

# A Scout is Frame-Ful: Framing, Community Newspapers, and the Boy Scouts of America

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*The Boy Scouts of America are a staple in American community newspaper coverage. This was particularly true in 2013, when the BSA adopted a controversial policy concerning members who are gay. This qualitative analysis compares 2012 community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts with culturally preservationist rhetoric espoused by conservative politicians. Analysis found that community newspapers avoid controversy entirely and instead focus on positive displays of local scouts, achievements, and connections. It implies that community newspapers are imagining an association between those local identities, and that conservative political rhetoric imposes cultural associations which are not reflected by community media. This study of 2012 news is particularly noteworthy given intervening and recent changes concerning the Boy Scouts' membership, and the growing cultural prominence of gay rights and gay marriage.*

The summer of 2015 saw considerable evolution in the so-called American culture wars. The United States Supreme Court instituted nationwide gay marriage in June, and almost exactly a month later the Boy Scouts of America abandoned its controversial ban on homosexual leaders (Leopold, 2015). Scholarship on contemporary coverage of this debate is a worthwhile endeavor. Such research on current events, however, would benefit considerably from scholarship focused on older news coverage of the same events – a “before,” in a sense, to offer a baseline comparison to the “after.” Community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America offers an intriguing example.

In 2013, when gay marriage remained a controversial state-by-state proposition, a passionate debate reconsidered the group’s longstanding ban against homosexual scouts and adult leaders. Many progressive voices, including the Episcopalian and Unitarian Universalist churches and, earlier, the advocacy of both President Barack Obama and his Republican challenger Mitt Romney (Camia, 2012), encouraged the Boy Scouts to abandon a blanket ban based on sexuality. Traditionalist voices, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Southern

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Baptist Convention, and a number of Republican politicians, argued instead that homosexuality and the admission of homosexual members would compromise the Boy Scouts' moral integrity. A number of prominent Texas Republicans, including Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples and Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, wrote an open letter to the BSA leadership:

As state elected officials, we strongly encourage the Boy Scouts of America to stick with their decades of support for family values and moral principles. Capitulating to the liberal social agenda not only undermines the very principles of scouting, but sets the stage for the erosion of an organization that has defined the American experience for generations of young men (Walls, 2013).

BSA leadership forged a compromise in 2013 – homosexual scouts would be admitted, but not homosexual adult leaders. The new policy encouraged liberals and disheartened conservatives, and was ultimately overturned. In 2015, Boy Scouts of America president and former secretary of defense Bob Gates said the ban “cannot be sustained,” and the organization opened adult membership to homosexuals; it did retain an exception for conservative church-led troops, however, allowing them to choose adult leaders “whose beliefs are consistent with their own” (Leopold, 2015).

From a media studies perspective, however, coverage of that 2013 Staples-Patterson<sup>†</sup> letter inadvertently raises an intriguing question. Their letter, along with much of the conservative ethos surrounding the Boy Scouts, implies a Mayberry-esque character – that the Boy Scouts remain a highly traditional, heterosexual, God-fearing group of achieving young boys and men. Were that the case, it seems logical that local media would reflect those values in their coverage of local Boy Scout troops.

How do local media frame coverage of local Boy Scouts? Does local newspaper coverage share the Staples-Patterson rhetoric? Such an analysis would need to have taken place *before* both the 2013 controversy and its resolution in 2015; otherwise, the debate itself might influence the coverage of the Scouts. Fortunately, a broad analysis of framing and community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America was conducted in the summer of 2012, months before the debate erupted. Qualitative framing analysis utilizing major frames by Entman (1993) and Reese (2001) will therefore answer this question while expanding framing analyses into the fertile ground of American community newspapers. Both frames will then be used to determine if community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts shares the Staples-Patterson rhetoric.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

Framing, as a theory, is elastic and evolving; as such, a number of complementary definitions and perspectives have developed over time. What D'Angelo (2002) has described as a research

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<sup>†</sup> Both Staples and Patterson entered, and lost, a crowded race for Lieutenant Governor of Texas.

portfolio of sorts has common roots in the works of scholars like Tuchman (1978), who argued that routinized and institutionalized frames and structures define media content; Gans (1979) who identified structured news patterns and filters through ethnographic research; Gamson and Modigliani (1989), who argued that frames are tangible tools for use by media and social actors; and Pan and Kosicki (1993), who noted that the framing process is a dynamic dialogue between sources, journalists and audiences to determine common frames. In each, a frame is effectively a composite of extant media content and implicit sociological meaning.

