

## Research Article

# Unstraightening the News: The Treatment of Online Philippine News Sites on the Coverage of LGBTs

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## Abstract

The media coverage on transwoman Jennifer Laude's death in October 2014 underscored the importance of media in delivering reports on lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders (LGBT) that are nondiscriminatory and fair. Consumers continue to demand for fast and easily accessible information, increasing the readership of online news platforms.

This research inquires into the treatment of on LGBTs in their news reportage of three major Philippine news websites. Articles from GMA News Online, Rappler and Inquirer.net that involved LGBTs published from April 2014 to April 2015 were content analysed to find out whether or not these comply with the seventh paragraph of the Philippine Press Institute-National Press Club (PPI-NPC) Journalist Code of Ethics, which states that, "I shall not, in any manner, cast aspersions on, or degrade any person by reason of sex, (...)." Furthermore, this study investigates: 1) the need for gender sensitivity trainings among reporters of news; 2) the existence of LGBT-specific style writing on reporting news rules, and 3) the LGBT community's reception of news reports.

Results show that some articles, though predominantly anti-heteronormative or nondiscriminatory, still contained words and phrases deemed offensive to the LGBT community. Also the researchers found that, all three news sites' stylebooks previously neither contain LGBT-specific provisions nor the reporters from the three sites undergo gender sensitivity trainings prescribed by their news organizations. LGBT interviewees expressed their hopes for a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of their sector in the media.

**Keywords:** gender sensitivity, online journalism, journalism ethics

## **Introduction**

The study explored the treatment of news involving members of the Lesbian, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgenders community in three of the Philippines' major online news publications: GMA News Online, Inquirer.net, and Rappler.com. Through content analysis and focus interviews, the researchers analyzed a year's worth of news articles dating six months before and after the death of Jennifer Laude on October 11, 2014. They wanted to find out whether or not the articles cast prejudice against members of the LGBT community, the news treatment affected the LGBT community, and there is a need for news reporters to go through a gender sensitivity training.

The American Psychological Association (2011) defines sex as a "person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female)." Gender, on the other hand, is defined as the cultural and social construct—attitudes, feelings, and behaviors—of the society in relation to an individual's sex. As such, a behavior that conforms to cultural expectations is gender-normative, with the opposite situation being gender non-conformist (Gender Spectrum, n.d.).

In 1973, the American Psychological Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder, removing it from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Since 1975, the association clamored for the removal of the stigma attached to individuals who identify themselves as part of the LGBT community. Prejudice towards them has shown to have negative psychological effects (American Psychological Society, 2008). Similarly, the American Psychiatric Association has done the same, discrediting gender non-conformity as a disease (GLAAD, 2014).

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, or GLAAD, pushes for a fair, accurate, and inclusive media coverage of those who belong to the LGBT community. Through the Media Reference Guide, it provides journalists accurate resources for the coverage of family, faith, economy, politics, sports, and health care involving the LGBT (GLAAD, 2014).



These signs of acceptance were questioned by LGBT Filipinos, saying that the acceptance was only possible if the LGBTs fit stereotypes and conform to occupational niches (Chiu, 2013; UNDP-USAID, 2014). The Catholic church's position is to embrace the LGBT; however, it does not condone same-sex relationships and unions, and "oppose efforts to provide legal protection for LGBT Filipinos" (UNDP-USAID, 2014, p. 27). The "2014 UNDP-USAID Being LGBT in Asia: The Philippines Country Report" also cites other challenges for the LGBT, this time within the LGBT community itself. The report says:

It was noted that challenges for the LGBT movement include the lack of an umbrella organization, lack of understanding within the LGBT community about SOGI [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity] concepts, and a lack of unity due in part because of class differences. This is within the context of continued social and political challenges for LGBT communities and individuals and a lack of studies on LGBT rights in the Philippines.

### The Case of Jennifer Laude

Nineteen-year-old US Marines Private First Class Joseph Pemberton met 26-year-old Jennifer Laude at the Ambyanz disco bar on the evening of October 11, 2014. According to eyewitness accounts and police investigators, the two checked in at Celzone Lodge, a nearby motel. Thirty minutes later, Pemberton left the motel (Rappler.com, 2014).

