HOW FOUR METROPOLITAN NEWSPAPERS REACTED TO MICHAEL SAM'S ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT BEING GAY

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by

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to learn how major newspapers write about a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender athlete and to determine how major newspapers use language to write specifically about an athlete who publicly announces that he is gay. A content analysis study was done of newspaper coverage about Michael Sam during the 15 days after he announced he is gay. Data was obtained from four major metropolitan newspapers — The Houston Chronicle, New York Times, Los Angeles Times and St. Louis Post-Dispatch — to identify trends after Sam's announcement. Results of the analysis show journalists made poor word choices and some dismissed him as an athlete, but the majority of the coverage praised Sam for deciding to announce his sexuality publicly. Data obtained in the study seem to imply that, although most instances showed writers using proper LGBT terminology, more work needs to be done. The findings have relevance for theory building and practical implications for sports reporters, journalists and other media.

Chapter One: Introduction

The present study investigates how four major metropolitan newspapers — Houston Chronicle, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times and St. Louis Post-Dispatch — covered and wrote about the announcement by Michael Sam, an All-American football player at the University of Missouri, after he self-identified as a gay man. Sam became the first openly gay athlete drafted by one of the four major North American professional sports leagues — Major League Baseball, National Basketball Association, National Football League, and National Hockey League. Did these publications treat him fairly and civilly after his announcement? Findings obtained in this study provides important information to journalists to help them better write about a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender athlete and the study holds potential to provide a significant contribution to sports journalists. This is the first study of its kind to be undertaken. The results illustrate how major news organizations report and frame news stories involving an LGBTQ sports participant.

At the time of Sam's announcement, there had never been an active athlete of his stature on the cusp of a professional sports career to announce publicly that he identifies as gay, so his announcement provided an opportunity to do a case study on media coverage of such a high-profile openly gay active athlete. The project aims to understand where newspapers in February 2014 were at in terms of the language they used to describe a prominent gay person actively competing in athletics. This status was evaluated by doing a content analysis of stories about Sam starting on the day of his announcement on February 9, 2014, and concluding 15 days later.

The Campus Pride 2012 LGBTQ National College Athlete Report found 5 percent of college athletes identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning (Rankin & Merson, 2012). In 2013, professional male athletes Jason Collins and Robbie Rogers both received attention for their decisions to announce they were gay men. Collins was an active NBA player in his 12th year when he made his announcement in Sports Illustrated (Collins & Lidz, 2013) on April 29, 2013. Rogers, a pro soccer player in Europe at the time of his announcement, announced his sexuality in a post on his blog on February 15, 2013 (Buzinski, 2013, February 15). They are two of the 77 people in sports that came out as gay in 2013 (OutSports, 2013). OutSports (2013), a website that specializes in covering lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in sports, said that those 77 sports figures mark the most coming out stories ever in one year. That number grew by 42 percent in 2014, when according to OutSports there were 109 people in sports that announced publicly they identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (OutSports, 2014).

When Sam made his public announcement about being gay, he did it through The New York Times, ESPN and OutSports.com (Branch, 2014; Connelly, 2014; Ziegler, 2014). Sam's announcement was one of the most covered media announcements by a LGBT athlete about their sexuality. This topic is something that has not received much previous academic study. Some research has been done on retired athletes announcing their sexuality publicly, but a gap in academic research exists looking at an active athlete. It is important that media continues to treat an active athlete fairly after that athlete decides to announce they are a member of a minority group based on their sexuality, and this study will examine how that happens.

Significance of the Problem

The objective of this research is to obtain a better understanding of how writers at major newspapers write about a social topic in sports, specifically a gay athlete in a major professional sport. A problem encountered when trying to look at Sam was a lack of previous research looking at media coverage of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender athletes. There were few studies that looked at how media portrayed them and no previous studies existed that looked at coverage of an active athlete.

This thesis looks to add to the literature and provide a starting point for research on the language used by media related to LGBT athletes. Media coverage can shape public opinion, so it is essential that LGBT athletes be written about properly and accurately without disparagement. The current research is designed to extend the prior research on portrayals of LGBT individuals, explore ways media frame and report stories dealing with this underserved population, and to answer questions regarding journalists and their portrayal of LGBTQ individuals.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter describes literature relevant to the research of this thesis. The chapter is divided into five sections that look at (1) how framing occurs in media, (2) how athletes have been framed by race and gender, (3) what studies found that looked at media coverage of gay tennis players, (4) how media responded to athletes announcing they have HIV, and (5) how media responded to a retired basketball player announcement about being gay.

Articles were initially chosen that examined frames of minority athletes, with a preference for studies that looked at print media. There were few studies that looked at media coverage of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender athletes. The oldest incidents studied about LGBT athletes were of tennis players Bill Tilden and Martina Navratilova, which looked at Tilden's apology for homosexual acts in the 1940s and Navratilova's 1992 tennis match against Jimmy Connors. The next most recent event studied was Olympic diver Greg Louganis' 1995 announcement that he contracted HIV, and three studies looked at different elements of media coverage around Louganis' announcement (Wachs & Dworkin, 1997; Dworkin & Wachs, 1998; Nair, 2000). The most recent event studied was a look at media coverage of when former NBA player John Amaechi announced publicly he was gay in February 2007 (Kian & Anderson, 2009). Otherwise, research has not yet looked at how homosexual athletes were portrayed by media.