This study is designed to explore framing and community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America; so, it employs a pair of popular framing methodologies.

One theory used here was designed by Robert Entman (1993), who argued that framing is essentially an expression of selection and salience. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p52). Of critical importance is the identification of a problem, and a solution, by the media; indeed, Entman argues that news inherently constructs conflict. Entman’s perspective is perhaps the most common application of framing theory, and it has been used by a number of scholars in a diverse group of studies (Bell & Entman, 2011; Nielsen, 2008; Rowling, Jones, & Sheets, 2011; Weimin, 2010).

Entman’s (1993) consideration of problem definitions and treatment recommendations seems logical for national media; however, literature shows that community media, with its primarily local focus, are not necessarily as conflict-prone as national media (Harry, 2001; Kanervo & Kanervo, 1995; Reader, 2006). An environmental controversy in West Texas, for example, required community journalists to consider community needs and affiliations much more sensitively than reporters at regional metropolitan newspapers (Schweitzer & Smith, 1991), and Reader (2006) found that among small-town editors, “community values were often given priority over journalistic values” (Reader, 2006, p861-862). Furthermore, a survey of small town mayors and city managers indicated that those political elites are somewhat ambivalent toward news coverage of controversy; while they generally approved of the watchdog role of the local press, they were more strongly committed to a sense of harmony and community cohesion (Kanervo & Kanervo, 1995). This is not to say, by any stretch, that community newspapers and hard-hitting journalism are incompatible; rather, it does suggest that Entman’s (1993) conflict-centric framing perspective may not be the best fit for the study of community journalism.

The second perspective used here, designed by Reese (2001), is arguably more agnostic toward conflict and centered more around patterns than particular elements. Frames are “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, 2001, p11). The perspective pursues predetermined frames of *organization*, *persistence*, *symbolism* and *structure* (Lewis & Reese, 2009, p. 87). This framework is a bit broader than other framing methodologies, but shares much with approaches adopted by other recent framing studies (Bullock, 2007; Dirikx & Gelders, 2010; Rogan, 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Spratt et al., 2007).

Unlike Entman's (1993) perspective, Reese's (2001) approach to framing does not have obvious friction with the study of community journalism. Academic analysis has not considered the organization of, or symbolism in, community newspaper content; as such, it provides a particularly intriguing framework.

## **Practical Framework**

This study applies two prominent framing perspectives to the study of American community newspapers and the Boy Scouts of America. The logic for these selections is threefold.

Firstly, given the volume of news coverage of the Boy Scouts of America and their new policy toward homosexual membership, as well as potential political and cultural ramifications of the policy shift, analysis of media coverage of the Boy Scouts is appropriate. It is particularly important to study community news coverage of the Boy Scouts *before* membership controversies and policy changes began – doing so properly establishes coverage of the Scouts, not the controversy, and informs the broader debate on the character and role of the Scouts in general.

Secondly, framing is rare in the evolving niche of community journalism research. Hyper-local weekly and daily newspapers are considered “relentlessly local” (Lauterer, 2006) and highly representative of, and accountable to, local audiences (Hume, 2005; Mersey, 2009; Reader, 2006; Smethers, Bressers, Willard, Harvey, & Freeland, 2007). While there have been some inquiries concerning community newspapers and social capital (Jackson, 1982; Jeffres, Lee, Neuendorf, & Atkin, 2007; Mersey, 2009), the bulk of the scholarship has been oriented toward in-the-newsroom adaptability and innovation (Brockus, 2009; Burmester, 2011; Chavez, 2010; Funk, 2010; Gilligan, 2011; Graybeal, 2011; Greer & Yan, 2010; Lowman, 2008; Reader, 2011).