The following day, October 12, a motel staff found Laude, naked and dead, partially covered from the waist down, and her head on the rim of the toilet bowl.

According to the investigation, the cause of Laude's death was "asphyxiation by drowning." Similarly, the investigation concluded that Laude's death was a "crime of hatred," with the police stating that the discovery of Laude's sexual orientation "prompted" Pemberton to kill the victim. Pemberton was initially detained inside the US Navy ship, and then in Camp Aguinaldo, headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Francisco, 2014). Meanwhile, sexual orientation, which is a person's physical, emotional, and/or romantic attraction towards another person (GLAAD, 2014), was implicated in the case.

The case received great attention from the media, with various news outlets highlighting Laude's gender identity and expression. Gender identity refers to the internal, deeply held sense of one's gender. This may or may not be evident to other people and may or may not fit into or subscribe to any particular sexual orientation. Meanwhile, gender expression means the external manifestations of gender be it in name, pronouns, clothing, or voice (GLAAD, 2014).

However, there was a notable inconsistency in the way Laude was identified, addressed to and referred to in news articles that told the story of her death and other related news and issues that followed. Was she also a he? Was her gender the realm for her death? These sparked the discussion on how to properly address and cover news that involve LGBTs, both inside and outside the newsroom. It brought to fore the PPI-NPC Journalist Code of Ethics and the journalist adherence to its provision.

Thus, this research aims to evaluate the reportage of the LGBT community in the Philippines through online news articles in GMA News Online, Inquirer.net, and Rappler from April 2014 to April 2015, in order to:

1. Analyze whether or not Inquirer.net, and Rappler and GMA News Online complied with or violated the seventh paragraph of the PPI-NPC Journalist Code of Ethics (attached) in their April 2014 to 2015 coverage of news concerning the LGBTs;
2. Find out how past experiences and personal biases may have affected the journalists' reportage of news involving LGBTs;
3. Find out whether or not news editors and journalists are equipped with proper training on LGBT reporting and follow a specific stylebook guidelines;
4. Describe how the LGBT community was affected by and reacted to the selected news articles from three news organizations, and
5. Identify courses of action on how to improve the coverage of news involving LGBT, and how the journalist can have gender sensitivity training.



The researchers aim to underscore the importance of media in delivering clear and non-discriminatory reports involving the LGBT community. They also aim to enlighten news organizations about the need for a gender sensitivity program for all journalists as a prerequisite to reporting, as this is an important tool in delivering clear and correct information on anything about LGBTs. Media practitioners must be aware of the power their words hold, and as such, should use this power to inform and build a greater sense of awareness and understanding among the public whom they serve.

With the findings of the study, there might be a need for the academics to include the topic of non-sexist and non-discriminatory reportage in the curriculum to avoid future occurrences of biased and unjust reporting by students who may one day cover news about the LGBT community.

The scope of the study included news articles from only three sites, which are some of the most visited websites in the Philippines according to California-based web data traffic and analytics provider Alexa.com (April 2016): GMA News Online, Inquirer.net, and Rappler.com. The study focused on the articles found in the websites that specifically involved the members of the LGBT community. These may fall under different news sections. However, the study did not include those that only mentioned LGBTs in passing. The analyzed articles were published from April 2014 to April 2015, six months before and after the death of Jennifer Laude.

## Review of Related Literature

### A. Stereotyping in Journalism

In the book, *Journalistic Ethics: Moral Responsibility in the Media*, Jacquette (2007) outlined the journalist's rights and responsibilities, placing great emphasis on the media's role to inform the public with stories that do not harm both its subjects and its audience. (Jacquette, 2007).

However, in popular media, negative representations of black males are readily visible and conveyed to the public through news, film,

music videos, reality television and other programming (Smith , 2013). According to Darron Smith, PhD. from the University of Utah, whose research primarily focused on the inequalities of African Americans and other Americans of color, an article in the The Huffington Post States that there is a set of typical roles given to black men in films. They were either the sidekick of the white protagonist, or the comedic relief, the absentee father, or the violent black man as drug-dealing criminal and gangster thug. These roles, he said, negate the broader and deeper experience of black life and the lives of black men in particular. He added that once these representations become familiar and accepted, they fuel misperceptions and perpetuate misunderstandings among the "races".