Framing

The way media reports on a person, event or topic can lead to a specific portrayal of that subject, which is called framing. A vast variety of topics can be framed by media,

including people that identify as gay and same-sex attraction. Robert Entman, Jorg Matthes and Lynn Pellicano (2009) define a frame as a message that

> Repeatedly invokes the same object and traits, using identical and synonymous words and symbols in a series of similar communications that are concentrated in time. These frames function to promote an interpretation of a problematic situation or actor and (implicit or explicit) support of a desirable response, often along with a moral judgment that provides an emotional charge. (p. 177)

Entman et al. (2009) go on to say that the repeating of frames over time create a perception about a subject, particularly a social one, that once the frame has appeared enough the citizenry can recall just by a phrase. They say, "Frames in communication often play an important role in shaping frames in thought" (p. 181). They use the examples of "9/11" and "Berlin Wall." They explicitly state, "If communication does not exhibit repeated words and symbols that connect with the cultural associations of many citizens, then by these standards, it is not a frame" (p. 177). Scheufele (2006) studied how "key events" cause "frame shifts" (p. 69).

Portrayal of Athletes

In the study "The Olympics, Jesse Owens, Burke, and the implications of media framing in symbolic boasting" by Milford (2012), the basis is about Jesse Owens' success at the Olympics and his treatment from media because of that success. Milford's article analyzes symbolic boasting connected to Jesse Owens in the 75 years after he won four goal medals at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, Germany, and framing theory is used as an example of "how symbolic boasting is manifested in communal discourse" (p. 488). Milford describes symbolic boasting as "the celebration of a community's ideology

via a focus on its most august representatives" (p. 500). Limitations of the study are hard to determine because the parameters of the study are not explained, but it seems the main publications articles were selected from The New York Times and The Dallas Morning News. Including a publication from Ohio, as a northern state that provides local interest in Owens since he starred at Ohio State University, would offer a beneficial contrast. It led to the inclusion of newspapers more familiar with Sam in this study. A strength of Milford's study is the comprehensive look spanning 75 years of articles about Owens, which allows Milford to conclude that media heap praise on Owens in connection to the Olympics but gives Owens little attention or notoriety long term. Milford speaks to how media ignore athletes after their time for their use ends. Milford writes how "any significant communal symbol suffers from cultural lag when it finds itself in circumstances that are an ill fit for its design" (p. 496). Milford's article is included in this literature review because he looked at print media framing of a minority athlete. Based on media's treatment of Owens, Milford's research findings would lead to an expectation media would heap praise on Sam and hold him up as a symbol of the community ideology and perpetuate their desired narrative. My research will show that continues with Sam, who media turn into what Milford calls a "communal hero" (p. 487). Milford defines a communal hero as "a powerful rhetorical tool for the creation and reinforcement of ideological principles because their performances can be used as models of social and political beliefs" (p. 487).

Kinnick's article (1998) does a content analysis looking for gender bias in personality profiles during the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics, looking at articles from USA Today, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. A limitation of Kinnick's study is it looked exclusively at personality profiles and did not include columns and coverage of events. Kinnick found that there were 170 profiles published during the 1996 Olympics with 93 about men and 77 about women with a greater percentage of the female Olympians profiled (2.5 percent) than the male competitors (1.4 percent). The main gender bias the author found was that journalists "still see marriage, appearance and emotions as relevant descriptors of female athletes, more so than for males" (p. 233). For example, the study found that marital status was revealed in the profiles for 20 percent of the men and for 35 percent of the women. This is included in the literature review because it is a content analysis study that looked at minority athletes, in this case women. Kinnick gives no distinct indicators on the framing of a gay athlete, but this study will build upon Kinnick's work by looking for bias in how Michael Sam is described by reporters and if any tendencies that exist showing descriptions of him that match more the similarities of description of men or women.

Jackie Robinson analysis.

When Major League Baseball player Jackie Robinson played his first game in 1947, he made himself a prominent figure in the history of sports by being the first African American man to play in Major League Baseball. The following studies about Robinson are included in this literature review because of similarities to Michael Sam, who became the first openly gay athlete drafted in one of the major American sports leagues.

Kelley (1976) conducted a content analysis of the day Robinson signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers on October 24, 1945. He looked at the first publication after his

signing of four metropolitan newspapers, four "Negro" newspaper, and six magazines. Kelley says, "Negro publications tended to focus more on the Robinson event as a significant historical occasion" (p. 139). It was a stark difference from how metropolitan newspapers handled Robinson's signing as they "tended to take the story as another occurrence in the sports world. Their reporting was not particularly voluminous nor concentrated. Nor did they seek out new news diligently" (p. 139).

While Kelley looked at media reaction to Robinson, Kelly (2005) tried to learn why Robinson's integration of baseball was important to fans. Kelly describes his pursuit as trying "to better understand why specific sports events, institutions and relationship become unusually, centrally, important to the rest of society" (p. 1012-1013). He concludes that Robinson achieved importance because he "was the first black man most US whites ever really knew, or at least the first they ever did not not-know. … The integration of fan with player was also the integration of the races in the nation" (p. 1030).

Words and Tennis

Some of the most notable gay athletes have come from the sport of tennis, and this section looks at studies that have analyzed coverage of gay tennis players Bill Tilden and Martina Navratilova. In 2013, Carvalho and Milford conducted a content analysis on media coverage of Tilden's morals charges involving young men and his apology in his autobiography. The authors' finding was that, "Not only did major news media outlets provide minimal coverage (if at all) of Tilden's legal problems, but they also ignored his attempt, however, limited and ineffective, to discuss his sexuality in his autobiography" (p. 564). That quote references the coverage of his 1940s trials involving the sexual

exploitation of boys. The authors also write how in the 1920s when Tilden reached his athletic peak that "the writers did not concern themselves with Tilden's private life, their praise of his public accomplishments was consistent and unanimous" (p. 559). The authors of the Tilden article do mention "a culture-wide denial" (p. 564) about Tilden's sexuality, but with Sam, denial of his homosexuality is impossible by the public. This drastic change in media coverage of Sam, who asks for media attention by scheduling interviews with ESPN and the New York Times, compared to Tilden, who did not want his homosexual acts publicized, are greatly different. This study builds on what Carvalho and Milford found in their study by examining a modern athlete in a modern media climate.