Only a sparse few of these community journalism studies have assessed framing directly. At least one study, a quantitative analysis of community newspapers in California and Missouri, focused expressly on community newspapers; it found that often community newspapers frame agricultural biotechnology in more diverse ways, and with more diverse sources, than national media (Crawley, 2007). Among traditional metropolitan publications, Holt and Major (2010) found that metro papers in Louisiana were more prone to “human interest” stories about the Jena Six than national media (Holt & Major, 2010).

Thirdly, proper study of community newspaper content requires analysis of *core* content – news and photographs which speak to the essence and values of community newspapers. Past research has indicated that community newspapers are more locally focused and civically-minded than metropolitan publications (Hume, 2005; Kanervo & Kanervo, 1995; Lauterer, 2006; Reader, 2006; Schweitzer & Smith, 1991). Community newspaper coverage of a particularly local and civic organization, like the Boy Scouts of America, provides an ideal text for this study. Coverage of a local civic group is consistent with the local and civic focus of community

newspapers writ large, which is particularly important given the scarcity of current framing analysis of community newspaper content.

Few organizations, too, have the staggering volume of the Boy Scouts of America. In 2011, 2.7 million youth members were enrolled in 111 thousand Scout troops across the United States and in American enclaves abroad. More than one million adult volunteers ran and staffed the organization ("At a Glance," 2012; Mazzuca, Perez, & Tillerson, 2011); nearly 38 thousand of those troops (and 421 thousand Scouts) were associated with the Mormon church, with several thousand others paired with Methodist, Catholic, Baptist, and other religious groups ("Chartered Organizations and the Boy Scouts of America," 2012). The Scouts have enrolled more than 114 million members since their founding in 1910; two million of those Scouts have been awarded an Eagle Scout award ("100 Years in Review, 1910-2010," 2011).

The organization is massive by any quantitative measure. Even excusing the exodus of many conservative troops following the 2013 controversy (Lohr, 2013; Nicks, 2013; Payne, 2013), it is safe to assume the group has wielded considerable influence over American society over the last century.

The Scouts have only barely been studied in academia, however.<sup>‡</sup> The only clear example is a study of a "gay market index" in metropolitan markets which argued via that metropolitan demographics influenced news coverage of gay rights, including membership within the Boy Scouts (Mitchell, Pollock, Schumacher, & de Zutter; Pollock, 2007). Remaining studies on the Boy Scouts, however, are only tangentially related to communication theory (Boyle & Marchak, 1994; Guardado, 2009; Hahner, 2008; Miller, 2006; Weiberg, 1977). The group was largely skipped, even, in Robert Putnam's (2000) iconic book on social capital – an ideal place for discussion of local, populous civic groups (Putnam, 2000).

The current study provides unique opportunity to fill these scholastic gaps. Community newspapers are typically understudied a theoretical level, even concerning content central to their local identity; the Boy Scouts, too, have been studied little by the academic community. Given the recent controversy surrounding the character and membership of the Scouts, a framing analysis seems prudent.

## **Research Questions & Methodology**

This study seeks to explore the application of popular framing perspectives onto coverage of the Boy Scouts of America. Such coverage is routine in community newspapers across the United States, and arguably constitutes core community news content. Because framing has rarely been applied to the study of community journalism, it is appropriate to employ diverse perspectives by Entman (1993) and Reese (2001). The former is principally concerned with the articulation of

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<sup>‡</sup> This seems surprising, considering the litany of other studies focused on homosexuals and homosexuality in other contexts (Anspach, Coe, & Thurlow, 2007; Goh, 2008; Gowen & Britt, 2006; Ho, Detenber, Malik, & Neo, 2012; Shamsudin & Ghazali, 2011).

problems and solutions; scholarship on community newspapers, meanwhile, has indicated that many are sensitive about controversial news, and are more loyal to their communities than journalistic practice (Kanervo & Kanervo, 1995; Reader, 2006; Schweitzer & Smith, 1991).

