individuals in this field, I assume that negative coverage could mean the loss of a valuable source - and perhaps the source's fellow researchers as well. Without these knowledgeable and easily accessible sources, the beat reporter would be paralysed.

Source bias in the news, by offering a voice only to those legitimated by the media, serves to muzzle other views. Again, returning to AIDS, this means that the perspective offered news consumers is that of an elite who are deemed to "know" more about AIDS than someone with the disease:

...the reporters I talk to as an AIDS activist always treat me as 'one' side of the story. I can never be "the" story itself. And...they go and get somebody else's account; then what they do is they undermine my position, so that they create a story which doesn't represent my reality at all. (George Smith as quoted in *Homophobia Heterosexism and AIDS*, 1991, p. 30)

The result is that we hear a great deal from scientists, bureaucrats, politicians, and perhaps one "legitimized" community group, and almost nothing from Canadians living with HIV/AIDS.

## Hegemony in News Construction

Overt control and censorship in the news media does exist, as I discussed above in reference to media owners and advertisers. This control has ranged from the overt censorship and pro-war stance of the news media during the Gulf War<sup>24</sup> to a more subtle, day-to-day influence of advertisers and owners on the content and angle of articles and newscasts.

However, this overt control does not explain the reproduction and maintenance of the social and economic order of our society. Why don't news consumers reject outright the skewed coverage of our mainstream media? Why is the myth of objectivity of the press still expected and accepted by news consumers? Why don't we tear up our newspapers and turn off our televisions in disgust with their parroting of politicians, business leaders, and other elites?

Many researchers would say that we don't fight back against the domination of elite people and ideas because we don't experience these biases as domination. At the average cocktail party, objections to the conservative bias in the news are met with examples of how the media struggle to present both sides of a story; how they ask hard questions of politicians; and don't hesitate to disclose the indiscretions of big business.

Despite appearances, the media work hard to create the illusion of debate while omitting or marginalizing dissenting views. Debate is permitted, even encouraged, but always within a certain "window" of acceptability. And when alternate views are given a place on the media agenda, they are often dismissed as unrepresentative and deviant enough to merit reform or

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<sup>24</sup> See Winter, "Truth as the First Casualty," Common Cents, 1992.



correction. This process is not necessarily accomplished consciously by news workers. Many of the news routines, values, and organizational structures already discussed, help to perpetuate the status quo.

Many media analysts have argued that this process is accomplished through "hegemony":

"hegemony" exists when a ruling class...is able not only to coerce a subordinate class to conform to its interests, but exerts a "total social authority" over those classes and the social formation as a whole. "Hegemony" is in operation when the dominant class factions not only dominate but direct - lead; when they not only possess the power to coerce but actively organize so as to command and win the consent of the subordinated classes to their continuing sway. "Hegemony" thus depends on a combination of force and consent. (Hall, in Curran et al. 1979 p. 315)

Todd Gitlin, paraphrasing the work of Antonio Gramsci,<sup>25</sup> suggests that the dominant economic class, while determining the nature of the hegemonic order, relies on the consent and cooperation of all institutions to reproduce and disseminate their ideology. "Hegemony is an historical process in which one picture of the world is systematically preferred over others..." (Gitlin, 1980 p. 257). And he claims that the cultural institutions, primarily the media are ideally suited to perform this work despite the fact that the owners are not directly engaged in producing media content:

The dominant economic class does not, for the most part, produce and disseminate ideology directly. That task is left to writers and journalists, producers and teachers, bureaucrats and artists organized for production within the cultural apparatus as a whole - the schools and mass media as a whole...(Gitlin, 1980, p. 254)

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<sup>25</sup> See Selections from the Prison Notebooks, 1971.

Gitlin and others (Herbert Gans, Stuart Hall) argue that the device for maintenance of the hegemonic order is its ability to tolerate and then absorb or coopt mildly dissenting views and to discredit and marginalize views outside of its window of acceptability. He says that "social conflict" is sought out by news workers and brought into the news room where it is processed. Dissenting views are dismissed using a "logic" which is ideologically-based and which James Winter says is perpetuated in our culture as "common sense."

While it is important to see how external issues of conflict in media messages are coopted by hegemony, Gitlin also credits hegemony for its ability to accommodate personal or individual conflicts between news workers:

But even when there are conflicts of policy between reporters and sources, or reporters and editors, or editors and publishers, these conflicts are played out within a field of terms and premises which does not overstep the hegemonic boundary. (Gitlin, 1980, p. 263)

So while converting issues and ideas into a "common sense" world view for its audience, the newswriters themselves do not experience the domination as domination any more than anyone else. Most reporters feel they have relative autonomy in performing their work; the very concept of the predominance of "deviance" in the news presupposes that anything challenging "conventions" or existing structures would be newsworthy. Gitlin again offers an explanation:

Journalists' ideals are fluid enough to protect them from seeing that their autonomy is bounded: that by going about their business in a professional way, they systematically frame the news to be compatible with the main institutional arrangements of the society...Their autonomy keeps within the boundaries of the hegemonic system. (Gitlin, 1980 p. 269)

These "ideals" to which Gitlin refers are deemed to be "steady" enough to perpetuate the hegemonic order and "flexible" enough to absorb the ebb and tide of dissenting voices.

In the context of AIDS coverage, the boundaries of the hegemonic discourse help to construct our understanding of the disease. Douglas Crimp discusses this process using the term "cultural conventions" which I feel represents his notion of hegemonic borders:

...cultural conventions rigidly dictate what can and will be said about AIDS. And these cultural conventions exist everywhere the epidemic is constructed: in newspaper stories and magazine articles, in television documentaries and fiction films, in political debate and health-care policy, in scientific research, in art, in activism, and in sexuality. The way AIDS is understood is in large measure predetermined by the forms these discourses take. (Crimp, 1987, p. 246)

Crimp also uses this concept to undermine discourses which are presented to cultural consumers as "critiques" of cultural conventions. While seemingly oppositional, he says that many of the establishment-bashing treatises on AIDS, simply play out their "critiques" within acceptable boundaries.

Crimp uses a specific example. While presented in the news media as the "untold truth about AIDS," he claims that the book *And the Band Played On* helped reinforce the mainstream construction of AIDS. Authored by Randy Shilts, an openly gay man, Crimp suggests that his book offers an illusion of resistance, rather than the real opposition championed by the author. Shilts' position within the media establishment, on the staff of a large San Francisco daily newspaper, further undermines this credibility:

Being fully of the media establishment, Shilts' criticism of that establishment is limited to pitting good journalists against bad. He is apparently oblivious to the economic and ideological mechanisms that

largely determine how AIDS will be constructed in the media, and he thus contributes to that construction rather than to its critique. (Crimp, 1987, p. 242)

The fact that parts of this book was reprinted in newspapers across North America, including the *Toronto Star*, suggests that this text was a palatable one; one that overtly challenged convention, but, through its adherence to acceptable norms, remained within the hegemonic discourse.

### **Journalists: Agency in News**

Given that all of these forces are working in tandem to frame what is considered news, the practical question remains: what role does the character, personality and beliefs of an individual newsworker play in the production of news? Despite the influence of organizations, owners and advertisers, values, routines, formulas, sources, and finally hegemony, analysts still struggle with the question of whether or not an individual can make a difference.

Encouraging journalists to cast off the tyranny of their values and practices and report fairly and accurately about all groups affected by AIDS seems to merit an attempt. Some believe it's possible while others do not:

Journalist Nicholas de Jongh has concluded that "newspapers will continue to write and publish what they choose to until they are made to feel ashamed." I [Simon Watney] am less convinced, however, that it is possible to "shame" either journalists or newspaper editors, since irrational stigmatisation is understood by them as professional practice. (Watney, 1987, p. 97)

I agree with Watney that much of the entrenched discrimination and homophobia in the media is pre-determined by the routines and values

journalists must buy into in order to be conforming members of the newswork environment. John Hartley also agrees:

Clearly news values are man-made, in both generic and the gender sense of 'man.' But it seems an individual journalist, whether male or female, is unable to escape their institutionalized force (presented as the right way of doing journalism), even when s/he contests their ideology. (Hartley, 1982, p. 81)

In contrast, James Kinsella believes that individual newsworkers in the United States were responsible for the news media's attention to AIDS. Their personal dedication to cover a story which affected them personally, he argues, propelled the disease onto the national agenda:

AIDS has now become a staple item of the news and a part of American consciousness and much of the credit lies with the journalists who dared to use their own experience and outrage as the lead into a major story (Kinsella, 1989, p.1)

There is no doubt that Kinsella believes that the interests of the journalist can make a difference in what appears in the news.

Richard Ericson set out to answer this question, and many others, during his in-depth study of newsrooms. While acknowledging many of the factors influencing newswork (which Kinsella doesn't), Ericson still concludes that there is a place for "agency" in the news process:

Our immersion in newsrooms led us to an appreciation that while the news organization has systemic features, it is not tightly rule-bound in the manner suggested by previous researchers....The facts of some openness, considerable equivocality, and extensive conflict, require explanation. If journalists are not automatons operating in strict conformity to paths laid down in a normative system, what else provides the basis for their actions." (Ericson et al, 1987, p. 347)

So Ericson is arguing that the conflict and negotiation he observed between newswriters demonstrates that a singular, linear route to the construction of a story does not exist. He concludes that through negotiation "...the journalist can create some autonomous space in which to practice his craft" (Ibid).

Todd Gitlin would disagree with Ericson's assertion that the conflict observable within a newsroom is grounds for supporting agency in the news. As quoted earlier, Gitlin believes that this conflict is played out within specific boundaries: "But even when there are conflicts of policy...these conflicts are played out within a field of terms and premises which does not overstep the hegemonic boundary" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 263). The hegemony of what is acceptable and unacceptable as news, while allowing for diversity of views, and encouraging debate, contains these conflicts within a limited realm of "serious" possibilities. That means that even if a single reporter lobbies and fights and finally receives permission to write an in-depth story about how AIDS is affecting gay men, this story will not change the factors conspiring to keep this story off the public agenda.

In determining my own position on the impact of journalistic agency in the news, especially considering the unresolved debate in the literature, I can only draw on what I've observed in conducting this study. One of the most compelling trends I found was the homogeneity of the coverage between my two sources. And, when I consider that my findings based on these two sources corroborated findings from several other media studies, I can't say that the newswriter played much of a role in influencing the manner in which the AIDS story was presented to the public.

Yes, I did find the occasional story which crossed the "unacceptable deviance" line in both publications. But like Gitlin, I found that these stories

were virtually washed out by the flood of articles which toed the hegemonic line, (excluding gays from the coverage.)

So while I'd like to believe that there is a place for the courageous and autonomous newswriters in the production of the news product, this study did not indicate their successful break down of the previously described boundaries of newswriting.

### **Journalists' Conception of Audience**

Journalists' conception of audience is another important but largely inconclusive field of study in media circles. Despite the fact that audience demographic research is conducted by many media outlets at great effort and expense, many social science researchers have found that journalists do not have strong conception of their audience (Ericson, 1987, Gans 1980) or simply view their audience as a homogenous mass (Watney, 1987).<sup>26</sup>

Herbert Gans found that journalists disregarded audience research due to their prejudices against those who do the research and against the data itself. It seems that most journalists have a liberal arts background which Gans suggests biases them against the validity or importance of statistics. There is also a general sense that a journalist feels he or she instinctively "knows" his or her audience better than any number cruncher could (Gans, 1980, p. 231-232).

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<sup>26</sup> The way in which a journalist views his or her audience is an important area for further research. I was able to find very little information on this subject in any context, and found no substantive information about the "AIDS audience" in the books, essays, and articles I studied.

Ericson, Gans, and Watney also each found that most journalists regard their audience as individuals much like themselves, their spouses, or their immediate social circle. Their belief is that what is acceptable to themselves and their families will be acceptable to a mass audience. Gans quotes one American editor as saying:

"You do the show for a cell of people - the office staff, the wife, and the kids. These are the only known audience. I know we have twenty million viewers, but I don't know who they are." (Gans, 1980. p. 234)

Alluding to the assumption that the majority of journalists are heterosexual men, Simon Watney observed that they are trained to view their readership as a homogeneous mass, broken down into family units.

