ON WHETHER ‘BULLYING’ INDEXES SEXUALITY, AND WHETHER IT OUGHT TO
Language, Gender, and Sexuality

Considerable work on how sexist ideologies marginalize women by casting masculine linguistic forms as unmarked

- ‘man’ and ‘he’ to refer to men and women
- ‘gay’ to refer to gay men and lesbians

Much less work on how heterosexist ideologies marginalize sexual minorities in similar ways

We argue that the term ‘bullying’ (and morphologically related forms), though brought to national attention following a series of suicides by LGBT youth, has only a weak association with sexual minorities.

- Draw on a qualitative and quantitative corpus study of news articles
- Discuss implications for efforts to prevent LGBT bullying
STRUCTURE

- Description of Corpus
- Quantitative Study: ‘bullying’
  - Investigation of strength of relationship between ‘bullying’ and LGBT youth across periodicals
- Case Study: Tyler Clementi
  - Analysis of relationship between ‘bullying’ and LGBT youth
  - Content Analysis of Topics and Headlines
- Implications
Sources (articles between August 2010 and May 2011)

- Corpus 1: articles on ‘bullying’ and morphologically related forms (N=123)
  - *bullying*: any kind of repeated aggressive behavior against a person
- Corpus 2: articles referring to Tyler Clementi’s death (N=131)
- Quantitative Measures
  - Sexuality Index: # terms referring to sexual minorities / word count * 100
  - Silence Index: # articles that do not mention sexuality / total # articles
RESULTS
SEXUALITY INDEX ACROSS PERIODICALS

Quantitative Study: ‘bullying’

F(3,119) = 3.0992, p < .0294
RESULTS
SILENCE INDEX

Quantitative Study: ‘bullying’

χ²=20.984, df=3, p<0.0001
RESULTS
NUMBER OF ARTICLES OVER TIME

Quantitative Study: ‘bullying’

death of Tyler Clementi

Case Study on Tyler Clementi

TYLER CLEMENTI

- 18-year-old Rutgers University student who jumped to his death after his roommate videotstreamed Clementi kissing another man over the internet
- Put the bullying phenomenon in the national spotlight
- Presents opportunity to investigate news reports about a specifically LGBT case of bullying
RESULTS
SEXUALITY INDEX ACROSS PERIODICALS

F(3,127) = 3.5991, p < .0154

Case Study on Tyler Clementi
RESULTS

SILENCE INDEX

$X^2 = 3.028, \ df = 3, \ n.s.$
Closer look on articles referring to Tyler Clementi’s suicide published between September 22, 2010 and November 30, 2010.

Goals
- To compare how this incident is discussed in the four publications.
- Investigate the extent to which this incident is understood as a case of bullying and specifically, as a case of LGBT bullying.
Case Study on Tyler Clementi

CONTENT ANALYSIS

![Bar chart showing content analysis of Advocate, NYTimes, USAToday, and WSJ]

- **Advocate**
  - Straight News: 31
  - Features, Editorials, Opinions: 7

- **NYTimes**
  - Straight News: 7
  - Features, Editorials, Opinions: 6

- **USAToday**
  - Straight News: 6
  - Features, Editorials, Opinions: 3

- **WSJ**
  - Straight News: 3
  - Features, Editorials, Opinions: 7

\[X^2 = 21.34, \text{ df}=3, \ p < 0.0001\]
Many of these articles discuss how Tyler Clementi’s suicide sheds light on issues that are of interest to the general public (e.g. online privacy, suicide prevention, mental health).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USAToday</td>
<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>“Suicide shows need for civility, privacy online”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAToday</td>
<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>“Privacy no more? Tyler Clementi’s death should rattle us all”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>Oct 17</td>
<td>“Little brother is watching”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAToday</td>
<td>Oct 19</td>
<td>“In our social media world, is empathy dying?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAToday</td>
<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>“After recent string of suicides, authorities aim for prevention”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSJ</td>
<td>Sept 30</td>
<td>“Rutgers suicide highlights mental health challenges at college”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The articles use Tyler Clementi’s suicide as an example to discuss issues that are of interest to non-LGBT readers, with issues pertinent to LGBT people appearing at the end of the article.
In several *USA Today* and *WSJ* articles, the Tyler Clementi incident is used to discuss cyber-bullying in general.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>Oct 6</td>
<td>“Shame the cyber-bullies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSJ</td>
<td>Sept 30</td>
<td>“Cyberbullying goes to college”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By contrast, the *New York Times* devotes more attention to the kind of cyber-bullying that LGBT people endure.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Newspaper</th>
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<th>Title</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>“Online musings point to student’s state of mind before a suicide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>Oct 3</td>
<td>“Bullying, suicide, punishment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>“Several recent suicides put light on pressures facing gay teenagers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>Oct 9</td>
<td>“Gay harassment and the struggle for inclusion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>Oct 23</td>
<td>“At a Long Island middle school, a course in what unites and divides”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LGBT bullying seems to be subsumed under the umbrella term of ‘bullying’ in *USA Today* and *WSJ*.

Diagram:

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bullying
  / \  
LGBT bullying   cyber-bullying
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Conclusion

IMPLICATIONS

- Practical
  - The explosion of public discourses on bullying has no doubt increased awareness of and attention to the bullying phenomenon.
  - However, characterizing LGBT bullying in general terms diverts attention from the unique challenges faced by LGBT youth.
  - Striking differences across the periodicals suggest that greater care should be taken to report news about LGBT bullying in a socially responsible manner.

- Theoretical
  - LGBT people are represented only when their interests coincide with hegemonic interests.
  - We hope further research will uncover how other linguistic taxonomic hierarchies are used to sustain power relations.