Entman's (1993) framing perspective may not be as effective, therefore, at describing community newspaper framing as Reese's (2001) perspective on socially shared and persistent organizing principles.

Furthermore, during the controversy surrounding the 2013 Boy Scout membership debate, many conservative voices argued that the Scouts exemplified traditional values; a comparison of community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America (prior to the controversy) with frames utilized in the Staples-Patterson letter is merited. Therefore, this study adopts three research questions:

RQ1: To what extent, if any, does Entman's (1993) framing perspective apply to community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America?

RQ2: To what extent, if any, does Reese's (2001) framing perspective apply to community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America?

RQ3: Using both Entman's (1993) and Reese's (2001) perspectives, does community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America share the culturally preservationist rhetoric in the Staples-Patterson letter?

Testing these research questions and framing perspectives requires application of a consistent methodology. Qualitative discourse analysis provides the best approach. It is highly consistent with Entman's (1993) perspective, and it is also easily applicable to Reese's (2001) perspective. Furthermore, the construction of media content is inherently a subjective phenomenon; an interpretation cognizant of that subjectivity seems appropriate, and discourse analysis offers the most flexible approach.

The dataset utilized the Library Press Display with a license from a major research university. The online database was instructed to search newspapers in the United States for news articles containing the words "Boy Scout" in the headline or body of the article; the search was conducted twice, in April and July of 2012, and covered the last month of articles. Each searches returned about 1,500 PDFs of newspaper pages containing mentions of the Boy Scouts. The collection included articles from newspapers of all sizes.

A random number generator was used to calculate a random starting point within each set of articles. Community newspapers were operationalized here as publications with regular circulation at or below 50,000 copies; this definition is common in community journalism research (Lauterer, 2006). Although geographic localness is not the only potential community which a community newspaper may serve, the term does apply to the traditional, hyper-local publications studied here.

Articles from larger publications were dismissed, often summarily; the circulation for *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, for example, did not need confirmation for this study. For unfamiliar publications, the researcher then used the Ulrich's Periodical Index to confirm circulation size; if the publication was a community newspaper, the page was downloaded and included in the study. If not, it was dismissed. No distinction was made between daily and weekly community newspapers. Care was also taken to ensure that no two articles came from the same publication; doing so ensured findings spoke to community newspapers as a whole, not individual publications with greater resources or outsized interest in the Scouts. Once 25 pages were collected in each month, data collection was terminated.

## Results

This study explored prominent framing perspectives and their application to community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America, which represents core content for small weekly and daily newspapers. The most neutral approach to consider framing perspectives by Entman (1993) and Reese (2001) requires a prior consideration of the text; put another way, the results should be presented first without theoretical consideration. Doing so ensures both perspectives are applied equally to the same texts, rather than selectively for each perspective.

Community newspapers routinely covered the Boy Scouts of America, and they did so in largely consistent fashion. Of principle emphasis were local scouts, local troops, local adult troop leaders, and their families. In some cases, a photo of a Scout and his family stood largely as independent content; in others a full article and photograph was published. Only rarely was text present without a photo or article; typically, these cases were devoted to announcements and meeting schedules.