In this manner the newspaper constructs an ideal audience of national family units, surrounded by the threatening spectacle of the mad, the foreign, the criminal and the perverted. (Watney, 1987, p. 84)

He later says that the uniform heterosexuality of a mass audience, or the "general public" as it is often referred, is an assumption on the part of journalists, as if no other possible sexual orientation exists:

...a large parcel of blame should be laid at the feet of a media industry which has consistently refused to acknowledge the sexual diversity of its uniformly and unproblematically heterosexual general public. (Watney, 1987 p. 108)

In the above passages, Watney speculates that issues of gay identity, gay sex, and gay politics do not fall within the realm of what a journalist conceives as of interest or concern to this "general public."

Therefore, the conclusions one draws about why people at risk for AIDS are constructed in one way or another may relate to how a journalist



conceives of his or her audience. In particular, the assumptions a journalist makes about the attitudes, sexual orientation, and social network of this audience influences how certain topics are constructed or avoided by the media profession. Therefore, the under-representation of gay men in the AIDS discourse may have something to do with a journalist's assumption that this topic is not of interest to the mass audience, and in some cases may even be distasteful to this audience. This an issue to which I will return in my concluding chapter.

#### **Wrap Up: What is newsworthy?**

News coverage or the identification of "newsworthiness" is not simply a "natural process" nor is it simply a product of human nature, as I've tried to demonstrate. Calling news a random assemblage of facts and words does not adequately explain the biases entrenched in our daily diet of news. But this is not a popular conception among those who claim to simply "tell-it-like-it-was." They would rather have us believe that the manner in which the AIDS story was presented in the press was the accurate reportage of a natural chain of events. A.M. Rosenthal, the man who was executive editor of the *New York Times* during the "entire five-year period when the epidemic was a non-story," reinforces this notion of "natural news" in an editorial about the way the *Times* handled the AIDS story: "That's just the way we are; go ask a psychiatrist why" (Crimp, 1987, p. 246).

Clearly not willing to accept this "chalk-it-up-to-human-nature" excuse, Crimp sarcastically replies "...Rock Hudson is a story, but the thousands of

other people with AIDS are not - 'go ask a psychiatrist why.' Heterosexuals with AIDS is a story; homosexuals with AIDS is not - 'go ask a psychiatrist why'" (Crimp, 1987, p. 246).

The way in which the AIDS story was covered in the news media has nothing to do with a "natural process." The combination and interrelationship of social, economic, and ideological processes contributes to what we experience as news. Specifically, organizational structures, news values and practices, the influence of owners and advertisers, source bias, news routines and formulas, attitudes toward audiences, and hegemonic boundaries all combine to create an expectation of the structure and content of news. All of these elements combine to dictate what is, and what is not newsworthy.

In this chapter, I've demonstrated that the factors which dictate the parameters of newswork also dictate the parameters of news. Events and topics which fall outside of even one of these structural imperatives typically do not appear in our daily diet of news. The AIDS story offers a clear example of how these limitations and boundaries influence the construction of news as I will now discuss in Chapters 5 through 7.

## **Chapter 5: AIDS: A DECADE OF NEWS COVERAGE.**

At least one newspaper columnist in Canada predicted that AIDS was destined to be one of the biggest stories of the last decade. "The most important news story in the last half of the 1980s is not going to be world terrorism, is not going to be nuclear proliferation, is not going to be street crime. The most important story is going to be AIDS." (*Star*, July 14, 1985)

Throughout the 1980s, the news media were largely responsible for educating the public about this disease - unravelling modes of transmission, preaching about the dangers of promiscuity, and providing up-to-the-minute coverage of medical research into its cure.

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the ways in which AIDS was covered by the news media in the 1980s and into the '90s. In the first section, I offer a general outline of the coverage as discussed by other analysts of the news coverage of AIDS. This literature suggests that the trends in coverage in Canada and the U.S. are remarkably uniform, pointing to many of the same biases and trends I found in my own sample. This section, entitled "Background on Media Coverage of AIDS," is intended to offer a backdrop to my own chronology of AIDS coverage based on my sample of articles in the *Globe* and the *Star*.

In the second part of this chapter, I will provide a brief synopsis of the quantitative analysis of my two sources, highlighting peaks and valleys in the coverage. I will also compare my own quantitative results to data collected in other studies conducted in this subject area.

In the third and final part of the chapter, "A Chronology of Coverage: Trends Over Time," I offer a tour through my database, demonstrating how the

*Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* framed the AIDS story over time. This analysis echoes many of the same trends presented in the first part of the chapter, indicating that my sources offered similar coverage to other news media throughout North America.

This quantitative and chronologic overview of the "AIDS story" precedes a qualitative textual analysis of my sample, particularly as it relates to "deviance," undertaken in Chapter 6.

### **Background on News Coverage of AIDS**

The Canadian news media have reported on HIV and AIDS on a regular basis over the past seven years. The "AIDS story" consists of several factors which combined to make it a highly newsworthy subject, not the least of which is the predominantly terminal nature of the disease. Its global implications and the fear it inspires have also contributed to the media's attraction as Drushel maps out:

...the story of the disease had all the necessary qualifications to warrant major attention:

1. It appeared to have deadly consequences.
  2. There had been a dramatic increase in the number of cases.
  3. Its scope was both national and international.
  4. It appealed to voyeurism and fear.
- (Drushel, 1991, in Wolf and Kielwasser p. 50)

From my reading of the media coverage, I would add its mysterious origin, and resistance to known treatments as additional factors contributing to the abundant coverage of AIDS.

But AIDS hasn't always been a hot media story. Many analysts of the media coverage of AIDS also point to its complete absence in the headlines in the early 1980s when the Centre for Disease Control in Atlanta first released information about five previously healthy men who died of a rare pneumonia.

The CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* reported that "The fact that these patients were all homosexuals suggests an association between some aspect of a homosexual lifestyle or disease acquired through sexual contact and *Pneumocystis pneumonia*."<sup>27</sup> Only one newswire and two daily newspapers in the U.S. covered this announcement (Kinsella, 1989). Others have claimed that the media virtually ignored the story until Rock Hudson announced his infection in 1985:

It wasn't until Rock Hudson died of AIDS in October 1985 that mass media noticed the disease in a big way. Suddenly, AIDS became a cover story, a page-one topic, a scourge worthy of repeated mention on the evening news. A survey of 90 major U.S. newspapers and magazines found that in the first half of 1985, a total of 1,197 articles on AIDS appeared. During the last half of the same year, 3,810 AIDS articles appeared - more than all those printed from 1982 through 1984."<sup>28</sup> (Lee and Solomon, 1990 p. 223)

The most often cited reason for the media's initial neglect of this story was the disease's minimal impact on heterosexuals. Many critics argue that until AIDS could be described as a threat to the "general public," it was not worthy of

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<sup>27</sup> This quote was taken from Kinsella, 1989 p.9, who did not specify the date of this MMWR except to say it was around June of 1981.

<sup>28</sup> I was unable to find similar statistics for Canadian media. American sources are quoted only when Canadian sources could not be found.

attention (Kinsella, 1989), (Crimp, 1987), (Patton, 1985). Or more specifically, "Some observers...have attributed the early lag in coverage to a reluctance by the media to air or publish stories about homosexuals (Cushel, in Wolf et al. 1991, p. 50).

Kinsella takes a different approach by arguing that the AIDS crisis was originally ignored by the mainstream media because no single newswriter "took on" AIDS as an issue for which to lobby or "will" onto the front page. Backed by quantitative analysis of media messages, Kinsella argues that, despite pressure from individual reporters, senior editors and producers resisted the story from 1981 to 1985 until Rock Hudson died of the syndrome.

Kinsella says that it took the death of a celebrity with whom every journalist, editor and producer in America was familiar, for this disease to merit their attention. This same argument was put forward by an American writer in the *Toronto Star* who felt that the disease wasn't taken seriously until long after Rock Hudson's death:

There will never be a sadder story than this, and if there is, I want no part of it...In a medical sense, it was a blip on the screen, just one more victim of a tragic disease. And yet in the real world, where most of us live, it was a cymbal crash between the ears, the true end of innocence. I don't know what we were all thinking up to this point, but I know this morning it is not the same....That The Day Magic Retired will now and forever be connected The Day America Began To Take AIDS Seriously may not reflect well our priorities, but it is the truth. (*Toronto Star*, November 9, 1991 p. C1)

In addition to entrenched homophobia and the necessity of the virus to "hit home" to become important, other observers blame the complex science of the disease for its original neglect in the media: "All this talk of seropositivity,

T-helper and suppressor counts, and exponential growth is not the stuff of evening news sound bites" (Wachter, 1991, p. 24).

Another barrier to coverage may have been the difficulties of using or not using the vocabulary of homosexual transmission if news workers worried about offending the "average" heterosexual viewer with words like anal intercourse, oral sex and others:

To explain AIDS transmission, words like "semen" and "penis" and "vagina" were absolutely essential. Unfortunately, in the first years of the epidemic they were strictly avoided. (Kinsella, 1989, p. 3).

It is hard to believe there is any one reason for the neglect of the AIDS story in both Canada and the U.S. in the early 1980s. For those who argue, as I do in this thesis, that the news media thrive on the reinforcement of marginalized groups and behaviours, the belief that this illness affected only homosexual men suggests that it did have the ingredients of a news story from day one.

Despite its overall omission from coverage in the early-eighties, since then, the abbreviation "AIDS" has become a more common front page item, particularly between 1985 and 1989. While less frequently covered today, AIDS is still a part of our daily news diet.

Despite this situation today, my discovery that the disease had been ignored in its early days forced me to question the well documented news theory of the emphasis of deviance and marginalization in the news. As homosexuality and homosexuals are clearly marginalized by the media, why was this story originally ignored? And, as my subsequent research showed, when it was covered, why was qualitative coverage of the impact of AIDS on the lives

of homosexual men passed over in favour of its impact on children, heterosexuals, athletes, and families? These are questions I will address using my own research into the coverage of the *Globe* and the *Star*.

While I noticed that gay men were left out of the in-depth coverage, it was evident that they weren't left out of all coverage. Homosexual men were mentioned in articles quite frequently during the 1980s. But it was only a mention; one sentence making the link between homosexuals and HIV, but offering nothing in the way of understanding or compassion for its devastating effects on their lives. Here are some examples:

As a hemophiliac, he was in a group - including male homosexuals, needle-drug addicts and Haitians - with an increased risk of catching AIDS. (*Globe and Mail*, February 23, 1984)

The most likely candidates are homosexual or bisexual men, immigrants from Haiti, heterosexual men and women who use intravenous drugs and men with hemophilia. (*Toronto Star*, April 19, 1983)

AIDS is a severe illness that affects mostly homosexuals, drug addicts, and Haitian immigrants, who are not necessarily homosexual nor drug abusers... (*Toronto Star*, June, 14, 1983)

These one sentence "blame lists" serve only to link gay men, and other marginalized groups, with the disease. As mentioned earlier, in my research, this link does not constitute "representation." Rather, this sentence allows us to place blame for the disease on a group of people about whom we know little or nothing. The few articles that did offer more than this cursory mention only served to reinforce the marginalization of this group, as I will explain.<sup>29</sup>

In order to determine if the news coverage of AIDS presented an adequate picture of the disease, I undertook an analysis of the *Globe and Mail*,

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<sup>29</sup> This was particularly true in the 1980s. I did find a handful of exceptions between 1989 and 1991, which I will include in my discussion.



(Canada's National Newspaper) and the *Toronto Star* - both daily newspapers originating in Toronto. My database begins with the very first stories to appear in each publication about AIDS - both in 1983, and ends in 1991 where I chose to cut off the sample.

The following discussion will analyze the coverage of AIDS from the perspective of the emphasis of deviance in news coverage. Beginning with my quantitative findings, I will then undertake to analyze the themes and trends in coverage evident in the *Globe* and the *Star*.

### Quantifying my Sample<sup>30</sup>

Between 1983 and 1991, 1042 articles related to AIDS appeared in the *Globe and Mail* and 1017 in the *Toronto Star*.<sup>31</sup> Nineteen eighty-seven was the year both publications printed the largest number of stories about the disease with the *Globe and Mail* featuring 283 articles, up from 75 in 1986, and the *Toronto Star* featuring 244 articles, up from 73 in 1986.