Media play a major role in creating social norms through their various forms including advertisements, television and film. Gender roles, as perpetuated by the media, exist because of society's choice to accept these; thus, viewers must be aware of these and make sure they are not actively participating in a culture of oppression (Lantagne, 2014). Gender roles are a culture's expectations towards a person's perceived gender, including actions, personality traits and physical appearance (APA, 2008).

## B. Online Journalism in the Philippines

While the use of internet is relatively new in the Philippines, there are more people who are shifting from traditional to online media for their news consumption (UNDP-USAID, 2014; Arabelo and Merida, 2013). Dailies now offer online versions of their papers (Tuazon, n.d.)

Arcangel (2013) inquired into the newsroom convergence of GMA Network and ABS-CBN, stating that "the evolving information needs and preferences of Filipino media consumers have prompted both ABS-CBN and GMA Network to invest in technologies to build online newsrooms and integrate their newsgathering operations" (p. 61).

The year 2012 gave birth to Rappler, the brainchild of Maria Ressa, former head of ABS-CBN News and Current Affairs, with the branding of "social media network." Rappler considers its accessibility features its claim to fame. Marquez and Perez (2014) site readers who were



interviewed and who praised Rappler, confirmed the site's accessibility. The same study gave Rappler a high score in terms of interactivity.

With the launch of these online news websites, it is clear that the internet has surfaced as a rather significant and new source of information. It has space for discourse that is not available in print and broadcast media (Montemayor, 2009).

### C. LGBT in the Media

The Stonewall Riots in the 1960s were major events in history that raised the public's knowledge about homosexual abuse. Major newspapers and local dailies at the time buried their pages deep into their publications and sensationalized the feat of one of the largest minorities in the US (Alwood, 1996).

In an article for the Daily News, an irreverent paper of the New York City's working class, which was published nearly a week after the riots, was considered to be the worst offender among many publications. Jerry Lisker branded the rioters as "Queen Bees", "princesses and ladies-in-waiting", "Florence Nightingales" throughout the article and called Stonewall Inn a "gay mecca" and a "homosexual beachhead" (Alwood, 1996, p. 86).

Written in an entertaining and dramatic fashion, the story evoked the days of yellow journalism, when newspapers put a premium on telling a story rather than finding the facts--or providing the truth (Alwood, 1996).

In recent years, there has been a conscious effort in media to look after the networks' content, particularly the Network Responsibility Index of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) where it rates US TV networks on their LGBT inclusive content. GLAAD assigned grades of "excellent," "good," "adequate," and "failing" based on the "quality, diversity and relative quantity" of LGBT representations in each network's original programming (GLAAD, 2015).

In the Philippines, the researchers checked whether or not the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippine Star, and Manila Bulletin

discriminate against LGBTs, using the seventh paragraph under the PPI-NPC Journalist Code of Ethics which states: "I shall not in any manner ridicule, cast aspersions on or degrade any person by reason of sex, creed, religious belief, political conviction, cultural and ethnic origin" (Bernardo and Claverez, 2010).

Over time, the media have empowered and disempowered different sectors of society, including the LGBT community. A total of 241 articles from Philstar.com, Inquirer.net and MB.com.ph were collected for content analysis, and a large number of these articles, (almost 50%), was categorized under the entertainment beat. The least number of LGBT news goes to the government and politics beat. This gives the impression that the community's niche is the entertainment industry (Arabelo and Merida, 2013).

The articles discussed mostly social issues, with the largest social indicator being social participation, acceptance, and equality. Statistical tests proved that all three news sites were anti-heteronormative, with the news items free from negative judgments, and instead talked about positive things that transpired in the community. However, there were heteronormative articles written in columns and opinions section, discussing issues concerning the LGBT community, such as talks of same-sex marriage (Arabelo and Merida, 2013). Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the only form of sexuality that is normal and accepted (APA, 2008). A heterosexual person is someone who is physically, emotionally and/or romantically attracted to a person of the opposite gender (GLAAD, 2014).

## **Study Framework**

### *1. Queer Theory*

This study was guided by the Queer Theory, Reflective Projective Theory of Mass Communication and Media Representation Theory.