The vast majority of the articles, as well as the photographs, revolved around people and projects. Many covered a charity initiative or humanitarian drive ("Boy Scouts hold successful food drive," 2012; "Cleanup On Ka Iwi Coast," 2012; "Limestone Ledger," 2012; "Old Lyme to Hold Earth Day Celebration," 2012; Ward, 2012); others covered more general events, often a camping expedition, fundraiser or banquet. For example:

PRINCETON — Thousands of Boy Scouts ready to use paintbrushes and shovels are scheduled to visit Mercer County in 2013 and lend their helping hands, so local organizers are finalizing the list of projects they can handle. Jeff Disibbio, who is working with the initiative Reaching the Summit/Boy Scout Projects, recently updated the Development Authority of Mercer County about the work being selected in Mercer County. The 2013 National Jamboree at the Summit Bechtel Reserve in Fayette County will bring an estimated 40,000 Boy Scouts to southern West Virginia. (Jordan, 2012)

The date is June 23, and it is a beautiful and sunny afternoon on the top of Mt. Pisgah, one of three Bradford County parks and one of the highest points in

Bradford County at 2278 feet above sea level. The aroma of hot dogs and hamburgers cooking on an open fire dances on the breeze. The voices of youth and adults can be heard laughing, cheering and clapping. Cub Scout Pack 4022 of Ridgebury, is enjoying the day together with a family picnic and a pack auction. (Swetland, 2012)

An Edmond Boy Scout presents the colors prior to the LibertyFest Concert at UCO on Thursday. (Schlachtenhauffen, 2012)

Many, too, focused on local scouts earning their Eagle Scout badges, the highest rank in Scouting ("Ewa Beach Boy Scout Renovates His High School Parking Lot," 2012; "Karg now Eagle Scout," 2012). Particularly for articles about gatherings or a "Court of Honor," coverage included listing prominent individuals who spoke or were in attendance; of particular emphasis were connections to the business community and political sphere, as were affiliations with religious congregations and (occasionally) the American military ("Area Boy Scouts council honors Kim Leonard," 2012; "Boy Scouts give awards," 2012; Myrick, 2012; Norwood, 2012). Individual Boy Scouts were routinely covered and photographed in conjunction with their families. For example:

Jeff Rice of Albion Boy Scout Troop 164, which is sponsored by the Knights of Columbus and Holy Family Parish, recently earned the rank of Eagle Scout. Rice, who is the son of Chris and Linda Rice, built a photo blind for the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge for his Eagle Scout project. The photo blind is located at Mallard Marsh on Sour Springs Road. As project manager, Allen solicited donations for lumber, hardware, stain, cement and roofing materials for the blind. With his team of volunteers, the blind was then built during July and August of 2011. (Reports, 2012)

Stuart Thorburn, 17, of Richmond, was awarded the rank of Eagle Scout on April 15. He is a member of Troop No. 118, sponsored by St. Mark's Catholic Church, and is a student at Madison Central High School. He is the son of Tom and Linda Thorburn of Richmond. For his Eagle Scout leadership service project, Thorburn, and a team under his direction, built and installed park benches for St. Mark's Catholic School playground, and is currently in his second summer working at Camp McKee teaching "The Dan Beard Program" to first and second year scouts. ("Thorburn awarded rank of Eagle Scout," 2012)

MIDDLETOWN — A small patch of earth on the side of the rectory at St. Sebastian's Church once overgrown with weeds is now adorned with a monument inscribed with the Prayer to St. Sebastian. The spruceup and installation of the monument was done by Sal Nesci Jr. as his Eagle Scout service project. Nesci is a

Life Scout with Boy Scouts of America Troop 41. Nesci said he wanted to do something with some permanence, along the lines of a statue. (Salemi, 2012)

Absent entirely from community newspaper coverage was any discussion of controversy, at a local or national level. BSA as a whole was rarely mentioned, and never negatively. Sexuality was never mentioned in any way. Race, too, was omitted entirely; there were some articles and photos of Boy Scouts of ethnic minorities, but articles were never written about an African-American Boy Scout or a Pacific Islander Boy Scout. They were simply articles about Boy Scouts. Furthermore, if there were local disagreements between Scouts or semi-friendly rivalries among local or regional scout troops, they were never mentioned.

These results were then applied to address the research questions. RQ1 asked, to what extent, if any, does Entman's (1993) framing perspective apply to community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America?