Of the 1042 articles in the *Globe*, 385 were focussed on the impact of the disease on certain groups, as identified by the article's headline, and the accompanying descriptor on the CD-ROM file. In the *Toronto Star*, 427 of the 1017 articles were focussed on specific groups. This means that those articles written about people with AIDS in general, or medical aspects of the disease,

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<sup>30</sup> Because the articles were relatively subjectively grouped into categories, some figures may not be statistically significant. Rather they are meant to demonstrate trends which I discuss later.

<sup>31</sup> Based on a CD-ROM search of both publications. Search criteria included HIV and/or AIDS in the title or descriptor.

such as a new drug, or a new discovery about the virus, were omitted from this analysis.

Categories of "groups" were determined as they appeared in the headlines. Table 1 refers to the percentage of the total number of articles in which each group appeared in the two publications. As I mentioned earlier, these figures show that homosexual men account for just 3% of *Toronto Star* articles, and 6.8% of the coverage in the *Globe and Mail*, despite the fact that in Canada, 79% of AIDS cases in Canada are attributable to homosexual and bisexual activity (*Surveillance Update*, April, 1992).

**Table 1** Percentage of the Total Number of Articles Addressing the Impact of AIDS in Two Canadian Newspapers by Group

<u>Groups</u>	<u>Toronto Star</u>	<u>Globe and Mail</u>
Homosexuals	3.0%	6.8%
Intravenous Drug Users (IVDU)	4.9	5.2
Hemophiliacs	2.3	1.6
Women (in general)	4.0	4.7
Men (in general)	4.7	7.5
Heterosexuals (specifically)	3.7	1.8
Prostitutes	1.9	3.6
Children	14.8	12.5
Doctors/Dentists	8.4	5.2
Support Workers (Health Care)	4.4	6.8
Natives	0.2	1.3
Inmates	6.6	2.1
Immigrants	1.9	2.3
Celebrities	1.6	3.1
People from developing world	13.6	13.5
Recipients of Blood or blood products (not specifically hemophiliacs)	10.5	10.9
Workers/Co-workers	4.7	-
Other*	8.7	4.2

\*this category is a collection of those groups who, by themselves, did not amount to 1% of the coverage in both publications.

These data are corroborated by an American study which found similar results. Conducted by Bruce Drushel, this study examined four weeks of print articles produced by Associated Press, the largest newswire in the U.S. in 1986:

While figures cited earlier have homosexuals and bisexuals accounting for 71.8 percent of reported AIDS cases, their frequency of mention in the sample were just 24.0 percent of all risk groups mentions. Abusers of intravenous drugs, who comprise the second-largest risk group, were also under-represented in the sample, but to a far lesser extent. While they accounted for 24.5 percent of reported cases of the disease, they represented just 23.5 percent of risk group mentioned in the sample. (Drushel in Wolf and Kielwasser, 1991, p. 58)

The study also found that children, who account for 1.4 percent of reported cases of AIDS, received almost double the coverage of homosexual men.<sup>32</sup>

While these data are interesting, and provide a backdrop for my analysis, I feel strongly that these figures do not tell the whole story. They simply indicate a trend that is worth further evaluation. That's why, after extracting these figures with the CD-ROM search, I then selected several articles from each newspaper, from every year - trying where I could to include articles from each of the groups listed above for more in-depth analysis. Because of the relatively few articles about the impact of this disease on gay men, and in order to confirm my hypothesis with complete texts, I selected all articles which offered gay men or the gay community as central characters. The following discussion (with the exception of Table 2) focuses on this sample which was approximately 90 articles from each of the two publications. As I will indicate, Table 2 refers to the entire sample in order to

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<sup>32</sup> Please note that this study included all articles in which its subgroups (gay men, IVUDs, children, and haemophiliacs) were mentioned - even if it was only a mention. My study categorized articles by group central to each story, not just passing references. This may account for why gay men received considerably more coverage in the AP database, than in my own. Both show, however, that gay men are under-represented.

provide some perspective on the total amount of coverage allotted to AIDS over the entire decade.

### **A Chronology of Coverage: Trends Over Time**

The following section is a brief overview of the chronological trends in coverage I identified in analyzing my sample of articles.

Despite the announcement of the unexplained death of several homosexual men from cancers and pneumonia in 1981, AIDS didn't reach the *Globe and Mail* or the *Toronto Star* until 1983.<sup>33</sup> Earlier evidence suggested that this was common across Canada, as well as in the U.S. as documented by Kinsella and others.

While the *Ottawa Citizen* was one of the first major dailies to cover a story on this phenomenon in Canada in July of 1982, (Emke, (a) 1991, p. 263) the *Toronto Star* didn't run an article until January 15, 1983. Entitled, "Killer disease linked to blood," the first article's opening sentence reads: "There's mounting evidence that the deadly new disease AIDS is transmitted through blood and blood products, putting thousands of hemophiliacs at risk."

Therefore, the very first time the *Toronto Star* introduces this subject to their readers, it discusses the effects of this disease on hemophiliacs, despite its own admission later in the text that not a single hemophiliac in Canada had developed the disease. At that time, the *Star* said, approximately 20 people

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<sup>33</sup> The Canadian gay press began reporting on AIDS in mid-1981. (Emke, (a) 1991, p. 422)

had been reported to have AIDS - presumably all gay men.<sup>34</sup> Also by its own admission, "the disease appeared approximately two years ago," but gave no explanation for why they had neglected coverage until that late date.

The first article to appear in the *Globe and Mail* was a very short, CP wire story entitled, "15 Canadians have died from syndrome in a year."<sup>35</sup> (February 19, 1983) The "note" referred to the mysterious nature of the disease and used the term "gay plague" to describe it.

The first substantive article on AIDS in the *Globe and Mail* appeared three weeks later, on March 10, 1983 and was entitled "Fatal disease feared, groups at risk advised not to donate blood." Rather than a discussion of the seemingly grave impact the disease was having on the risk communities mentioned in the first sentence, "promiscuous male homosexuals, drug abusers and Haitians," the article was about protecting the "general public" via the national blood supply from these marginalized groups. Again the article mentions that the disease has been "known to doctors" for two years, but made no excuse for the *Globe's* lack of coverage.

Also, as Emke points out, reporter Jane Gadd says the disease was "once known as the 'gay plague'," a term used in the note that appeared just three weeks before in the same publication. What is of further interest, but not mentioned by Emke, is the entire sentence that mentions the "gay plague". The

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<sup>34</sup> While at that time many IVDUs may have had AIDS, those that were diagnosed and included in these numbers were probably middle class white men. Crimp makes this suggestion: "...AIDS was first seen in middle-class gay men...in part because of our access to medical care. Retrospectively, however, it appears that IV drug users...were dying...throughout the '70s and early '80s... (Crimp, 1987, p. 249)

<sup>35</sup> This article escaped my search but was documented by Emke ((a) 1991 p. 264) as the first story to appear in this publication. This is the only article *to my knowledge* that slipped through the cracks of my computer search.

whole phrase reads: "once known as "the gay plague," to the *homosexual community*." (emphasis mine).

While I didn't undertake an analysis of the gay press, Emke reports that as early as 1983 the gay press was criticizing the mainstream media for the use of this term. An article in *Rites*, a Canadian publication aimed at the gay community said that "It's the responsibility of the mass media to stop hysteria by providing the right information and avoiding banner headlines like "killer gay plague" (Emke, (a) 1991, p. 429). Erroneously attributing the use of the term "gay plague" to the gay community suggests a glib justification for continued use of this heterosexual-value-laden term.

After its initial coverage, the AIDS story in the mainstream news media went through a number of phases, falling in and out of favour as a newsworthy story. Using the whole sample now for these figures, Table 2 shows how much coverage was allotted to the story from 1983 to 1991 in both the *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* as indicated by the headlines. Nineteen eighty-seven marked the highest point in quantity of coverage in both newspapers. With the exception of 1987 and 1990, the two newspapers demonstrated considerable homogeneity on the amount of coverage afforded to AIDS, including the leap in coverage in 1985.

**Table 2**      Total Number of Articles on AIDS in Each Publication by Year

YEAR	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star
1983	22	18
1984	17	20
1985	106	98
1986	73	75
1987	244	283
1988	182	175
1989	169	187
1990	120	61
1991	109	100

As suggested before, in 1985 AIDS became a more widely covered news item at least in part due to the speculation, and later confirmation, that Rock Hudson had AIDS. Kinsella documents that this coverage most significantly increases in the latter half of the year after speculation began as to the type of illness for which Hudson was being treated in Paris.

In support of Kinsella's findings, I found that after the Hudson incident, the *Toronto Star's* coverage in 1985 turned from spotty stories about medical research (ie "Virus like AIDS found in monkeys," April 15, 1985); the juggling of risk groups (ie. "Haitians dropped from high-risk AIDS group list," April 10, 1985); and statistical updates, ("Deaths of 4 kids in Montreal push Canadian AIDS toll to 131," June 11, 1985) to more sensational and more general discussions of the impact of the disease on what was described as "the general population." Headlines such as "AIDS has the world running scared" (*Star*, September 9, 1985) and "Does AIDS spell end of sexual revolution?" (*Star*, September 14, 1985) abounded. In addition to these panicky headlines, the coverage simultaneously takes on a reassuring tone, quelling the fears of

specific groups: "No AIDS cases in our prisons, Ottawa says," (*Star*, September 11, 1985) and "No reason for concern on AIDS, dentists told." (*Star*, November 4, 1985).

While the story tapered off in 1986, 1987 marked the height of coverage to date. While I wasn't able to trace the coverage to a single incident in either the *Globe and Mail* or the *Toronto Star*, several events may have coincided to make AIDS one of the biggest stories of that year.

One of these events was the arrest of a prostitute in Canada who tested positive for HIV and who refused to stop soliciting. Clearly a member of a marginalized group, the "AIDS-hooker" story seemed particularly newsworthy in both sources. In fact the media's own preoccupation with this story was criticized in one source:

The Toronto news media were heavy handed in their coverage of a prostitute who says she is carrying the AIDS virus, a spokesman for the AIDS Committee of Toronto said yesterday. "It was pack journalism at its worst," Philip Shaw said in an interview....The situation involved Stacey Smith, 21, a Toronto woman who was arrested...on the charge of communicating for the purposes of prostitution. Such charges usually receive scant attention. But when Ms. Smith told police she carries the virus associated with [AIDS], the information was released and the dozens of newspapers, television and radio reporters showed up at the College Park court building on Tuesday to cover her appearance. (*Globe*, January 22, 1987)

In addition to being a member of a marginalized population, it is likely the media's nose-for-news was piqued by the disease's movement toward the heterosexual community, as the general population was conceivably at risk (ie. male, heterosexual customers of prostitutes). In fact, four days after the above article appeared, the *Globe* ran another article warning heterosexual male customers of prostitutes to stay away from them. The sensational headline



read: "Health official on AIDS: avoid hookers 'like the plague'" - inferring prostitutes are responsible for spreading this "plague."

The size of the epidemic in other countries such as Africa was also a preoccupation in 1987 coverage and was treated as evidence that the disease could be transmitted heterosexually. This gave rise to countless articles about testing immigrants for the virus: "US considers AIDS testing for Immigrants," (*Star*, May 16, 1987); "3 arrivals in Canada suffering from AIDS, health officials report," (*Globe*, June 10, 1987); and "Immigrants with AIDS barred, officials said" (*Star*, February 18, 1987). These articles focussed on the threat people from third world countries posed to Canadians and our health care system.

Fear mongering was also a common theme in 1987, highlighting the public's fear of children with AIDS in schools, the dangers of dating, the dangers of having sex in foreign countries, the dangers of kissing, and the danger of prostitutes. The repeated coverage of immigrants, prisoners, prostitutes, and promiscuous heterosexuals in 1987 demonstrates the preoccupation with groups and behaviours considered deviant by news workers and a threat to the mainstream.

As the incidence of AIDS continued to grow significantly leading up to 1987, so too did policy and social issues such as anonymous testing, discrimination, life insurance, AIDS in the workplace, the ethics of contact tracing, and government funding - all "new angles" which accounted for a significant amount of coverage in both publications in that year.

A final conceivable reason for the leap in coverage, and one which could lie outside the media, was the organization of AIDS groups across the country. Formed in the mid-80s, members of the Canadian AIDS Society

became effective lobbyists and activists by 1987, prior to which they were learning and building their group. (They held their second annual meeting at the end of 1986 which also received some coverage).