The more recent event analyzed involving a gay tennis player was the article Halbert and Latimer (1994) wrote. Their content analysis looked at the broadcast transcript from a pay-per-view tennis match between Navratilova and men's player Jimmy Connors called the "Battle of Champions." The authors compared the language used to describe the two competitors — looking for asymmetrical gender marking, gendered hierarchy of naming, ration of praise to criticism, type of praise, character portraits, and gendering of the athletic event. The authors found that the sports commentators ended up "overemphasizing Navratilova's femaleness" (p. 307). Though the study found they frequently emphasized her being a woman, the commentators did not talk about her being attractive, and the lone time the article reference Navratilova's sexuality came in the section on the type of praise the athletes received. The section said:

> Although commentators have undermined women's sports participation by focusing on female athletes' physical appearance, Navratilova's physical

> appearance/attractiveness was not once mentioned by the commentators. … Navratilova's sexuality and societal myths about lesbianism made it more difficult for the commentators to rely on traditional ways of describing her. (p. 304)

Halbert and Latimer do not expand on what they feel "societal myths" are regarding lesbianism, but it could correlate to media describing Sam differently after his announcement about being gay from how media normally describe a male football player.

AIDS Framing

Previous research is minimal that looks at the portrayal of gay athletes following their announcement they are gay. Three studies have been done that looked at gay Olympic diver Greg Louganis' announcement regarding his HIV-positive status, an announcement that occurred eight months after he initially announced publicly he was gay. The three journal articles are "Dead images, live transmissions," "There's no such thing as a gay hero," and "Disciplining the body."

Nair (2000) in "Dead images, live transmissions" looked at the broadcast "Secrets of a Champion" done by Barbara Walters and ABC on February 24, 1995, which is the "20/20" piece where Louganis made his public announcement that he was HIV-positive. Nair criticized the portrayal of Louganis. She wrote that, "Louganis's story, as 'Secrets' would have it, was typical of the disjointed, alienated, homosexual man unable to fully place himself within the boundaries of normal society" (p. 62). Nair also is critical saying the piece created "a narrative of Louganis's development into a body that was always bound to be the site of AIDS" (p. 63). But Nair uses broad criticism and doesn't attack specifics in the piece other than questioning the wording of questions asked by Walters.

Nair throughout her article questions using video repeatedly of Louganis hitting his dead on the diving board at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. But more pertinent to this research is Nair's displeasure with the use of pictures from Louganis' childhood of him in sequins and dancing with his sister, which Nair says, "sought to affirm the tinge of gender disphoria assumed to be part of the homosexual identity" (p. 62). Nair then provides the part of her article most relevant to framing of gay athletes.

> "Secrets" concretised all the unspoken and implicitly concomitant narratives that are assumed to be entwined with such personalities: a constant feeling of otherness, a dissatisfaction and an unfamiliarity with a constructedly coherent self, an unhappiness with one's place in the world to the point of self expulsion … and an expectation of having let down those among whom he had proved himself. (p. 62)

Looking for the portrayal of gay athletes in relation to any of those ideas would definitely be necessary to watch for in framing.

Louganis had come out publicly as gay in June 1994, so that was not part of his revelation he made to Walters. Nair only touches on his coming out, and she is critical of "Secrets" for portraying his sexuality announcement as something new saying the "20/20" piece classified the portrayal of him being gay "as an item on the brink of disclosure" (p. 58). Based on Nair's research, Sam would be expected to be personified by media as having unhappiness with his place in the world and "having let down" people around him and society. The New York Times did a story showing the disappointment of Sam's dad by his announcement (Drape, Eder, & Witzfeb, 2014), but there wasn't a portrayal of Sam himself as unhappy. That did not happen maybe partially

because HIV/AIDS are not so closely tied to homosexuality as it was in 1995. HIV was not mentioned in any of the stories about Sam analyzed for this study and the only mention of AIDS was in talking about former NFL player Jerry Smith, who died from complications of AIDS in 1986 (Macur, 2014).

While Nair looked exclusively at Louganis, Wachs and Dworkin in their two articles compare Louganis' HIV announcement to announcements by straight athletes. First, they compare Louganis to basketball player Magic Johnson (Wachs & Dworkin, 1997) then in an article a year later compare Louganis to Johnson and boxer Tommy Morrison (Dworkin & Wachs, 1998). Both articles emphasize a negative portrayal of Louganis' announcement compared to the heterosexual athletes.

The article "There's no such thing as a gay hero" compares articles from the Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post and The New York Times. Wachs and Dworkin collected all articles published three months after the announcements by Louganis and Johnson, and they took 10 percent of the articles published in the year after each of their announcements. They had 11 articles to look at for Louganis and over 100 articles about Johnson. The authors made a point about the difference in the number of articles saying, "This observation supports our assertion that the news frame is complicit in the (re)production of hegemonic masculinity" (p. 331). The authors coded the articles they found for tone and implication. They used the categories of identity (carrier, hero, victim), social issues (race, class, gender), business related, health related, editorial, AIDS policy in sports and AIDS research (p. 331) when doing their coding. Most of the research article focuses on the breakdown of what identity was used to describe Louganis and Johnson. Of the articles about Louganis, the authors found the focus of all 11 to be

about him hitting his head on the diving board in Seoul and bleeding publicly, and by making these articles about the bleeding they "continue to debate Louganis's moral obligations, which undermines heroic status" (p. 334). Two articles frame Louganis as a hero, and the authors say that, "He is framed only as a fragmented hero to subgroups and marginalized populations such as other gay men or Samoans" (p. 336). Johnson in contrast is called a hero in several headlines (p. 334). Of value to keep in mind when looking at framing of gay athletes, Wachs and Dworkin point out that "7 of the 11 articles on Louganis mention that he is gay, none of the articles makes mention of his long-term partner, reinforcing cultural conceptions of what is a legitimate or 'real' relationship" (p. 334-335). The authors go on to point out that, "Louganis's monogamy is ignored and not used as evidence that anyone can get AIDS" (p. 337).