Textual analysis for RQ1 indicated Entman's (1993) conflict-centric framing perspective has awkward implementation concerning the study of community journalism. His perspective focuses on framing as a method of promoting "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p52). Literature on community newspapers, however, has indicated that the top consideration is the local audience rather than journalistic practice, and that coverage of conflict is often more nuanced in small papers than larger ones (Harry, 2001; Kanervo & Kanervo, 1995; Reader, 2006; Schweitzer & Smith, 1991). Ultimately, the conflict-centric nature of Entman's (1993) perspective would be displaced by community newspaper's local-first ideology.

Conflict, of any kind, was barely mentioned in community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America. Photos of smiling teenagers and their parents can hardly be considered an articulation of a "problem definition," and without a problem, there is no material to provide a causal interpretation or treatment recommendation. Some content did mention charity fundraisers or membership drives, and it could be argued that such examples did articulate a problem definition of sorts. However, these problem definitions were relatively simple. Membership and charity were both encouraged using direct language, and the problems themselves seem fairly elementary – obviously, charity is a positive, salient quality. This application of Entman's (1993) perspective seems shallow.

However, the mention of a "moral evaluation" does resonate considerably with community newspaper's coverage of the Boy Scouts of America. The Scouts are always cast as a moral organization, and its members considered upstanding citizens doing positive, helpful tasks for the community. It is perhaps a simple moral judgment but it is a tangible element of the news coverage nonetheless.

Entman's (1993) perspective demonstrates key differences between national and community media. Its ground-up perspective analyses a text holistically to determine the presence and meaning of four key provisions: a problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation. One of those, moral evaluation, is evident in

spades among community newspaper articles on the Boy Scouts of America; the remaining three are largely absent. In one sense, this perspective is largely ineffective at considering community newspaper coverage. If three fourths of the criteria are inapplicable, then alternative perspectives should be considered for future research.

RQ2 asked, to what extent, if any, does Reese's (2001) framing perspective apply to community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America? Textual analysis for RQ2 indicated that Reese's (2001) framing perspective offered a largely appropriate fit for the study of community journalism. It argues that framing consists of "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Reese, 2001, p11).

Consistently, community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America emphasized local identity, local families, and local events. Scouts were portrayed in a positive light, and as local organizations; both reflect Reese's (2001) "organizing principles." Local events are especially important to local newspapers, and the structure and activity-oriented schedule of the Scouts lends itself well to newspaper coverage. These themes seem socially shared and persistent; the Scouts were covered similarly by community newspapers across the country, and over the sample periods. And, they meaningfully structure the social world by prioritizing a civic-minded local organization; the relevant social world is structured, by extension, as a local, civic-minded and family-oriented place with prominent ties to businesses and church groups.

Reese's (2001) framing perspective offers intriguing textual analysis of community newspaper content. It effectively offers a top-down approach, seeking specific and pre-determined attributes of a media text. Reese's (2001) criteria were clearly evident in these texts.

RQ3 asked, does community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America share the culturally preservationist rhetoric in the Staples-Patterson letter? This question utilizes both Entman's (1993) and Reese's (2001) framing perspectives to consider potential shared culturally preservationist rhetoric among community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America and the Staples-Patterson letter, which serves here as a strong example of conservative opposition to policies expanding Boy Scout membership to homosexuals.

The letter itself is highly consistent with both Entman's (1993) and Reese's (2001) perspectives. Using Entman's (1993) perspective, there is a clear problem definition (the "liberal social agenda"), causal interpretation ("Capitulating to the liberal social agenda"), moral evaluation (which "sets the stage for the erosion of an organization that has defined the American experience"), and treatment recommendation ("we strongly encourage the Boy Scouts of America to stick with their decades of support for family values and moral principles").

Using Reese's (2001) perspective, the same clauses indicate socially shared, persistent, and meaningful organizing principles. However, as mentioned previously, Entman's (1993) perspective is problematic concerning community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America; Reese's (2001) perspective is a better fit, but there is limited overlap between community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts and the Staples-Patterson letter about the Boy Scouts.