By '87 this group seemed to have also acquired "legitimacy" as a source, giving them increasing access to the news workers looking for authorized knowers.<sup>36</sup> The effectiveness of this lobby is evidenced by the Canadian government's commitment the following year to a five year funding package worth \$112 million dollars toward AIDS research, education, prevention, and care, brought about almost exclusively by political pressure from these groups.<sup>37</sup> By effectively disrupting scientific meetings, holding controversial press conferences, and marching in the streets, AIDS groups were able to attract the attention of the mainstream media.<sup>38</sup>

Once AIDS had become a regular feature on the news landscape as it did in 1987, heterosexuals were alternately told that they were and were not at significant risk. Nineteen eighty-eight proved a particularly confusing year for what the news media often referred to as the "general population",:

"Most heterosexuals called free of AIDS" (*Globe*, June 14, 1988)

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<sup>36</sup> The Canadian AIDS Society's (CAS) lobbying stance is considerably less confrontational than its sister groups in the U.S., in part because they rely on government funding for their existence. Other groups representing People with AIDS have sprung up in reaction to this less militant stance, including the group AIDS Action Now! who refuse government funding. Emke suggests that AAN! is accessed less than CAS as a source by the media due to their many views that fall outside of the 'window of acceptability' adhered to by newswriters. (Emke, (b) 1991)

<sup>37</sup> The fact that the Federal government provided funding due to pressure from activists is not a secret in the AIDS environment. Scientists, activists, bureaucrats and politicians themselves admit to this pressure. During a meeting with the Ad Hoc Parliamentary Committee on AIDS on June 17, 1992 politicians like Svend Robinson suggested that the next phase of AIDS funding is slow to appear because of the relative quiet of AIDS activists.

<sup>38</sup> For a further discussion of this process see Emke's article "Action and Reaction," (b) 1991, unpublished paper.

"Spread of AIDS among heterosexuals worsening, MD says" (*Star*, October 8, 1988)

"Canada's AIDS rate high, study says: Heterosexuals now major transmitters" (*Globe*, October 21, 1988)

Despite this flourish in 1988, the role of the heterosexual in the AIDS epidemic was a major preoccupation of the news media from the beginning of the coverage. That many heterosexuals had been infected from the beginning of the epidemic - IVDUs and Haitians, for example - seemed to escape the newswriters' understanding.

Presenting "heterosexuals" instead of their sexual practices as new transmitters of the disease was misleading. Cindy Patton suggests that by stripping high risk groups who were not gay, of their true sexual identity and even their sexuality helped further marginalize groups who were already depicted as deviants:

These individuals' status as heterosexuals was insufficient to normalize their deviant behavior or socially marked relationship to a medical condition once they received an AIDS diagnosis: they became honorary queers. (Patton, 1990 p. 117)

Despite the abundance of contradictory warnings to various groups and continued spotty coverage of issues related to AIDS, by 1988 its coverage dropped off again and then, especially in the *Toronto Star*, plummeted in 1990 as AIDS activism decreased and the incidence of AIDS appeared to be slowing.

Interestingly, the *Globe and Mail's* coverage of AIDS in 1990 was almost double that of the *Toronto Star*. While there are probably many reasons for the discrepancy, the *Globe's* coverage in 1990 was preoccupied with government funding programs and the pharmaceutical industry, two issues which were of little interest to the *Toronto Star*. For example, the *Globe*

offered extensive coverage of the federal government's Canadian AIDS Strategy, announced that year while the *Toronto Star* included just one story focussed on this government initiative. The *Globe* also provided consistent updates on companies that produced drugs like BIRG and 3TC, often from the perspective of stock market action in the pages of the Report on Business, again an issue that was largely absent from the pages of the *Star*.

The coverage in late 1991 rose quite dramatically from the year before in both publications due mainly to the announcement by a macho, heterosexual basketball hero known for his prowess with women, that he had contracted HIV. Over a two day period, the *Toronto Star* published nine stories about Magic Johnson's disease, and its potential fallout on Johnson and professional sports. (November 8 and 9, 1991). Most of these articles appeared in the sports section.

Following on the heels of the Magic Johnson story, in late 1991 both newspapers gave considerable attention to the announcement by two Montreal doctors that a former HIV infected female patient had slept with a number of Canadian NHL hockey players: "AIDS scare rocks NHL: players, owners agree disease must be faced head on" (*Star*, December 4, 1991). The majority of coverage centred on HIV testing of athletes, and the temptations professional athletes face from their female fans. While there was much speculation about the possibility of infection among the players, not a single journalist wondered if the dead woman had contracted HIV from one of the players. Rather she was portrayed as the carrier of the disease who threatened to infect others and not as someone who had contracted the virus herself - a trend I will explore further in the next chapter.

While looking for issues of importance to the mainstream news media over this nine year span, I also noticed an interesting and seemingly positive progression in language and construction of this disease over the same nine years. As I pointed out earlier, in the early to mid-1980s, "risk groups" were consistently highlighted by the media: homosexuals, Haitians, hemophiliacs, IVDUs, and prostitutes. This language posed a significant problem for AIDS activists and cultural critics who claimed that AIDS was being inextricably linked to people within groups, rather than risk activities. This language, they claim, contributed to perpetuating the marginalization of many groups in our society:

...the term "risk group" makes people think AIDS only happens to people with a particular label, instead of being the potential outcome of certain risk activities....It is no coincidence that the early "risk groups" were already marginalized in society by existing heterosexist and racist practices. (Canadian AIDS Society, 1991, p. 29).

However, in performing my analysis I noticed that throughout 1985 and 1986, the use of the term "risk groups" was slowly supplanted by the term "risk behaviours" such as homosexual sex, sex with a prostitute, and the sharing of needles: "It is passed by sexual intercourse as well as oral and anal sex..." (*Star*, November 2, 1986).

The language of transmission was later refined to another but less specific behaviour, the "exchange" of bodily fluids and blood and blood products leaving out the sex "act" altogether: "AIDS is believed to spread through exchange of bodily fluids such as semen, blood, and possibly saliva" (*Globe*, September 10, 1987). Finally, the media turned to an inert vocabulary, defining AIDS as a disease spread by a virus through semen, vaginal fluids, and blood and blood products, thus eliminating "action" or an

activity from the equation: "Acquired immune deficiency syndrome is caused by a virus transmitted by blood and semen" (*Globe*, June 14, 1988).<sup>39</sup>

While not offered uniformly, the movement of the vocabulary of transmission from risk groups, to risk behaviours, and on to the biological mode of transmission, marks a coup for the cultural activists who criticized the cultural industries for this misuse of language (Patton, 1990; Crimp, 1987; Watney, 1987). At first it turned the disease away from its association with people, and toward the activities engaged in by individuals, both of which imply some sort of culpability for the transmission of the virus. The later framing of the virus as transmitted by semen, vaginal fluids and blood, takes away the notion of culpability, placing the blame for AIDS squarely on the virus, HIV.

The most striking aspect of this overview of the news coverage of AIDS in my two sample newspapers is their uniformity.<sup>40</sup> Both papers covered the same sorts of issues, in the same manner. They started the coverage at about the same time, with the same focus and preceded to follow similar story lines: framing the disease in the opening stories as affecting hemophiliacs as well as the blood supply, and then moving on to coverage of the possibility of heterosexual transmission, stories about prostitutes, and in-depth reporting of how the disease was affecting certain heterosexuals. Both sources highlighted the same marginalized members of our society using the same angles, the same language, and the same prejudices.

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<sup>39</sup> This is a trend only. I did find exceptions to the shifts in language use, but there were few.

<sup>40</sup> With the exception of the 1990 coverage of government funding programs and the pharmaceutical industry as discussed earlier.

**Having offered this thin layer of understanding of the coverage of AIDS in my sample, I will now dig deeper into particular sites of representation to further explore whether or not all marginalized groups are identified as newsworthy by news workers.**

## Chapter 6: DEFINING DEVIANCE

Having offered a guided tour through the nine years of coverage of AIDS in the *Star* and the *Globe*, I will now turn to a more in-depth analysis of the texts themselves. It is my hope to demonstrate in this chapter that while the news media highlight certain marginalized groups in the context of AIDS, the marginalized group most affected by the disease is considerably less visible. After analyzing the texts, I hope to explore some reasons for this finding in the final chapter.

In reading my sample database, it became evident that the construction of deviance was accomplished in two ways: first, through direct discourse, framing some groups in a way that implied they were deviant; and second, by framing other groups as mainstream, next to which the rest are necessarily deviant.

In this chapter's first section, I will demonstrate the first of these two methods, showing that the construction of some groups as "deviant" is accomplished by direct representations. The examples I use include the case of prostitutes and Haitians, two groups which the news media consistently constructed as outside the mainstream.

In the section, "Deviants vs. Innocents," I will demonstrate that in addition to being marginalized in this direct fashion, these groups were also marginalized via their comparison to what the media situate as the "innocent victims" of AIDS including hemophiliacs and children.

Throughout the first two sections, I will support the news theory of the centrality of the construction of deviance to the news process. Whether



directly, or indirectly, certain marginalized groups are consistently constructed by news workers as stigmatized people or those apart from the mainstream.

In the third part of this chapter, "Unacceptable Deviance," I will focus on one marginalized group which, despite the theory of deviance, was under-represented, or consistently presented in a uni-dimensional manner, in both publications. Within my sample, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, gay men were barely visible in the coverage of AIDS short of the one sentence link to the disease. Before discussing their under-representation, I will show that when they did appear in the discourse, they too were marginalized by the mainstream news media in much the same way as prostitutes and Haitians.

This chapter is intended to answer one question, and ask a second. Firstly in answer to the question, does the news media rely on the construction of deviance to form the news?, my analysis of the text will demonstrate that, in general, the news media do rely on this construction to form a news story. However, my conclusions about the under-representation of one of these groups, gay men, prompts another question: "why are gay men, the marginalized group hardest hit by this epidemic, under-represented in the news?", a question I will tackle in Chapter 7.

### **Acceptable Deviance**

The general overview of the trends in coverage described in Chapter 5 points to the consistent link of AIDS to marginalized groups within our society: gay men, intravenous drug users (IVDUs), prostitutes, Haitians, women of

colour, immigrants, prisoners. This is a trend which I believe supports the news theory that newswork systematically identifies "deviance" in the construction of a news story. While I'll return to the treatment of gay men in news coverage, it is interesting to look at the treatment of the marginalized groups which received the majority of coverage in my sample: prostitutes and Haitians. I will then briefly contrast these groups to the coverage received by hemophiliacs and children, before moving to a more in-depth discussion on the invisibility of homosexual men within the discourse.

• *Prostitutes as Conduits*

Prostitutes, while framed consistently as a risk group in the early days of the disease, began to be singled out in the mid-80s. Especially beginning in about 1986, prostitutes, as individuals and as a group, were among the most consistent protagonists in the AIDS story. As part of the "whore/mother" dichotomy described in my chapter on social construction of AIDS, the newsworker's framing of women as hookers seems to provide an understandable reference point to readers. This adherence to a formula (woman = prostitute) led to the consistent blaming of women for transmission of the disease, under the stigmatized label of "prostitute":

It is thought by some doctors that AIDS went through several steps before it reached a stage where it could be transmitted by heterosexuals. Homosexual men probably passed it on to bisexual males, who infected some female prostitutes, who then gave AIDS to heterosexual men. (*Globe*, December 31, 1984)

This sentence merits investigation on several levels. First, its insistence that it was prostitutes, not just women who formed a link in this chain, illustrates the news media's persistence in blaming this disease on marginalized groups. It had to be a prostitute, one might suppose, as "normal" women wouldn't be capable of such unacceptable behaviours as having sex with bisexual men, and transmitting a deadly virus. It also implies that bisexual men don't have sex with "average" women. Their deviance seemingly confines them to other deviants.

Secondly, the infection of heterosexual men is presented in this text as the ultimate and final "crime." This epidemic of deviance is presented as leading up to the infection of the "general population," more clearly described as the heterosexual man. It's interesting that the phrase did not follow through on its "link-in-the-chain" logic to say that heterosexual men then infected heterosexual women, including their wives, who in turn infected children. This would be extending the blame from "deviants" to members of the "general population", a concept that falls outside of the construction of this disease as spread about the globe by deviant groups and behaviours.