The term “queer theory” was used by Teresa de Lauretis in 1990, intending to disturb the complacent state of lesbian and gay studies (Littlejohn and Foss, 2011).

The theory posits that the different categories of sexuality and identity are social constructions and not biological categories, thus the rejection of these categories. Through the contestation and rejection of these traditional assumptions, labels, categories and heteronormativity, the emergence of more fluid constructions are possible (Littlejohn and Foss, 2011).

## 2. *Reflective-Projective Theory of Mass Communication*

The reflective-projective theory of mass communication postulates that “mass communications are best understood as mirrors of society that reflect an ambiguous image in which each observer projects or sees his/her own vision of himself/herself and society” (Loevinger 1969 p. 283). Hence, there is a distinction between realities and how media represent these realities (Loevinger, 1969).

Expounding further, the mirror reflects different images of society and Loevinger (1969) asserts that the reflection of these images, similar to telescopes and cameras that have mirrors, may choose to broaden or narrow the focus of some particular events.

## 3. *Media Representation Theory*

According to the theory, the different texts that people encounter, despite how realistic they may appear, are “constructed representations” and not absolute reproductions of reality. Moreover, representations are “unavoidably selective,” leaving some facts in the background and maintaining focus on others (Media Representation, n.d.).

The theory does not only refer to the products of representation, but also includes the process involved in the construction of these meanings and views in media. This process is not one-way (as illustrated in Figure 1), and the constructions of an identity—marked by the “cage” of identity, class, age, gender, and ethnicity—in a particular text comes with its production and the reception of the people (Media Representation, n.d.).

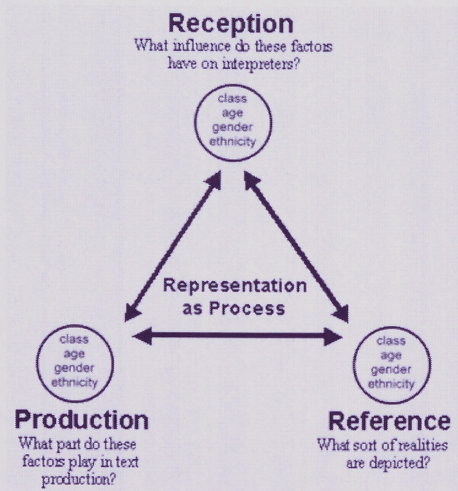


Figure 1. Media Representation Theory Model

#### 4. Integrated Framework

The researchers adapted the integrated framework shown in Figure 2 from the works of Arabelo and Merida. The model incorporated Loewinger’s reflective-projective theory and the queer theory together, with the latter serving as guide to illustrate how the realities mirrored in media may or may not be distorted by the dominant stance in the culture (Arabelo and Merida, 2013).



Taking off from the model, the researchers integrated the media representation theory shown in Figure 1 with the reflective-prospective theory, and with the dominant/anti-dominant stance going in the same place as the text production. The news are realities depicted in media, and the addition of the reception variable—the LGBT community as the interpreter of the text. The double headed arrows represent the interactive nature of the concepts.

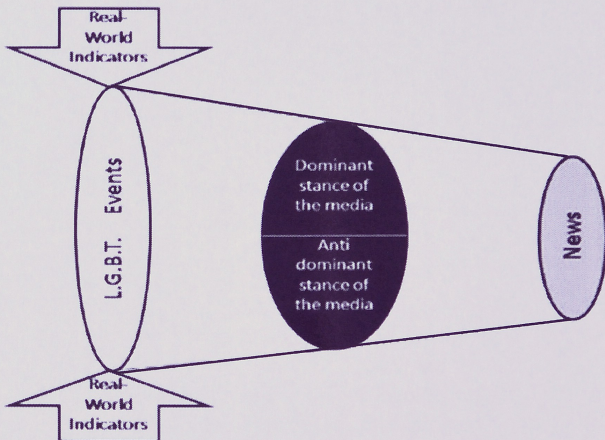
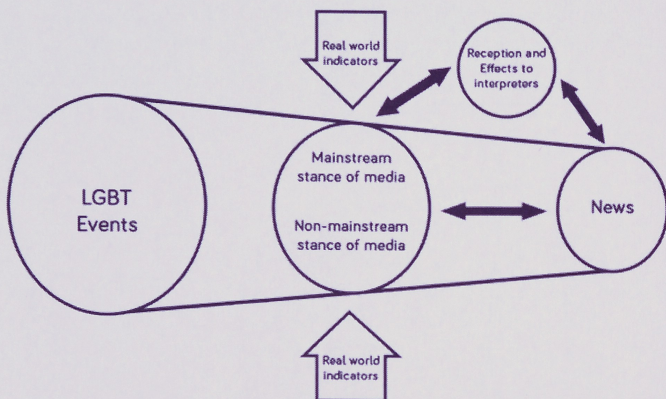