The organizing principles emphasized by community newspapers focused on achievement, family, and the local community. These are clearly socially shared, persistent over time, symbolic, and meaningful. There seems clear overlap with the “family values and moral principles” emphasized in the Staples-Patterson letter. However, there is no mention of threats at all, or indeed anything resembling negative coverage. Mentions of “the liberal social agenda,” homosexuality, or any controversy at all are omitted.

## **Discussion**

This qualitative analysis of community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America explored prominent framing perspectives by Entman (1993) and Reese (2001). It found that Reese’s (2001) perspective offered the most thorough understanding of community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts, due in large part to its broadness and flexibility; Entman’s (1993) perspective offered a problematic focus on conflict which simply did not conform to the data. It also found problematic overlap with frames used in the Staples-Patterson letter, used here as an example of conservative opposition to homosexual-friendly membership policies.

The appropriateness of Reese’s (2001) perspective is best characterized as further elaboration on the persistent principles that work to “meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, 2001, p11). An array of studies of community journalism indicates that the principle focus is on local content and the local community (Hume, 2005; Kanervo & Kanervo, 1995; Lauterer, 2006; Reader, 2006; Smethers, et al., 2007). The Boy Scouts of America offer a tangible, visible, civic-minded and family-oriented articulation of both that local content and local community. The Scouts reaffirm the community newspaper’s editorial focus on a civically rich, socially dense local community; furthermore, the Scouts’ focus on values helps reaffirm that local identity as a positive one.

In a sense, community newspapers seem to borrow, incorporate and add local emphasis to the values espoused by the Boy Scouts. To quote the Scout Law, a Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful and friendly, among other virtues; by covering the Boy Scouts so positively, community newspapers are implying that their communities share those values as well. Taken a step further, they are *imagining* their communities as trustworthy and loyal, as well as moral and socially integrated.

Coverage of charity drives, Courts of Honor, fundraisers and campouts serve a twofold function. Firstly, they represent achievement of one form or another, be it a new rank or an adventurous campout or canoeing trip. Covering these achievements in community newspapers, in a way, incorporates and imagines them as local milestones as much as individual achievements.

Coverage often emphasizes connections between local Scouts and business leaders, and with military officials and clergy members. This is partly an articulation of local social capital. By emphasizing connections within the local community, community newspapers are effectively emphasizing the connectivity of the community as a whole, which in turn reflects the

newspaper's priority toward the local audience. Partly, too, the focus on connections elevates the organizations being connected – typically the business community, as well as military and church leadership. Each represents other organizations which purport leadership and moral values, and business and church organizations often play prominent roles in local communities. Such coverage, too, imagines the local community as conducive to leadership, business, faith and responsibility.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that community newspapers do nothing to engage, legitimize or de-legitimize those controversies; they simply ignore them. This seems to imply a distancing effect rather than a legitimizing or de-legitimizing one. It is here, then, that a fault line forms between conservative frames in the Staples-Patterson letter and community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America. The letter establishes a problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation concerning homosexual scouts; none of these frames are adopted, in any way, by community newspapers. Instead, the organizing principles utilized by community newspapers are entirely devoid of issues of sexuality or controversy; additionally, they are also devoid of discussion of race or other potentially exclusionary factors. These community newspapers are using the Boy Scouts, effectively, to effectively imagine an inclusive local community – even if that inclusivity is tacitly based on an omission of exclusion, rather than an outright declaration of diversity.

The coverage is decidedly egalitarian in tone and focuses on the positive character of the Boy Scouts and the local community. Perceived deviant threats to the organization or the community are ignored, unlike the Staples-Patterson letter. This implies that a community newspaper's priority, at least in this case, is a positive display of community members and their achievements. It also implies that conservatives like Staples and Patterson are assigning cultural associations and meanings to the Boy Scouts which are not reflected by community media.