The tendency to blame, particularly foreign or third world prostitutes while ignoring their own rate of infection is clearly illustrated by an article outside of my sample appearing in June, 1991 in the *Montreal Gazette* (Dunn, "Thailand on cusp of AIDS epidemic," June 15, 1991). Written by a female journalist the article opens with the phrase "There were about 100 or so Thai men in the room..." and proceeded to talk about how female prostitutes may be endangering Thai men. While the article states that one in eight of Thailand's 800,000 (mostly female) prostitutes are HIV-positive, she didn't frame this reality - that 100,000 women in Thailand were suffering from a disease - as

news. That they could infect heterosexual men, is newsworthy - even to a female reporter. It's as if these 100,000 women are invisible or simply inanimate clinical carriers of a potentially deadly disease. My reading of this text, and others like it, is that, as prostitutes, and therefore deviants, these women deserved this disease while their clients are constructed as "innocent victims."<sup>41</sup>

Social commentators also point to the trend toward the representation of prostitutes as the new "disease-spreaders," much in the same way our society regards the promiscuity of homosexual men - all the while maintaining the discourse of deviance. Sander Gilman says:

This shift, from the male sufferer to the female source of pollution, clearly parallels the history of the iconography of syphilis. Here a new group is labelled as the source of disease, women - but not of course all women, only those who are beyond the social pale of respectability. (Gilman, 1990, p. 269)

Other commentators have made it clear that both homosexual men and prostitutes represent our fear of the power of our own sexuality. Stephen Schechter explains by quoting Leo Bersani:

...people associate homosexuality with promiscuity, and promiscuity with the unlimited capacity and appetite for sex manifested by women and publicized by female prostitutes. Hence, "the similarities between representations of female prostitutes and male homosexuals should help us to specify the exact form of sexual behaviour being targeted, in representations of AIDS, as the criminal, fatal, and irresistibly repeated act. (Schechter, 1990, p. 97)

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<sup>41</sup> See "Sex and Sun: Risk of AIDS doesn't deter determined visitors to Haiti," *Globe and Mail*, May 14, 1987 for another example of the coverage of risk to men rather than the suffering of those already infected.

The male fantasy of the sexual appetite of prostitutes, and women in general is presented by the media as a greater threat than AIDS:

[Jacqueline] said that she has not had sexual intercourse since her return to Montreal, even though her sexual drive remains strong....Said Jacqueline: "There is a part of me that stops me from having sex, because it would be like killing every time, and another part that loves sex. As much as I want to contribute to prevention, another part of me has some power of destruction." (*Macleans Magazine*, August 31, 1987)

Despite the fact that this article was written by a woman - perhaps an argument for the lack of agency and the strength of hegemony in newswork - this article is laden with male fears of the strength and power of female sexuality.

Jacqueline is portrayed as being able to "kill" men with her *sexuality* - not via the transmission of a virus. The sex-crazed woman becomes a "loaded gun" (*Star*, November 13, 1988) whose voracious sexual appetite threatens the moral fibre of our nuclear-family-based society

In 1986, two more articles about prostitutes and AIDS, appearing side by side in the *Globe and Mail*, were headlined: "Hookers' clients get new AIDS warning: Business travellers at risk" and "Ottawa prostitute exposed to virus is only 'theoretical risk', MD says." The newsworthy angle throughout my sample is that prostitutes with HIV pose a risk to men. Not a single article appeared declaring or lamenting that prostitutes were at risk of getting this disease.

#### • *Haitians: The Unexplained Risk Group*

In the early years of the epidemic, immigrants from Haiti were inexplicably lumped into the category of a risk group by the media. I say

"inexplicably" in contrast to gay men, who were said to have contracted the disease through homosexual sex, IVDU's who were infected through the sharing of dirty needles, prostitutes whose very promiscuity seemed to put them at risk, and hemophiliacs who got it from blood and blood products.

But Haitians? Why Haitians? This constant link to AIDS is not explained in either the *Globe and Mail* or the *Toronto Star* in the first few years of the epidemic. An article appearing in the *Toronto Star* in 1983 ranks Haitians as the second most infected population in Canada. Yet, its description of how the disease was thought to be spread - gay and bisexual sex, blood and blood products, sharing of needles - left readers to assume that Haitians must be inherently diseased or uniformly homosexuals and drug users. Or worse, perhaps their ability to easily spread the disease to one another meant that they could infect their neighbours with a touch or a glance.

The damage done by the early coverage of Haitians was documented by the *Star* itself, when in September, 1984 it printed an article called "Haitians and AIDS: the fact and fictions" which told the tale of discrimination faced by Haitian immigrants living in Ontario, not one of whom had tested positive for HIV in 1984:

...some people assume that all Haitians are somehow capable of spreading the deadly condition....Almost one quarter of the AIDS cases in Canada have been among recent Haitian immigrants, many in the Montreal area. This has made some people think of AIDS in connection with all Haitians, although this has no medical justification. (*Star*, September 29, 1984)

The *Star*, not surprisingly, does not accept responsibility for its role in the construction of this stigmatization, allowing their sources to blame the lack of education for its perpetuation.

The above article was followed a year later, on April 10, 1985 by an Associated Press announcement from the U.S. stating that Haitians had been "dropped from high-risk AIDS group" categorization. The article said that "scientists could no longer justify including them on statistical grounds" but it reassured readers that "the change was not a result of political pressure from Haitians and will not alter public health policy concerning blood donations by Haitians." This suggests that these scientists, and the news worker reporting, would rather keep Haitians on the "diseased" list, but could find no valid excuse to do so.

But not so willing to rid a "deviant" group of its diseased status, the *Toronto Star* continued to include Haitians on their "blame list" until as late as April 4, 1987: "...AIDS high risk groups which includes male homosexuals, hemophiliacs, Haitians and intravenous drug users."

Witness to the suggestion that all deviance is not created equal is the following excerpt from a *Star* article which, while framing Haitians as somewhat deviant, points to another group for their problems:

It's not known how Haitians are involved in this circle, since those involved have not had homosexual or drug abuse history. Some people think that the infectious agent, if there is one, may be more common in Haiti and that vacationing homosexuals carried it back to Canada, while others think that Haitians might have caught it from homosexual tourists. (*Star*, September 8, 1984)

In the absence of information on why Haitians were in a high risk group, this news worker (Lillian Newbery) simply editorialized on the potential cause, not bothering to follow the news convention of attributing the theory to a source. "Some people think" was seen as justification enough to lay the blame squarely on the shoulders of homosexuals everywhere.

## **"Deviants" vs. "Innocents" of AIDS: Hemophiliacs and Children**

While it's evident that many groups affected by AIDS have been preferred by the media as subjects for coverage, by looking at groups who are not constructed as "deviant" by news workers, we can see a qualitative difference in the way they are treated. Groups and individuals that are constructed as moral "deviants" by the news media include those people who contracted AIDS in the following manners: homosexual sex, injection drug use, and if women, promiscuous heterosexual sex, particularly for money. In other words, those people who engaged in activities deemed to be unacceptable, if not illegal, by the mainstream of our society were somehow guilty or culpable. That they deserved what they got, was an overt message of their construction.

The "innocent victims" of AIDS I found in my media sample are those who contracted HIV through blood transfusions, in the womb, through artificial insemination, or from a dentist. Men who contracted HIV heterosexually, regardless of their promiscuity are also portrayed as innocent victims or even heroes, evidenced by the coverage of Magic Johnson.<sup>42</sup> Women were also innocent victims provided that promiscuity could be discounted as a factor contributing to her infection.

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<sup>42</sup>See for example, The Toronto Star, "Friends, public believe in Magic," and "Magic's brave disclosure may 'save a lot of lives'" both on November 9, 1991, and "Johnson is labelled a 'brave man' by his supporters," November 9, 1991.



• *Construction of Hemophiliacs*

Starting with hemophiliacs, a group categorized into the original "risk list," many of the newspaper articles referred to the plight of families coping with the disease, an issue ignored in the treatment of marginalized populations:

Dr. Tsoukas said the impact of the AIDS situation on hemophiliacs and their families is "devastating. The grief these people go through is incredible." (*Globe*, February 18, 1987)

Unlike articles about gay men, prostitutes, and IVDUs with the disease, this article also discussed how the sexual partners and sexuality of hemophiliacs are being affected:

Physicians and the Canadian Hemophilia Society have been counselling hemophiliacs about safe sex practices, such as the use of condoms, to protect their spouses..."It's putting a strain on some marriages"...(Globe, February, 18 1987)

Protecting the spouses of the *marginalized* risk groups was a subject that did not exist in my sample, nor was the stress the disease might place on an intimate relationship.

Another illustration in the discrepancy of media coverage as I discussed earlier, was the fact that the hemophilia community was the first group to be profiled in the *Toronto Star* in an AIDS-related story at a time when not a single hemophiliac in Canada had developed AIDS. Incidentally, a hemophiliac

was also the first person to be the subject of an inquest into an AIDS related death, as reported in the *Globe* in February of 1984.<sup>43</sup>

•*Construction of Children*

While the coverage of hemophiliacs dropped significantly when the blood supply was screened for HIV, other "innocent victims" of AIDS appeared. The most frequently covered of these were children. The American study conducted by Drushel found that while accounting for just 1.4% of reported cases in the U.S., children received almost as much coverage as IV drug users and gay men combined in his sample, a group which accounted for almost 95% of reported incidents at that time (Drushel in Wolf and Kielwasser, 1991, p. 56). The *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* focussed 12.5 and 14.8 percent, respectively, of their coverage on children, a group that makes up less than one percent of the HIV positive population in Canada.

In addition to the frequent coverage of children with AIDS, the tone of the coverage was significantly different than the marginalized groups living with AIDS. The following headlines are representative of my sample:

"Tragedy of children who inherit AIDS," (*Star*, January 12, 1985)

"More babies being born with the disease: the forgotten victims of AIDS," (*Star*, July 25, 1989)

"For children who have AIDS, the simple joys are missing," (*Globe*, July 18, 1987)

These headlines use a language in empathy in the construction of a child with AIDS, as does the language of the texts. Children are described as innocents

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<sup>43</sup> *Globe and Mail*, "Inquest to probe AIDS-related death of B.C. hemophiliac," February 23, 1984.

in relation to drug using mothers, bisexual fathers, and the homosexual males who, it is implied, infected the nation's blood supply.

In addition to being the "innocents" of the epidemic, many of the articles go into great detail about the impact of this disease on the lives of the children, referring to their added burdens of poverty, loss of other loved ones to AIDS, isolation and discrimination because of their disease.

Babies with AIDS, unlike those with leukemia or other life-threatening childhood illnesses, are often born into families where the mother is also terminally ill, the father is absent, and even the extended family may be riddled by drugs and wracked by poverty (*Star*, July 25, 1989)

"You have to understand the environment those kids come from. For the most part, the parents are poor, are heavy drug users, and have AIDS themselves"....Then there are the children whose parents have already died of AIDS. (*Star*, January 12, 1985)

Many take a personal approach, profiling one youngster, and focusing on his or her struggle to live with the disease, showing courage, and the will to survive against huge odds:

A 9 year-old girl with AIDS, for example, has lived the past two years in a hospital room banked with stuffed animals. The toys were brought by nurses, doctors, and social workers, and volunteers who visit the child and do their best to substitute for her parents, both drug abusers, who abandoned her after she was diagnosed two years ago. (*Globe*, July 18, 1987)

The discussion of the lives of children living with AIDS in both publications is descriptive, sympathetic, caring, and empathy-inspiring, a language confined to the media's "innocent" victims of this disease.

• *"Innocents" Construct "Deviants"*

In contrast to the coverage of "innocents," not only do the media imply that marginalized groups "got what they deserved," but they are also blamed for bringing AIDS to the "innocent victims" mentioned above. The implication is that without prostitutes, drug users, and gay men, AIDS would not exist. Marginalized groups are the mass media's scapegoats for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

For example, an article in the *Ottawa Citizen*, reported the results of a poll which asked readers, (as the headline reported): "Who's to blame for AIDS spread?: Gays, heterosexuals divided on question, survey finds." That anyone could be "blamed" for the spread of this disease was not an issue. Someone, it is implied, must take the blame. The issue was simply "who" should it be:

Gays and heterosexuals seem to see eye-to-eye on many subjects in an extensive survey on AIDS except on the question of who's responsible for spreading the dread disease. (*Ottawa Citizen*, April 4, 1987)

Who is responsible for AIDS? Not surprisingly, 33 percent of heterosexual respondents blamed gay men for the spread of the disease while only one percent of gay men concurred. Intravenous drug users, hemophiliacs, prostitutes, and Haitians were not included in the sample. As the headline implies, the world is divided by sexual orientation: it's either homosexuals or heterosexuals who must take the blame for the disease. Based on the survey results, the culpability of homosexuals was reinforced resoundingly.