After critiquing the coverage in general, the authors analyzed the coverage of Johnson and Louganis during five stages of how the press covers a fallen sports star (p. 332). They said that Johnson is a hero during all five stages, and that Louganis never received the opportunity to convert to a hero because he is gay. The authors summarized that the coverage they looked at "merely reproduces the hierarchicalization of heterosexual identity and denigrates and criminalizes homosexual identity" (p. 341). They said something that was probably true in 1995 when Louganis made his announcement but is probably no longer true that, "The idea that all homosexual sex is inherently risky is reinforced through the implicit assumption in the text that AIDS is part of a normal gay life course" (p. 341). As one of the few journal articles that studies how a gay man's announcement about something private, with Louganis it is having HIV compared to Sam announcing he is gay, Wachs and Dworkin provide a barometer of how

media can treat a gay man, and this study will reflect how that has transformed in the ensuing 20 years.

The second article by Dworkin and Wachs (1998) made many of the same points as the previous article. The primary difference is that comparisons are also made to boxer Tommy Morrison. The same methodology was used in collecting articles for this research, except there were 12 articles on Louganis used this time and six articles found on Morrison (p. 5). The questions the authors try to answer in this article are:

> How might the mainstream American print media construct sports heroes' bodies once they announce they have a socially stigmatized disease, such as HIV/AIDS? Will the print media protect the widely celebrated virility of male sport heroes, or will it mark the athletes' bodies with symbols of "immorality" and "inappropriate" sexuality? (p. 2).

A significant difference in this article is the emphasis on the "shock" over Johnson and Morrison getting HIV compared to the lack of shock in relation to Louganis (p. 6-8). The authors are also bothered that "the articles ignore the reality that high (and low) risk acts … are practiced across the spectrum of sexualities" (p. 6), and they later add "there are numerous sex acts in common between gays, lesbians, bisexuals and heterosexuals" (p. 11). They are getting to the point that "by assuming that risk correlates to identity, not practice, the myth of dangerous and bad sexualities is maintained" (p. 11). The point is again made in this research that Louganis' partner is not mentioned in the stories, which is unlike Johnson's wife and Morrison's fiancé (p. 9). The authors also looked at the particular framing of Louganis saying:

> The homosexual body is framed as necessarily immoral, deviant, and stigmatized. Louganis is not framed as having the option of abstinence or monogamy which could have "saved him from HIV/AIDS. Being gay conflates him with the "evils of promiscuity," a dangerous gay sexuality, and an inevitable HIV/AIDS outcome. This is accomplished through the absence of any comment about Louganis' sexual practices or any inquiry into the cause of his HIV-positive condition. (p. 12)

As of Louganis' announcement in 1995 and presumably when the authors wrote the article in 1998, there remains a strong connection to gay men and HIV/AIDS to the point that the authors say it is portrayed in the Louganis articles that "gays will get AIDS" (p. 13). But the stronger point of the article is the privilege and compassion media gave straight athletes that were not afforded to Louganis, a gay athlete. "The print media coverage of HIV-positive athletes reveals how sports media are active in the reproduction of ideologies, which privilege heterosexual male behavior" (p. 14). This study will expand on their mid-1990's research and determine if media portray Sam as evil and dangerous simply because of his sexuality.

Amaechi Analysis

The research that closely resembles this research is by Kian and Anderson (2009). They studied how media covered former NBA player John Amaechi announcing he is gay at the end of his professional basketball career and the hostile response from former NBA All-Star Tim Hardaway. Their study found that that "decreasing homophobia on the part of sport media is yet another indicator of the rapidly changing zeitgeist toward homosexuality" (p. 812). The authors went on to say, "Sport reporters rejected the

domineering, homophobic behaviors and attitudes of orthodox masculinity" (p. 812). And later said, "We are not suggesting that male sport reporters have completely redeveloped orthodox masculinity, but instead that have made it more inclusive" (p. 812). The authors felt a significant finding in their research also was that African Americans in sports with black religious and political leaders were "calling for an end to the elevated rates of homophobia that exist within the African-American community" (p. 813).

Kian and Anderson say in their overall conclusion that, "An active gay teamsport athlete who publicly came out would be treated well by print media" (p. 813). They later add, "Sport, and in particular sport media, is at least growing more accepting of gays and gay lifestyles" (p. 813). The findings from these authors will be expanded on by this study through examining how the media responds when an active athlete announces his sexuality compared to a retired athlete.

Chapter Three: Method

The approach to the research was to do a content analysis of articles published online about Michael Sam from February 9, 2014, to February 23, 2014, which are the two weeks after Sam made his public announcement on February 9, 2014. The 15-day span was selected to follow the study done by Kian and Anderson (2009). Four publications selected to analyze were Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, and St. Louis Post-Dispatch. The Houston Chronicle was selected because of its proximity to Sam's hometown of Hitchcock, Texas, and its stature as the main newspaper in the United States' fourth largest city. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch was selected because of its proximity to Sam's alma mater, the University of Missouri. The New York Times was selected for being the largest daily print publication in the United States' largest city and for its role breaking the news. The Los Angeles Times was chosen to represent a major publication from the West Coast. Any articles mentioning Sam were analyzed. Any listings of statistics and box scores was not analyzed. The reader feedback to the online articles was not be analyzed. The four newspapers' websites totaled 83 articles that mention Sam in the 15 days starting with the day he announced his sexuality. The Houston Chronicle had 22 articles; the Los Angeles Times contained 16 articles; The New York Times included 16 articles; and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch featured 29 articles.