## **Conclusions**

This qualitative study of framing perspectives and community newspaper coverage of the Boy Scouts of America offers unique opportunity for theoretical discussion. It also opens the door for at least five intriguing analyses – particularly since the discussion has evolved considerably in the intervening three years. The Boy Scouts have since abandoned their ban on homosexual leaders, although the newest policy does allow individual troops to select leaders on their own criteria, allowing troops housed in conservative church communities to effectively maintain a ban on homosexual adult leaders (Leopold, 2015). It's worth noting, too, that debates concerning both the Boy Scouts and gay marriage are not resolved; recent decisions concerning both have been quite controversial among conservative groups, and the discussion may continue to evolve.

The first new research opportunity studies this transition. It would be tremendously interesting if frames and coverage patterns have shifted between 2012 and 2015. Are community newspapers more likely now to address the membership controversy, in a positive or negative light? Given the national prominence of gay marriage as an issue and Supreme Court case, as

well as the new Boy Scouts policy, have community newspapers reconsidered their attempts to avoid the debate? And if so, have they now embraced the conservative rhetoric espoused by Staples and Patterson, or have they instead adopted inclusivity and gay-friendly language as part of their imagined communities? Such an “after” study would require a “before” analysis, as this paper provides; comparison between the two could be highly fruitful.

Secondly, how does coverage of the Boy Scouts in community newspapers compare to coverage in national or big-city media? This study has explored news on the Boy Scouts as “core” content in community newspapers, but perhaps these coverage patterns are equally indicative of coverage of the Boy Scouts by *any* newspaper. The local publications studied here were unwilling to address controversy and membership in the Boy Scouts; perhaps newspapers in dense urban areas would reach the same conclusion? This could imply that the type of news content drives the tone and level of controversy in news content, perhaps to an equal or greater degree than the size or nature of the news media itself. Potential similarities between community and larger newspapers should not be discounted, and may reveal quite a bit about the future of big city and small town newspapers. Similarly, if larger newspapers were more willing to adopt the frames espoused by political elites, this could be a telling difference between community and larger newspapers – or if that political discussion was even acknowledged by larger media, as it was avoided in local media.

Third, this study argues that Reese’s (2001) framing perspective fits the study of community newspapers well, at least in this instance. How would that perspective fare in a broader analysis of community newspaper content? By focusing on one framing perspective and a variety of community newspaper content, rather than two perspectives and one common topic of coverage, theoretical understanding of community newspapers could be broadened considerably.

Fourth, this study invites an exploration of framing differences among articles written by bylined reporters and submitted content. Many community newspapers publish content on civic organizations, like the Boy Scouts, written by parents or organization members. Sometimes these news releases are published verbatim, and sometimes they are edited, but they represent a different type of content than news written by paid staff. The influence of resources and byline ownership, and how the source of a story relates to its frames, is a worthy avenue of study. It would be interesting, too, to compare coverage of the Boy Scouts of America with news on other civic groups, like Rotary or Kiwanis clubs.

And, finally, these findings invite broader questions on coverage of conflict in community newspapers. It seems clear that conflict frames were avoided by community newspapers covering the Boy Scouts of America; that is not to say, however, that conflict is avoided by community newspapers writ large. It re-emphasizes a point made by Kanervo and Kanervo (1995) and Reader (2006), among others, that community newspapers hold special preference for content which elevates the local community, and that community newspapers approach conflict delicately; these texts do not speak to coverage of politics or education policy, however, which may be potentially more conflict-oriented.

A photograph of a local troop visiting a hypothetical city council meeting, for example, could potentially have little to no bearing on that same newspaper's coverage of the remainder of the meeting. The Boy Scouts are, after all, a youth group, and coverage of powerful adults may lend itself more directly to conflict and controversy in a newspaper of any size. This study cannot speak to conflict coverage in community newspapers in general; it can only claim that, at least concerning the Boy Scouts of America, local connections and achievement are emphasized while conflict is ignored.

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