Therefore, even when homosexuals are not the subject of discussion as they were in this poll, the idea that the allocation of blame for AIDS is appropriate is often the implicit message. The *Star* offers another example:

It is hard to see how anyone...can blame women for it, since to date it's mainly gays who are affected. (*Star*, February 24, 1987)

Instead of decrying the allocation of any blame, this newsworker is saying that we shouldn't blame women, when it's gay men who are really responsible.

In contrast to the groups-to-blame coverage, people who do not fall within stigmatized risk groups have been afforded rather delicate and compassionate coverage, implying that the "others" (deviants) deserved what they got.

Seemingly innocuous sentences in the news discourse pit the culpable against the innocents by insisting that, because it is moving away from gay men, AIDS is now cause for concern:

But AIDS, which primarily afflicts promiscuous homosexual males, was the cause of death in recent months of a 34 year-old hemophiliac lawyer, a 3 year-old boy, a middle aged woman, a 20 month old baby, and a 70 year old woman. (*Star*, October 24, 1984)

So AIDS "afflicts" homosexual men, like a punishment from God for their "promiscuity", while it benignly "caused the death" of several white, middle class, and innocent members of the general population: a hemophiliac, children, and two women beyond the age that promiscuity might be an issue. By constructing some groups as the innocent victims of AIDS, the discourse implies the existence of HIV-infected people who are responsible for their own misfortune due to a chosen "deviant" lifestyle.

This discussion of how deviance is constructed in the AIDS story offers a strong case for supporting the theory that identifying deviance is a central practice of newswork. An in-depth analysis of the coverage of both prostitutes and Haitians was offered to show how AIDS was constructed as a disease affecting marginalized groups. The media clearly sought out the "deviance"

angle when covering the AIDS story. And, an analysis of non-marginalized groups demonstrated how "non-deviants" were used to construct "deviance" through discursive comparisons and implied culpability of marginalized groups. So even when not part of the direct discourse, marginalized groups were constructed as deviant by inference.

Therefore, I agree with Ericson when he says that deviance is the single most important ingredient of the newsworthiness equation. However, in the following discussion, I will show that while generally sound, this theory falls slightly short of accounting for the construction of all deviance in the news.

### **Unacceptable Deviance**

...meaning in news-discourse is not only determined by what is there, but also by what is absent, not selected, discursively repressed (Hartley, 1982, p. 117)

The fact that AIDS is consistently linked to gay men is obvious in my sample as it was in other studies, (Emke, (a) 1991). Almost every article appearing on the subject before 1987 chanted the list of high risk groups like a mantra - always including either homosexual men, or homosexual sex. And yet my own analysis, and the results of two other studies point to the under-representation of gay men as central characters, subjects or protagonists of news stories and profiles beyond inclusion in the one sentence of risk groups. We are therefore left with the paradox that gay men are excluded from the discourse, but even when absent, are painted as central to the AIDS story.

As I also said, because gay men belong to a marginalized and stigmatized group, they should fit the profile of a "deviant" subject on which the mainstream media base decisions about newsworthiness. Still, they are left out of the discourse on AIDS in the news media. In the following section, I will first analyze the way in which gay men were portrayed when they did reach the discourse around AIDS. This includes an analysis of the 3% and 6.8% respectively of *Toronto Star* articles and *Globe and Mail* articles which offered gay men as central news makers. I will then concentrate on the under-representation of gay men by highlighting the coverage of more acceptable groups and their behaviours.

#### • *Marginalization through Discourse*

While I will turn to analyzing the under-representation of the community that has suffered the most from AIDS, my quantitative results show that gay men did receive a small amount of coverage in each source. And my subsequent analysis indicated that the way gay men were portrayed in these few articles merits some attention as it also supports the "deviance" thesis in news. So before moving on to a discussion of the glaring gap in coverage about how AIDS affects gay men, I will look briefly at the way gay men are represented when mentioned in more than a peripheral way. In short, my analysis of these few articles suggest that, when offered as subjects, gay men are constructed in much the same way as prostitutes and Haitians - deviant people exhibiting deviant behaviour.

To start with, discourse about the shame and deviance of homosexuality is reinforced constantly in the rare occasions when gay men are included as subjects in the AIDS commentary. Headlines are one manner in which newswriters marginalize the lives and practices of gay men, reinforcing their deviance by implying their irresponsibility, and their threat to the "general population." A *Globe and Mail* article appearing on June 1, 1987 headlined, "Gays ignore advice, AIDS study finds," and reports on a study that showed gay men had *reduced* their average number of sex partners between 1984 and 1986. The study also showed that 50% of gay men used condoms regularly, up from 4% when last surveyed. These are all figures which suggest just the opposite of the headline - that gay men were heeding the safe sex message. The information was framed by reporter Joan Breckenridge in such a way as to say that this behaviour change was not enough. Rather than report on the overwhelming response from this community, the fact that they were still sexually active, and indeed, still gay, took precedence. The headline writers, products of the same environment as the reporter, underscored the negative thread of the article.<sup>44</sup>

Another example of the reinforcement of the threat of gay men to our society is reports on retribution against gays by the "general public." Simon Watney says that these kinds of articles are nothing short of an incitement of violence against gays. The *Toronto Star* was especially guilty of this kind of representation: "AIDS panic sparks homosexual 'witch hunt' in Mexico" (*Star*, June 7, 1987); "Aussie homosexuals beaten over AIDS-infected blood" (*Star*, November 20, 1984). Watney describes this kind of reporting as "inexorably

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<sup>44</sup> For an analysis of the importance of headlines in the news discourse see, Teun A. van Dijk's Racism and the Press, 1991. p. 50 - 69.



caught up in the larger discourse of retribution against gay men, which both precedes and exceeds the unfolding of the epidemic" (Watney, 1987, p. 82).

The *Globe and Mail* printed a similar story about reprisals against gay men, highlighting and legitimizing the unfounded fears of homophobic Canadians. Portrayed as "double jeopardy," gay men with AIDS were the subject of vehement prejudice in a small Ontario town, near which a retreat for people with AIDS was being built:

A resort for people with AIDS will open tomorrow in Ontario's Muskoka region despite strong opposition from residents of a nearby town who are more worried about the presence of homosexuals hurting the local economy than they are about contracting the disease. (*Globe*, July 26, 1990)

The article reinforced several times, the fact that the residents were more fearful of the gay men, than they were of contracting HIV. "The big objection is the mode of living (of the guests), not as much the virus..." At no point in the article did the reporter state that the retreat is for people with AIDS - and is not limited to homosexual men. Nor did he refute the false fear of "getting AIDS" from a group of people who happen to live a few kilometres away - even if it was only a secondary fear. Nor did he question the sources in the article which said that property values would drop and that tourists would be scared away. While the presence of this article in 1983 or 1984 would have been shocking enough, the fact that these erroneous views were held, unchallenged, and reinforced by the media in 1990 is evidence of the continued marginalization of gay men.

Although sparse, the coverage of the impact of AIDS on gay men is laden with the discourse of deviance, as is the discourse around the other

marginalized groups I looked at in my sample. As I've also shown, gay men are portrayed as people who are feared and hated. They are shown as irresponsible and unable to control their deviant urges. This coverage reinforces the place of gay men as a marginalized group, and one that is considered deviant by the media. When present, the substantive coverage of gay men reinforces the theory about the identification and construction of deviance in the news. Again, this consistency in the media's identification of deviance would suggest that gay men did meet their criteria for newsworthy subjects. And again, this was not born out in my analysis as I will now discuss.

• *Under-representation of Gay Men*

Missing from my sample, with at least one notable exception, is the kind of story which invites readers into the reality of a gay man living with AIDS. The news media regularly profiled children, hemophiliacs, and individuals who contracted HIV heterosexually, in this manner. We learned about the difficulties of their day-to-day lives. We began to understand the compounded tragedies of entire families who had contracted the disease. A full page story in the *Toronto Star* documented how a doctor, who had contracted HIV through a rare "needle stick" injury,<sup>45</sup> had lost his job, his home, and a law suit against an insurance company, and was still managing to cope. Another article appearing at the end of 1991 in the *Globe and Mail* featured a Christmas-time tragedy of a family who had AIDS:

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<sup>45</sup> A "needle stick" injury refers to the accidental puncturing of the skin by a health care worker handling infectious blood in a syringe.

**It's little more than a year since the Newmans' world began to fall apart. First Kim, then Rob, then two of their children were found to be infected with [HIV] that leads to AIDS...The story that unfolded was one of courage and hope. It's a story that one day, perhaps, will not seem so remarkable - especially if AIDS spreads through the heterosexual population. (Globe, December 21, 1991)**

**The story goes on to paint a portrait of the day-to-day life of a "normal" family living with AIDS. These profiles are plentiful and will probably become more so as the media seek out more families to come out about "heterosexual AIDS." And yet, the group which accounts for 79% of the incidents of AIDS in Canada, and who, because of this staggering figure have lived through the illnesses and deaths of scores of friends and their lovers, all while coping with their own illnesses, and impending deaths, have been largely omitted from this kind of discourse.**

**Only one article, a column by June Callwood, a white woman and a well-known Canadian author, told the tale of the effect AIDS has had on the lives of people within the gay community. It sat like an island in a nine-year sea of similar accounts of groups who contracted AIDS in a less stigmatized manner, usually families or orphaned children. Callwood's article points out how the desecration of a community has been ignored:**

**Only a country that remembers a war can appreciate what is happening as acquired immune deficiency syndrome slays a generation of people in their most productive years. Canada's five-year survivor of AIDS, Jim St. James began four years ago - to his regret - to list friends who have died of the disease. He now has several sheets of paper bearing more than 70 names. "I am losing my history," he says. "The people I used to meet for brunch, the people I worked with, the people I hung out with, the ones I loved." (Globe, November 23, 1988)**

While the tragedy of everyone living with AIDS needs to be understood, the circumstances described by Callwood in the lives of the gay community in this country and others, points to their unique circumstances as the hardest hit by the disease. The hardship faced by this community would seemingly warrant even more understanding and empathy - not less, which is precisely what has happened.

Even when being ignored by the news media, the construction of gay men and gay sex as deviant persists. By referring to heterosexual, vaginal sex as "conventional," "normal," or "everyday," gay sex by implication is a deviant form of behavior. Simon Watney quotes a British newspaper article which said, "No-one ever told her that sleeping with a man could be like facing a firing squad...no-one said that sex - normal, healthy, conventional sex could kill (Watney, 1987, p. 93).

But we needn't look as far as Britain to find examples of the marginalization and demonification of gay sex:

"We're talking about a disease transmissible through average ordinary sex. You don't need all sorts of kinky, weird behaviour." (*Star*, March 30, 1985)

"...in most cases AIDS is the price that people must pay in this decade for anal intercourse." (*Star*, December 14, 1985)

The message is clear: gay sex is kinky, weird behaviour, and anal intercourse is an evil activity for which we can expect to suffer consequences.

Some of the texts are much more explicit in marginalizing gay sex. An early *Globe and Mail* feature offered a full page on AIDS, one article of which was entitled "Evidence is increasing on spread of AIDS through conventional sex" (*Globe*, December 31, 1984). Following the headline, the article's first

sentence unnecessarily clarifies the use of the term conventional by saying "conventional, heterosexual intercourse." The article suggests that as AIDS is spreading to the heterosexual population in San Francisco, it thus marks a perfect point in history to begin studying the disease:

"in heterosexuals, with the disease at its earliest point, we might be able to do this more effectively this time around," he says. "We need aggressive epidemiological studies now the disease has entered a new phase, and not be afraid to ask direct questions about specific sexual activities." (Ibid)

The importance of "aggressive epidemiological studies" on the "old phase" of the disease, gay men for example, was not advocated by this article. Gay men were an invisible, and seemingly disposable group.