Procedure

A search was done online through each of the four publications' website. Any articles that include the exact phrase "Michael Sam" were copied and put into a document

that was given to the coders. The two coders were each a woman with master's degrees. Any articles written by wire services were excluded because their inclusion on the newspaper's website does not necessarily mean they appeared in the print edition, and an objective of this study is to give a sense of the newspaper's staff's handling of the Sam announcement. A codebook was prepared and two coders were selected to read through the 83 articles and look for specific information from each article and make note of important identifying information for each article. The coders included the writer listed on the story. The coders were also asked to include the section of the paper that the story originated if it was mentioned online. The Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times and St. Louis Post-Dispatch do not regularly say online what section of the paper the article was included in, but for The New York Times, the placement of the story in the newspaper was noted. The headline for each story was documented by the coders. Also, coders were asked to include the number of photos that correspond to each article. They were also asked to identify the type of story written — is it event coverage, features, or opinion, and all three types of stories were analyzed and included in the research results. In addition, they looked at the length of each story by the number of paragraphs written.

Here are additional questions they were asked to looking at for each specific article. The full list of questions is available on the included codebook:

- Adjectives used to describe the athlete
    - After the coders compile the adjectives used to describe Sam, each adjectives will be determined as referring to the athlete as strong, weak or neutral. A strong adjective describes him as someone powerful or

casts him in a positive light. A weak adjective would be something derogatory or describes him as frail.

    - Adjectives that would be strong include: athletic, brawny, fit, forceful, hard, mighty, muscular, rugged, stout, strapping, virile
    - Adjective that would be weak include: delicate, faint, puny, slight, soft, susceptible, tender, vulnerable, wet

- If stories mention the athlete's sexuality and how close to the first mention of the athlete's name is the mention of the athlete's sexuality?
- How the athlete's sexuality is described — gay, homosexual, queer
- Is the athlete's partner or spouse talked about
- How near the start of the story the athlete is mentioned

The author of this research spent five to ten minutes discussing the questions with each coder, who then completed the coding of the articles over several months on an Excel spreadsheet. Once both coders completed their analysis, the author looked over the information for trends. When a coder found inappropriate language used to describe Sam, the author went back to the articles to see the context of the language and how it was used in the publication. In the process of analyzing the data, the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association Stylebook was used to determine what language was appropriate for journalists to use writing about a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Chapter Four: Results

The analysis of the coverage of Sam in the 15 days after he announced publicly that he identifies as gay proved to be largely positive, particularly talking about him as a person. When he was analyzed as a football player, it tended to be less positive and sometimes negative. There were instances of poor language choice by the journalists that did not follow National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA) guidelines to avoid using phrases like "homosexual," "sexual preference," and "sexual orientation," but those words or phrases tended not to be repeated after a publication initially used them inappropriately. Holsti's formula was used for determining the intercoder reliability of the study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014), and across the study, the overall intercoder reliability was 76 percent. An events of note in those 15 days was that after his initial announcement on February 9, the next time Sam spoke publicly was at the NFL Combine on February 22.

Weak Adjective Use

In the Houston Chronicle, there were no weak adjectives used to describe Michael Sam as a person, but there were weak adjectives used to describe him as a football player. Harvey's article (2014) described Sam as "not particularly big," and Tafur (2014) described him as "too small to play defensive end" and "too big and stiff to be a linebacker for the NFL." Those were the exceptions in the Houston Chronicle, and strong adjective were more common. Houston's staff called him "bold," "principled," "impressive," "brave," "pleasant," "tough-minded," "ferocious," "honest," and "courageous" (Editorial, 2014b; Killion, 2014; Jenkins, 2014; Estrich, 2014; Thompson,

2014). But of interest is that the two writers, Harvey and Tafur, that used weak adjectives never used strong adjectives to describe Sam during these 15 days.

In the Los Angeles Times, a Feb. 19 article by Farmer (2014b) is the biggest example of weak adjectives to describe Sam. The article describes Sam as both a "tweener" and "underwhelming," and Farmer uses these descriptors for Sam with only the general attribution that "he's widely regarded" this way. Farmer's definition of a "tweener" when writing about Sam also seems to be a particularly harsh definition of the term. Farmer writes that Sam is a "tweener" because he is "not fast enough or good enough in coverage to play linebacker in the pros, and one too stout to be a dominant defensive end." Farmer (2014c) again writes about Sam on Feb. 22, and this time he condescendingly calls Sam the "Jackie Robinson of the gay community" and labels Sam as "shorter than the prototypical defensive end." Here is the full quote comparing Sam to Robinson:

> Sam is ready to shift gears, to stand out to NFL teams only because of what he can do on the field, rather than being viewed as a pioneer, or the Jackie Robinson of the gay community, as some people have suggested. (Farmer, 2014c)

The only other Los Angeles Times article that uses a negative or weak descriptor of Sam in these 15 days is a Feb. 11 article by Baxter (2014) where he says "scouts" view Sam as "too small, at 6 feet 2 and 260 pounds, to play defensive end in pro football, and that he lacks the skill set to move to linebacker," and in the same article, Baxter describes Sam as a "vending-machine-sized lineman." This is Baxter's only article about Sam in these 15 days, and he seems to balance the descriptors of him. Farmer wrote four articles about Sam in these 15 days, and he never uses a strong adjective to describe Sam, only

weak or neutral adjectives (Farmer & Klein, 2014; Farmer, 2014a; Farmer, 2014b; Farmer, 2014c). Muskal's LA Times article is also one of four that used strong adjectives to describe Sam. Muskal describes Sam as displaying "personal courage." Other LA Times articles say Sam has "strength" and showed "bravery," "honesty," and "courage" (Baxter, 2014; Schilken, 2014; Lang, 2014). Two articles mention Sam's honesty (Schilken, 2014; Lang, 2014).