While stating and decrying the fact that gay men are omitted from the commentary on AIDS, I realize that stressing this omission can be a dangerous thing, as it can easily be used in hateful ways. For example, the *Globe and Mail's* science columnist, Stephen Strauss reveals the vehemence of his homophobia when he says, near the end of a column called "Women and AIDS not the most at risk,":

I believe a massive overplaying of the risk to women feeds into this awful ignorance because our media coverage and public awareness programs criminally underplay the overwhelming gayness of the plague. It is time to give AIDS back to its risk groups. (*Globe and Mail*, January 12, 1991)

The phrase "gayness of the plague" (diseases don't have sexual orientations) and the outrageous call to "give AIDS" to risk groups implies a natural ghettoization of this disease. While I can't comment on his intentions, Strauss attributes the under-representation of gay men in the AIDS discourse with their

escape from accepting responsibility for the disease. Strauss obscures this blatant "heterosexism" by sending a contradictory message that our society should face the "homophobia of public policy":

It is time to "normalize" the disease by turning our face on the homophobia implicit in a public policy that pretends that the only way Canadian society can accept the disease is by its feminization. (Ibid)

His basic thesis is that we shouldn't need to "feminize" the disease; that is, preach that women too, are at risk - to take it seriously. I'm sure that breast cancer activists, due to their own experience with the inaction of governments, would consider the "feminization" of AIDS as a weapon used to further marginalize the disease, not make it more acceptable. While on first read this article seems to decry the absence of homosexual men from the AIDS discourse, it has an undercurrent of both homophobia and misogyny. This is just one example of how the issue of "under-representation" can be misused as an issue of blame and culpability. When pointing out that gay men are under-represented, this homophobic response implies that gay men have somehow managed to escape blame for this disease which causes suffering in others.

The reasons for the under-representation of gay men from the AIDS story are complex. Some might point to the fundamental homophobia of newswriters, or the perceived homophobia of audiences. The notion that journalists made a concerted effort not to link AIDS with homosexuals is also a possible explanation. While Drushel's study was not conclusive he did allude to this last point:

The under-representation of drug users, and particularly of homosexuals and bisexuals, may have been less a conscious effort by journalists not to link them to AIDS and more an effort to avoid their

mention entirely. It is quite possible that, while the press became increasingly more willing to report on the disease as its seriousness became more evident, its hesitance to mention its most significant risk group did not. (Drushel in Wolf and Kielwasser, 1991, p. 59)

I agree with Drushel that reporters probably didn't set out a "politically correct" agenda in not associating gay men with AIDS by not writing about them in any depth. Due to the limits of 'agency' in newswork and the overwhelming standardization produced by news routines, values, and the hegemonic forces at work in our society, my research shows that this kind of "active bias" by news workers is not sanctioned by this profession. Not only is it not sanctioned, but the "checks and balances" inherent in the editorial hierarchy leave individual reporters with little autonomy as to the subject and angle of the story.

In a CBC Radio interview, Patricia Graham, Senior Editor of the *Vancouver Sun* suggested that mechanisms are in place to prevent newswriters from censoring or framing stories in a particular way. In a discussion about the backlash against feminism, CBC host Gail Hulnik asked Graham if she would choose not to cover events or viewpoints that contributed to this backlash. Graham stated clearly that this was not an appropriate action for a newswriter to take, and that the entire process of editing (passed from hand to hand, as discussed in Chapter 4) ensures that a newswriter does not consciously take a particular view, whether it be "politically correct" or not.<sup>46</sup> This indicates that news workers are unlikely to take a conscious decision based on their own political views regarding a news story. Rather, as I've explained, the biases and omissions are less obviously motivated.

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<sup>46</sup> On the "Summer Edition," July 8, 1992, CBC Radio Vancouver.

While not necessarily overtly trained to view homosexuals as deviants, notions implicit in all forms of newswork help to create this distinction. Newswriters within mass circulation daily newspapers are trained to view audiences as a homogeneous mass: the general public. Gay men, are not part of the AIDS discourse, because the news machine does not consider them part of the general public. Simon Watney, in an analysis of AIDS in television, concurs:

...a large parcel of blame should be laid at the feet of a media industry which has consistently refused to acknowledge the sexual diversity of its actual spectators, preferring to cater for the amazing fiction of a uniformly and unproblematically heterosexual general public. (Watney, 1987, p. 103)

By avoiding mention of gay men altogether, newswriters, through their daily practices, reinforce boundaries of acceptable subject matter for news coverage. In depth discussion of homosexual men or homosexual practices apparently falls outside of these boundaries.

Three classes of people with AIDS emerged from my analysis of news coverage: groups which are not marginalized, but are portrayed as the "innocent victim" of AIDS, (children, hemophiliacs); groups which are constructed as deviant, but in acceptable ways, (prostitutes, Haitians, IVDUs, immigrants, prisoners); and thirdly, although largely absent, those groups who are deemed too deviant for coverage - in this case, gay men.

In this discussion, I've illustrated the consistent and systematic under-representation of gay men in the news media's discourse on AIDS outside of the perpetual one-sentence link to the disease. At the same time, I've also demonstrated that other marginalized groups are featured consistently in this



discourse where they are constructed as "deviant." These two observations suggest that the theory of the centrality of the identification of deviance in news construction, while generally valid, does not account for all forms of deviance.

While I was able to provide this evidence, the difficult part of this field of study is to answer the question of why gay men were not represented consistently in the news while other "deviators" were portrayed? Or more generically, why is some deviance not included while other deviance remains central to news construction?

## **Chapter 7: CONCLUSIONS AND STRATEGIES**

### **Conclusions**

My research showed that while gay men were often linked to the disease of AIDS in a single phrase, their presence as subjects of news items was drastically less than was warranted by the actual effect the disease has had on this community. I also showed that other marginalized groups affected by AIDS received copious attention from the news media although they were often subjected to unfavourable comparisons with groups less stigmatized in our society.

I feel very strongly that the construction of deviance by the news media plays a significant role in reinforcing the values of the mainstream. As other news analysts have pointed out, in order for the "usual" to exist, the "unusual" must first be defined, (Mary Douglas, in Ericson, 1987, p. 60) And more importantly, for the "usual" to be perpetuated, it must be constructed as the "acceptable," "preferred," "moral," and "normal" course of action or behaviour. This is accomplished by defining the "unusual" as an "unacceptable," "undesirable," "immoral" and "deviant" course of action or behaviour.

So, if we look at the portrayal of deviance, it is plausible that every time a male, white, middle class, heterosexual Canadian reads a newspaper or watches television, he is reassured that his chosen lifestyle and social situation is the "preferred" lifestyle; the lifestyle of choice. He is left to feel thankful for his lifestyle, and disdainful of those who are too weak, too evil, or too

different, to pursue it for themselves. This process, Ericson says, helps to instruct us about social order:

...the predominance of deviance and control in the news is that it constitutes an important means by which our culture constructs a sense of order and consensus. While such news may be entertaining, it also articulates current sensibilities about collective life and the basis of social order. News of deviance and control is included because it is intrinsically instructive about social order...(Ericson et al, 1987, p. 59)

While it is important for the media, to reassure the "general public" that they are the acceptable majority, they must be careful not to create social chaos by causing fear, loathing, and violence to emerge against those not toeing society's moral line. Therefore, when offering the image of deviance to news consumers, the media almost always provide a socially acceptable way to correct or limit this deviance. Richard Ericson describes this process as the discourse of "control" (Ericson et al, 1987, p. 44). In other words rather than just framing an incident or person as deviant, the media offer an institutional method for control of that deviance or the deviant behaviour and, in doing so, help to indirectly reinforce dominant values. Herbert Gans explains this point by using the notion of moral disorder rather than deviance: "Moral disorder news therefore reinforces and relegitimizes dominant national and society values by publicizing and helping to punish those who deviate from the values" (Gans, 1980, p. 293).

The most obvious example of this, according to Ericson, is "law and order" news. He says that the news is preoccupied with the ways and means of controlling deviance:

A substantial amount of reporting consists of accounts of 'policing' undertaken by one organization in relation to other organizations or

individuals (e.g. a securities commission investigates irregular trading by a member company of a stock exchange); or, accounts of policing matters internal to a particular organization (e.g. a hospital administration initiates an investigation into the death of a patient) which may or may not eventually lead to policing initiatives from outside that organization...The news-media emphasis on organized life, and its policing, means that they focus on aspects which violate expectations about organized life or which suggest tendencies towards disorganization, and the social control or policing efforts to deal with these. (Ericson et al, 1987, p. 47)

So Ericson suggests that the news media are equally obsessed with the identification, as well as the control, of deviance, offering the "general public" simultaneous reinforcement of their own social morality, and reassurance that social mechanisms are in place to protect their home and family from the deviant fringe.

In the realm of AIDS, this construction of deviance has led to prejudice against people who have the disease:

In this manner the newspaper constructs an ideal audience of national family units, surrounded by the threatening spectacle of the mad, the foreign, the criminal and the perverted. The press is therefore heavily dependent upon the very categories which it ceaselessly offers up exemplary signs of the "breakdown of law and order" or simply "the disgusting" or "the depraved." Scandal serves the purpose of exemplary exclusion in newspaper discourse, and is the central means whereby readers find themselves reassured and reconciled as "normal", law abiding citizens. Hence the remorseless diet of racism and homophobia. (Watney, 1987, p. 84)

When reading the newspaper, it's clear that issues of criminality are relatively easy to construct and then correct in the media. A behaviour which is deemed to be deviant is often, also criminal; the law is a mechanism our society has developed to maintain a socially acceptable order. In the context of AIDS, a prostitute with AIDS (a double deviant) can be arrested, and jailed to prevent her from passing the disease onto others. She is a member of a marginalized

group which our society has instituted means of controlling. The media can tell the public that she's out there. They'll call her the AIDS hooker, and warn potential clients away from her. But they'll also reassure regular folk that she is "in custody," or has been "charged," or is being "held," or will otherwise be "corrected" by the legal system. (See the *Toronto Star* "Judge urges harsher sentences for prostitutes carrying AIDS," November 13, 1988).

When I considered the ease with which newswriters are able to construct an article around a prostitute with AIDS - offering a story about simultaneous deviance and control - I wondered if this process played a role in the qualitative under-representation of gay men in the mainstream AIDS discourse. Gay sex, unlike so many of the other marginalized behaviours affected by AIDS, is not controlled under the law (although at one time, in keeping with efforts to control deviance, it was). When constructing a story about a gay man with AIDS, newswriters must break out of this "routine" of "deviance-and-control" to offer a novel equilibrium to the deviance being framed; they must offer deviance along with something else to reassure the average news consumer. They must find some other administrative option to balance and "correct" the deviance being framed. While not impossible, perhaps the necessity of breaking out of the "formula" and routines of newswriting adds to the process of newswriting's exclusion of gay men from this story.

While the constraints of the procedures of newswriting may contribute to this process of exclusion, there are other forces at work which limit the scope of this deviance to that which titillates but not disturbs; issues which offer a realm of debate but that don't fall outside of what is ideologically acceptable.

Ralph Nader, reflecting on a peace march held in Washington D.C. on January 26, 1991 says that the range of possible dissent is consistently limited:

"[It] was probably the biggest citizen demonstration ever [held] in Washington in winter. CBS gives them a four-second -- that may be an exaggeration -- scan while someone is saying 'Meanwhile, there were protests on both coasts today.' They didn't interview anybody...The media have gone to the point where they don't even cover the bizarre, if the bizarre reflects a dissenting ideology." (Winter, 1992. p. 13)

The inference is that, while deviance or "the bizarre" continues to be the game of the media hunter, if it reflects a dissenting ideology, or steps out of hegemonic boundaries, it is marginalized and often excluded from the universal definition of a "newsworthy" topic.

Whether you call it hegemony, or the manufacture of common sense, or even simple logic, the result is the same:

...a powerful system of logic underlies the news and provides implicit boundaries on the parts of the world that are newsworthy and the parts that are not. (Bennett et al. 1985, p. 67)

This boundary or line between acceptable and unacceptable deviance, considering its uniformity in the AIDS discourse, is likely drawn by the complementary and interconnected values of newswriters and the hegemonic discourse within which they work. Trained to view the "natural" world, and therefore, the mass audience, as a heterosexual mass, broken down into family units, newswriters consciously, and unconsciously view the representation of homosexuality as falling outside this "window" of what is acceptable to this mass audience.