Only one of the New York Times' articles clearly uses a weak descriptor for Sam. A passage in Dawidoff's Feb. 14 article (2014) calls Sam "undersized for an N.F.L. defensive lineman and slow for a pass-rushing linebacker," but in the same article, Dawidoff calls Sam a "football star" and says he has "unusual public courage." The other two debatable instances are both A1 stories that appeared on the paper's main front. On Feb. 9, Branch's story (2014) about Sam's sexuality includes the statement that Sam "might be too small for an NFL defensive end," with strong hedging by Branch on this description and the fact this is the first story written about Sam's sexuality. On the Feb. 11 A1 story (Drape, Eder, & Witzfeb, 2014), the phrase "loud country boy" is used to describe Sam, which has both strong and weak adjectives — "loud" being the strong adjective and "boy" being the weak descriptor. Like the Houston Chronicle, strong adjectives are much more prevalent than weak adjective in the New York Times, which describes Sam as "brave," "defensive terror," "trailblazer," "athletically blessed," "talented," "triumphant figure," "composed," and "confident" (Editorial, 2014a; Drape et al., 2014; Rhoden, 2014a; Rhoden, 2014b; B. Strauss, 2014).

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch provides the biggest sample to analyze with 29 articles in 15 days about Sam. Burwell (2014) uses a weak adjective to call Sam

"undersized," but he also calls Sam a "star" and the "ultimate macho man" in the same story. A second instance of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch using a weak adjective is Feb. 11, J. Strauss (2014) says Sam is "too small to play defensive end in the NFL," but he balances it by also calling him his "team's most celebrated defender." An additional instance of weak adjectives used by the Post-Dispatch is when Miklasz (2014a) calls Sam "undersized for a defensive end" on Feb. 11. That same Miklasz article, he calls Sam "courageous" and a "cultural trailblazer." While the Burwell (2014), J. Strauss (2014), and Miklasz (2014a) articles, which were all opinion articles, balanced strong and weak descriptors of Sam, there were two articles that used weak adjectives and no strong adjectives to describe him. Gordon's article (2014) on Feb. 11 called Sam "limited," but worth nothing is that this article is not primarily about Sam. Only five of Gordon's 18 paragraphs are about Sam, and Sam is not mentioned until the article's 26th sentence. The other instance is Thomas' (2014c) Feb. 23 article that calls Sam "awkward" as an outside linebacker. Five Post-Dispatch articles use strong adjectives to describe Sam and do not use weak adjectives. The descriptors for Sam in these articles are "All-American," "impressive," "African-American campus leader," "respected," "engaging," "delightful," "thoughtful," "refreshing," "ground-breaker," "pioneer," "trailblazer," "poised," "charming," "humorous," "direct," and "intelligent" (Peterson, 2014; Matter, 2014a; Matter, 2014b; Thomas, 2014b; Miklasz, 2014b).

Use of Homosexual

There are two of the 16 LA Times articles that use "homosexual" to describe Sam, and one of them is by Farmer (2014c). Farmer wrote in response to Sam saying he wanted to be viewed as a football player not a "gay football player" that, "It was Sam

who generated the story with his announcement two weeks ago he is homosexual, telling his story to the New York Times and ESPN." Though not describing Sam, Farmer (2014a) also uses the phrase "homosexual slurs." The other article to use the word "homosexual" to describe Sam is by Muskal (2014) on Feb. 10, and it's Muskal's only article about Sam in these 15 days. Muskal wrote:

> The aftermath of Michael Sam's announcement that he is gay and will likely become the first openly homosexual player in the National Football League was greeted Monday with the kind of coverage usually reserved for the lead-up to the Super Bowl. (Muskal, 2014).

As the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association Stylebook (n.d.) states, the use of the word "homosexual" should be limited to "use only in medical contexts or in reference to sexual activity."

The Houston Chronicle's only story of its 22 about Sam in these 15 days that used the word "homosexual" was Harvey's article (2014), but he used "homosexual" six times in his story and the word "homosexuality" once and never used the word "gay," which the NLGJA Stylebook (n.d.) says is the preferred term. None of Harvey's uses were direct quotes. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch never used the word "homosexual" and uses "homosexuality" just once. The New York Times' only use of homosexual is not to describe Sam and is used in a humorous passage about the perceived fear of a gay teammate in NFL locker rooms. Bruni (2014) writes:

> To his question, a few of my own: When did the locker room become such a delicate ecosystem? Is it inhabited by athletes or orchids? And how is it that gladiators who don't flinch when a 300-pound mountain of flesh in shoulder pads

> comes roaring toward them start to quiver at the thought of a homosexual under a nearby nozzle? They may be physical giants, but at least a few of them are psychological pipsqueaks. (Bruni 2014)

Saying "Lifestyle" and "Preference"

The biggest mistake by the Post-Dispatch is using the phrase "gay lifestyle," which Burwell (2014) did Feb. 10 in describing Sam as "comfortably living a fairly open gay lifestyle." The National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association Stylebook says the word "lifestyle" is:

> An inaccurate term sometimes used to describe the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Sexual orientation may be part of a broader lifestyle but is not one in and of itself, just as there is no "straight" lifestyle. Avoid. (NLGJA Stylebook, n.d.)

The Houston Chronicle had two articles that used the word "lifestyle," but both avoided the phrase "gay lifestyle (Jenkins, 2014; Tafur, 2014). Tafur's use of "lifestyle" is to say players "tend not to care" about their teammates' "personality" or "lifestyle." Jenkins' use borders on pejorative when he says Sam needs to meet with his NFL teammates and tell them, "Got a nickname that makes fun of my lifestyle? I'll be laughing right along with you." The Los Angeles Times never used the word "lifestyle" in its 16 articles, and the word "lifestyle" did not appear at all in the New York Times' 16 articles.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch writer J. Strauss (2014) uses the phrase "sexual preference" outside of a quote. The National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association Stylebook (n.d.) directs writers to avoid the phrase "sexual preference." J. Strauss

paraphrases Missouri football coach Gary Pinkel and writes that "Pinkel said NFL types never directly contacted him to confirm rumors of Sam's sexual preference." The National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association Stylebook says about the use of "sexual preference" that it is a "politically charged term implying that sexuality is the result of a conscious choice. Avoid or use only in quotations."