In summary, I've offered two hypotheses to the question of why the gay community was under-represented in the AIDS discourse, excepting of course

its constant presence in the "risk group list." The first is that the news media are unable to offer means of institutionally controlling certain deviant behaviours, a common news practice, and are therefore unable to frame the story in an "acceptable" manner. While it was not impossible to construct these stories, newswriters must break routines, formulas, and the time-bound rhythm of newswriting to frame this story uniquely.

My second hypothesis is that the inherent values of newswriters and the hegemonic boundaries of our society simply exclude some deviance from public discourse. The perception of the mass audience as a heterosexual and homophobic mass means that homosexuality lies outside of that which is acceptably "different."

Both the limitations of news routines and formulas, and the implicit forces of news values and hegemony combine, or conspire, to limit the representation of gay men in the news discourse of AIDS.

## **Strategies**

The challenge remains for social activists to seek to resolve the under-representation of gay men in the media - without perpetuating the "gay = AIDS" formula. We are also challenged to encourage the rejection of the "deviant" construction of certain groups with AIDS within the news discourse. And that means breaking down the entrenched barriers I've discussed in this thesis.

In their booklet, *Homophobia Heterosexism and AIDS*, the Canadian AIDS Society, undaunted by these barriers, offers several dozen "strategies for

change," targeting homophobia in society. They also offer a short list of strategies for changing media construction of gay people in AIDS. These strategies include being careful not to re-create the media's vocabulary of repression (ie. AIDS victim, AIDS patient); challenging individual journalists during interviews to change their use of language to avoid generalizations and prejudice; and offering journalists a sheet of guidelines for the use of language in HIV/AIDS.

While I don't think any of these activities can hurt the effort, they assume individual journalists can make a difference, something I feel even the best intentions cannot make so. The problem remains that these strategies do not address the entrenched homophobia in our society and the continued marginalization of specific groups with AIDS.

I do not believe that the means of representing highly marginalized groups, and changing the representation of other marginalized groups lies with the media themselves. Perhaps the best approach to changing the representation of marginalized groups in the mainstream may be to take advantage of the patterns of newswork outlined in Chapter 4. With the knowledge that newswriters look for stories about deviance and control, that they are restricted by the rhythm and routines of newswork, that they look to certain kinds of sources for information, and that they do not have much space for individual biases, perhaps the public relations efforts of activists can exploit these fixed boundaries for our own purposes. However, given the implicit ideology that homosexuality is somehow bad or evil, this may be more difficult than turning away from the media and looking to consumers of media messages for support.



That is, rather than change the mass media, a paradigm shift must take place across institutions, and on a smaller scale. That means rather than asking the impossible and challenging journalists to break through all of their barriers to offer a fair representation of people with AIDS, we must challenge consumers of news to reject the messages being offered. For me, it was Umberto Eco who inspired this shift in thinking:

In political activity, it is not indispensable to change a given message; it would be enough (or, perhaps better) to change the attitude of the audience, so as to induce a different decoding of the message - or in order to isolate the intentions of the transmitter and thus to criticize them. (Eco, 1972, P. 121).

Granted this suggestion too, means swimming upstream against a current of ideological forces. But I feel that shifting our efforts away from the media to the consumers of their products may be a different way of approaching the problem of representations of people with AIDS in the news media. So far, trying to change the values of journalists hasn't worked as evidenced by the results of this study, nor is it likely to work in the future considering the constraints they face in producing news. The challenge now is to develop concrete strategies, perhaps at a community level, to allow people who don't have AIDS to understand the realities of people who do.

That leads to an important area for further research. The way in which audiences respond to mainstream media is poorly understood in media studies. But if this mass audience does soak up and reiterate what they are told by the mainstream press as one of my sources suggests (Van Dijk, 1991), does an entry point exist for smaller media to expand the limited realm of debate by reaching segments of this same audience? Is it possible, given the "legitimate" reputation of mainstream media, for community advocates and activists to reach

small segments of this audience through other vehicles such as community forums, newsletters, computers, or video? Are these messages crowded out by the mainstream, or is a collection of smaller voices enough to at least broaden the marketplace of ideas? Given the massive economic clout and legitimacy of our western media, does the possibility of resistance exist to reject the homophobia of dominant media and the manner in which they've constructed AIDS and the people who have it?

Like Eco, Jean Baudrillard asserts that the real site of subversion rests in methods which circumvent, not change, the mainstream media:

The street is, in this sense, the alternative and subversive form of the mass media, since it isn't, like the latter, an objectified support for answerless messages, a transmission system at a distance. It is the frayed space of the symbolic exchange of speech - ephemeral, mortal: a speech that is not reflected on the Platonic screen of the media. (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 134)

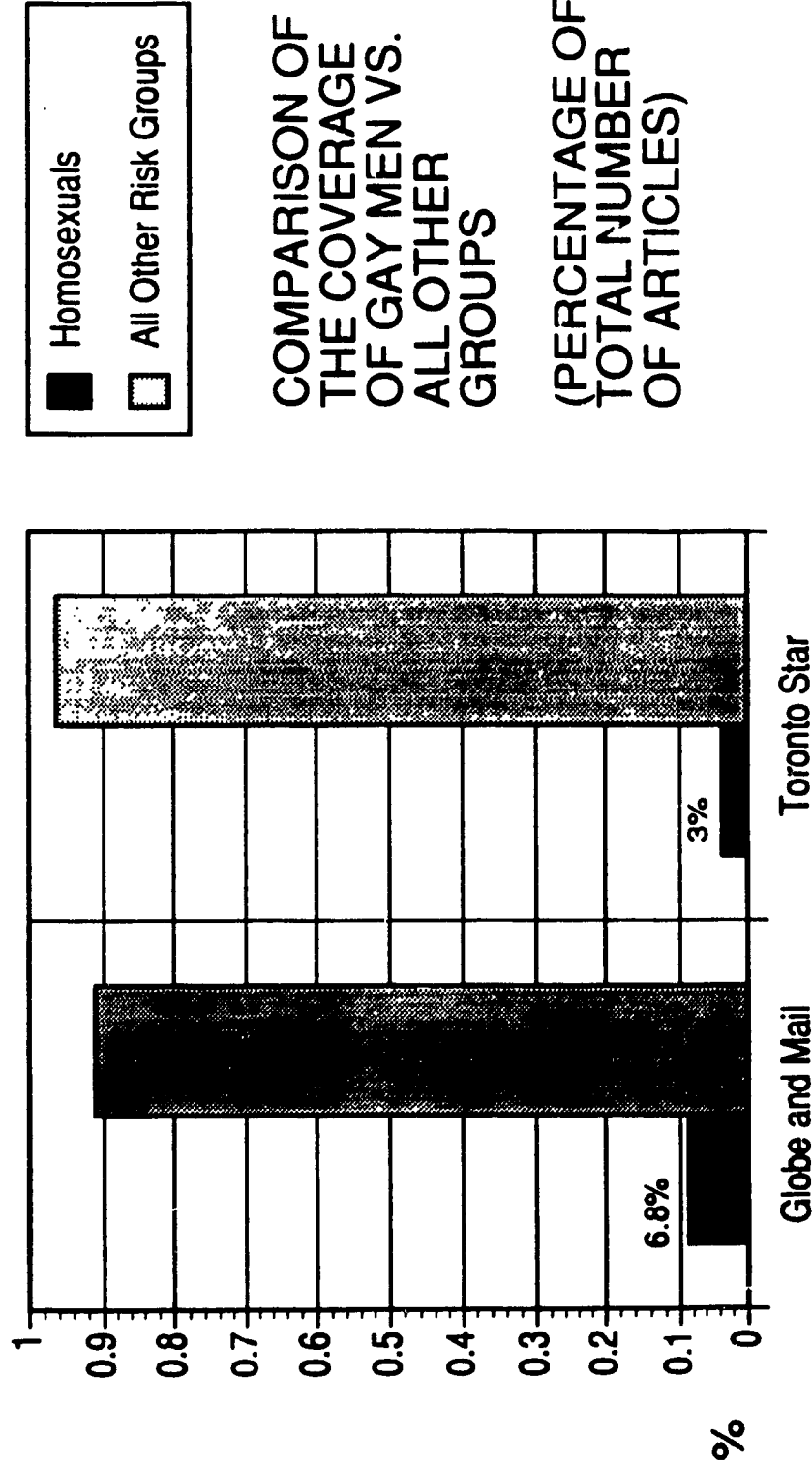
At least in his early writings, Baudrillard said that by making homemade placards for demonstrations, distributing photocopied speeches, or maybe even accessing alternative computer messaging networks, and by showing videos in community, or at least non-broadcast settings, a grass roots movement can spread its ideology. Video technologies have been particularly effective in this regard. (See Appendix 2)

But, an important note of caution, he feels that once this message is discovered by and strained through television or other mass media, its subversive potential is negated. This suggests that distribution channels may be the biggest hurdle to overcome in broadening the ideological boundaries around the issue of AIDS.

While they won't solve the problem of the representation of AIDS, the answers to some of these questions may provide a means to alleviate the marginalization of people with AIDS as well as the groups bearing the stigma of the disease.

## **APPENDICES**

# TO Star vs. Globe and Mail, 83-91



COMPARISON OF  
THE COVERAGE  
OF GAY MEN VS.  
ALL OTHER  
GROUPS

(PERCENTAGE OF  
TOTAL NUMBER  
OF ARTICLES)

## APPENDIX 2

### Examples of Subversive Capacity of Video Technologies

Cases have been documented where video technologies in particular have been successful at offering alternatives to mainstream images. Hans Magnus Enzensberger has no doubt that the "new" media have the potential to reverse the traditional top down sender-receiver model to achieve subversive ends:

For the first time in history, the media are making possible mass participation in a social and socialized productive process, the practical means of which are in the hands of the masses themselves. Such a use of them would bring the communications media, which up to now have not deserved the name, into their own....The direct mobilizing potentialities of the media become still more clear when they are consciously used for subversive ends. Their presence is a factor that immensely increases the demonstrative nature of any political act. (Enzensberger, 1986 p. 98 and 111)

We need only look to mainstream newspapers and magazines for illustrations of this phenomena throughout the world. For example, *Time Magazine* claims that "while dissidents in repressive countries produce video documentaries to rival the officially sanctioned nightly news, guerrilla fighters in places like Afghanistan and Eritrea use videotapes of their military exploits to rally support for their causes" (Beyer. 1989 p. 67).

In the Philippines, the real story behind the assassination of Benigno Aquino is said to have been brought into the country via video cassette, thus circumventing government attempts to hush it up. The *New York Times* said:

A customs examiner at Manila International Airport, going through the baggage of a Filipino arriving from Tokyo, ignored a videotape cassette labelled "Playboy Lovers," as the passenger had expected he would. Later the tape would be viewed in Philippine living rooms for its political interest, since most of the movie had been erased and replaced by a taped copy of a Japanese documentary on the assassination of Benigno S. Aquino Jr.<sup>47</sup>

According to the article, these video cassettes are usually distributed in an ad hoc fashion, passed from household to household, or placed discretely in

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<sup>47</sup> Ganley, 1988 p. 94 quoted from a *New York Times* article September 3, 1983.

the local video rental store. El Salvadoran guerrillas also made use of video technologies for subversive ends:

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini inspired his followers on tape cassettes. The Salvadoran guerrillas now promote their cause on Betamax...Combining the electronic revolution with political revolution, the Salvadoran leftwing guerrilla coalition, the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation, has brought its cause into the plazas of El Salvador with the aid of video cassette. (Ibid p. 91)

The guerrillas had as many as three, three-man video crews spread throughout the countryside capturing guerrilla "victories" on tape. These were dubbed and disseminated throughout their own country and as importantly, exported to the U.S.

Sri Lankan guerrillas, Afghanistan's mugjahedin, Chilean rebels, Chinese students, - each of these groups has successfully employed video technology to achieve subversive political ends. Whether confined to specific incidents (Tiananmen Square) or protracted wars (Afghanistan), video, due to its portability and ease of reproduction, has helped to disseminate perspectives and images that oppose mainstream, and government controlled mass media.

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