The New York Times does not use the phrase "sexual preference" outside of direct quotes in any of its stories. The Houston Chronicle uses it twice outside of a direct quote (Harvey, 2014; Killion, 2014). Harvey wrote that Sam "told his teammates before the season of his sexual preference." Killion wrote that "in the past players have been directly questioned about their sexual preferences at the combine." Killion is referring to the NFL combine. The only time a Los Angeles Times story uses the phrase "sexual preference" is in a story by Farmer (2014a), and it's not a direct quote. Farmer is writing about an NFL investigation into the Miami Dolphins franchise in the context of Sam's announcement, and Farmer writes that the investigation portrayed "an unflattering snapshot of a locker room culture where off-color remarks about sexual preference and race are commonplace."

Change of Emphasis

Looking at the Post-Dispatch stories, Feb. 18 is the line of demarcation when Sam's sexuality is no longer necessary in referring to the NFL prospect. From Feb. 10 to 18, all 15 Post-Dispatch stories that mention Sam in the first five sentences also mention his sexuality in the first five sentences. There are no Post-Dispatch articles Feb. 19 or Feb. 20 that mention Sam in the first five sentences. Then from Feb. 21 to 24, there are five articles that mention Sam in the first five sentences, and none of them mention his

sexuality before the ninth sentence. One article doesn't mention Sam's sexuality at all, an article primarily about Texas A&M quarterback Johnny Manziel written by Thomas (2014a) that only mentions Sam in the fifth sentence of the 20-paragraph-long story. The Post-Dispatch turns its focus to writing about Sam as an NFL Draft prospect in the Feb. 21 to 24 time period, with three of the stories having an Indianapolis dateline from the NFL Combine. The shift in St. Louis paper's coverage likely is attributable to that publication spending significantly more time writing about Sam during his college career at the University of Missouri and the readers having more familiarity with him as a Missouri football player, and that allows his sexuality to necessitate less mention in Missouri as it gets farther away from his announcement about being gay.

There is not a similar turn of focus by The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and Houston Chronicle. There are eight New York Times stories that mention Sam in the first five sentences, and six mention his sexuality in the first five sentences as well. Four of those six times his sexuality is mentioned in the same sentence he is first mentioned. The first instance where Sam's sexuality is not mentioned high in the story is Macur's Feb. 9 article "It's Time for the N.F.L. to Welcome a Gay Player" (2014). Her story has the topic in the headline and throughout the story though she doesn't directly identify Sam as gay at any point. The second instance is the 73-paragraph-long Feb. 11 article "Michael Sam's Troubled Upbringing in Texas" (Drape et al., 2014), which builds some narrative before saying in the sixth sentence that Sam's gay. The Los Angeles Times has 13 stories that mention Sam in the first five sentences, and 11 of those stories describe Sam's sexuality in the same sentence Sam is first mentioned. The two instances that doesn't apply to still mention his sexuality high in the story, and they are the Feb. 15 and

Feb. 22 stories that mention Sam in the first sentence and mention him being gay in the second and third sentences, respectively (Lang, 2014; Farmer, 2014c).

In the Houston Chronicle, there are 17 articles that mention Sam in the first five sentences and two stories that don't mention Sam's sexuality high in the story — one came Feb. 10 and one was Feb. 22 (Smith, 2014a; Smith, 2014e). The other 15 articles that mention Sam in the first five sentences all mention his sexuality in the same sentence. Regarding Smith's Feb. 22 article "Teddy Bridgewater: 'I'm the best quarterback in this draft'" (2014e), Sam's mention in the second sentence is the only time he's written about in the 13-paragraph story that's primarily about Bridgewater. Smith says, "Michael Sam has the mass media attention," and doesn't talk about Sam again. Smith's Feb. 10 article "Hitchock ISD on Michael Sam: 'We are proud'" (2014a) is three paragraphs long — the first paragraph introduces a press release from Sam's high school, the second paragraph is the press release from the school that does not mention Sam being gay, and the third paragraph is the Houston Chronicle saying that Sam announced he is gay and the importance of it. As far as Houston Chronicle's writing, there is not much to analyze in those two instances.

The intercoder reliability in determining if Sam's name was mentioned in the first five sentences was 100 percent using Holsti's formula for determining "the reliability of nominal data in terms of percentage of agreement" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). There were 10 instances where the coders did not agree on the exact sentence Sam's name appeared first in the story, and those discrepancies tended to occur when Sam wasn't mentioned until late in the story. The intercoder reliability using Holsti's formula on the exact sentence he was first mentioned was 87.3 percent.

Sam Comparisons

Based on Kelly's 2005 research, there was an expectation of comparisons to other gay people, and that did happen in about one-fifth of the stories. There were 17 articles of the 83 articles analyzed that compared Sam to someone else that was LGBT. The somewhat surprising element is that there was only one comparison not made to an LGBT athlete, and it is a Houston Chronicle article (Estrich, 2014) on Feb. 14 that compares Sam to Pascal Tessier. Estrich identifies Tessier as the "first openly gay Eagle Scout." She compares how the two are breaking ground and showing that gay people are in every part of society. The player Sam is most compared to is NBA player Jason Collins, who came out as gay in April 2013, and that comparison was made in eight of the articles.

Halbert and Latimer's 1994 research looked at how Martina Navratilova was described during a match compared to other female athletes. It's hard to do that same comparison for Sam, because he was not being critiqued in this period about how he performed on the field. There are descriptors used for Sam that would be uncommon for talking about someone during a football game like "honest," "engaging," and "friendly" (Peterson, 2014; Matter, 2014a), but they don't seem inappropriate or out of place in this context where the stories are written primarily about Sam's media interviews.

Wachs and Dworkin's idea that homosexual relationships would be dismissed was not proved wrong by this research. The Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times and St. Louis Post-Dispatch never mentioned Sam's relationship with Vito Cammisano — which would not be revealed publicly until the Columbia Missourian confirmed it after they kissed during the NFL Draft on May 11, 2014 (Hall, 2014). The New York Times alluded

to their relationship twice though the paper did not mention Cammisano by name (Branch, 2014; Drape et al., 2014). It is unclear how much of this was Sam not wanting to reveal his partner and how much was media's lack of desire to portray a gay relationship as a serious relationship. Unlike what Wachs and Dworkin found with Louganis, the four newspapers did not portray Sam as dangerous. Kelley's 1976 findings about Jackie Robinson being portrayed as unimportant did not continue for Sam as many stories pointed to Sam's announcement as being significant, which in turn supports Kian and Anderson. While there were a few instances of subversive use of language, The Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, New York Times and St. Louis Post-Dispatch said nothing that was glaringly negative about Sam in the 15 days after he announced his sexuality publicly.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In looking at how the Houston Chronicle, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote about Michael Sam in the 15 days after he publicly announced his sexuality, there were misuses of language to describe Sam and his sexuality, but the infractions were rare. The publications tended to make the mistakes in the first few days after the news, and they were not reoccurring, with Farmer's writing being the exception. The likely cause for these mistakes is that these publications and writers are not experienced writing about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender athletes since Jason Collins and Robbie Rogers had been the only prominent LGBT athletes in men's major American sports leagues prior to Sam. It's surprising that a writer from the Los Angeles Times would be the one to make repeated mistakes, since Los Angeles is seen as more liberal than St. Louis or Houston. It would be interesting to see if Farmer's poor language choices continued as he wrote about Sam or if these mistakes were rectified like occurred for other writers. There may have been more sensitivity to writing about Sam in St. Louis and Houston, because the stories about Sam from those two newspapers made more effort to localize the story since he had local interest compared to Los Angeles and New York handling the story as a national story.

While there were poor word choices made, there were few negative descriptions of Sam as a person. His portrayal as a football player was instead discounted. In the two seasons after being drafted, Sam did not play in a NFL regular season game, so maybe those analyses were accurate or maybe discounting him as a player is the new way of disparaging him because it would not be politically correct to cast aspersions on him for

being openly gay. But there is value in seeing these publications in most situations using proper terminology and language to describe Sam and his sexuality. That means most publications are conscious and sensitive about using proper terminology for members of the LGBT community and possess a desire to be respectful to members of the LGBT community. The significance of this study is that it provides detailed items for sports journalists to be conscious about when covering an LGBT athlete, and the mistakes made of using improper language such as “homosexual” and phrases like “gay lifestyle” to write about Sam during this period provide lessons that can be learned from and avoided in the future.

When the next openly gay football player announces his sexuality publicly, it would be valuable to compare his portrayal against the way Sam is framed as a character person with inadequate football skills. A limitation of the study is that it looked at only the 15 days after he made his announcement and there was no game coverage included in the period of time analyzed. A beneficial future study would look at how an openly gay player is treated during game coverage. A sense of that was beginning to be displayed in how the newspapers wrote about Sam around the NFL combine, which occurred at the end of the 15-day period analyzed. The coverage around the combine showed that most writers and publications learned from previous mistakes, which seems encouraging for future LGBT athletes in how they can expect to be treated by media.

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APPENDIX

Codebook for Michael Sam content analysis

1. Publication name
    1 = New York Times
    2 = Houston Chronicle
    3 = San Francisco Chronicle
    4 = St. Louis Post-Dispatch
2. Publication date (write in the format MM/DD/YY)
3. Article headline (type as is)
4. Article author (type as is)
5. Section published (type as is)
6. Is Sam's name in the headline
    1 = Yes
    2 = No
7. Is Sam's sexuality in the headline
    1 = Yes, the headline includes the word gay or homosexual or sexuality
    2 = No
8. Number of photos (Enter the number of photos that are part of the story)
9. Number of photos that include Sam (Enter a numeral.)
10. Number of photos that depict Sam wearing a football helmet or jersey or pads (Enter a numeral.)
11. Number of photos that Sam is alone in the photo (Enter a numeral.)
12. Article type
    1 = Event coverage, the story is about something specific happening in one location
    2 = Feature, the story is a broader look at an individual or part of their life
    3 = Opinion, the writer shares his views on a topic
13. Length of story (How many paragraphs long)
14. How many paragraphs mention Sam? (Enter a numeral.)
15. Sam mention into the story (Enter a numeral to indicate the number of sentences in the story when Sam is first mentioned. If he's mentioned in the first sentence, enter "1.")
16. Focus of lede
    1 = Sports, the first paragraph emphasizes football or athleticism more than Sam being gay
    2 = Sexuality
    3 = Both sports and sexuality
    4 = Neither

17. Author adjectives (Any adjectives used by the author to describe Sam)
18. Word(s) describing Sam's sexuality (List any words used such as gay or homosexual)
19. Sam's sexuality mentioned (Enter a numeral to indicate the number of sentences into the story that Sam's sexuality is first mentioned. If it's mentioned in the first sentence, enter "1.")
20. Sam's partner mentioned
    1 = Yes
    2 = No
21. Number of times "gay" used (Write the numeral)
22. Gay as a noun (Enter a numeral)
23. Gay as adjective (Enter a numeral)
24. Number of times "homosexual" used (Write the numeral)
25. Homosexual as a noun (Enter a numeral)
26. Homosexual as adjective (Enter a numeral)
27. How many times are direct quotes offset with quotation marks used from Sam in the story? (Enter a numeral.)
28. Sam's self-descriptors (Enter any words Sam uses to describe himself)
29. Number of people quoted (Not including Sam, how many people are directly quoted in the story)
30. Sources names (The names of anyone quoted directly in the story besides Sam) *On Codesheet leave four spaces
31. Sources titles (The title used in the story for anyone directly quoted in the story)
32. Sources descriptors (Any nouns or adjectives used to describe Sam by sources) *On Codesheet leave four spaces
33. Gay comparison
    1 = Yes, a comparison is made between Sam and another gay person by a source or author
    2 = No
34. Compared person (Enter the name(s) of the person (people) compared to Sam)