Figure 2. The “Ambiguous Mirror” Conceptual Model as visualized by Arabelo & Merida (2013)

At the conceptual level, real world events make up what would be registered as news. Figure 2 shows the diagram used by researchers Arabelo and Merida in their study *Chasing Rainbows: Online News Empowerment Framing of LGBTs Social and Political Conditions*, which also used the reflective-projective theory. The current study analyzed the media’s effects and how these were received by audiences with the help of the media representation theory integrated into the framework. The mainstream or dominant stance of the media discriminates the minority. In the context of this study, this would be the LGBTs. On the other hand,

the non-mainstream stance of the media pushes for equality and works to reject the discrimination or prejudice of the mainstream stance. These are reflected at the integrated conceptual level shown in Figure 3.



*Figure 3. Integrated Conceptual Framework*

At the operational level shown in Figure 4, the researchers analyzed news articles from three major news websites namely GMA News Online, Rappler.com and Inquirer.net that involved members of the LGBT. The news story was an article that appeared in the category of news publications reviewed.

Indicators that affected how the journalists reflected these events in their articles included mainly the journalists' past interactions with the LGBT community, their own personal biases and perceptions towards it, and whether or not they received proper training and specific guidelines on how to write news involving the LGBT community. An interaction is considered to be any interpersonal communication and dealings between journalists and any member of the LGBT community including friendships, involvement in gender sensitivity or SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression) trainings, prior interviews and/or articles with LGBTs.



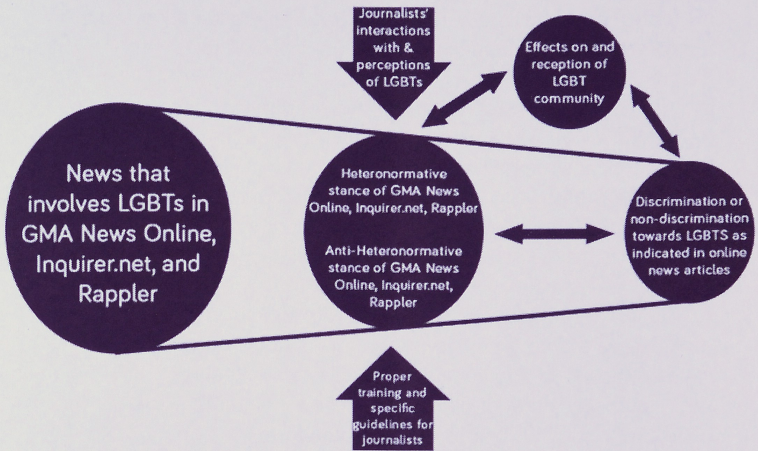


Figure 4. Integrated Operational Framework

The information was gathered through focus interviews with journalists and editors from the three news organizations. The heteronormative stance of GMA News Online, Inquirer.net and Rappler refers to produced articles that put LGBTs under bad light and contained discrimination and prejudice or mislabelling of LGBTs.

An article is tagged heteronormative if it presents a viewpoint which reinforces the belief that heterosexuals are the only individuals in society who are worthy of acceptance. This tends to privilege those who conform and discriminate upon homosexuals. An example of this type of article would be, *Nintendo shuns same-sex relationships in new social game*. On the other hand, the anti-heteronormative stance of these media organizations refers to produced articles that handled subjects with utmost sensitivity due to the acknowledgment of how marginalized LGBTs are in society. This stance produced articles that treat LGBTs with fairness and without judgment. An article is tagged anti-heteronormative if it presents a viewpoint which fights to abolish the hatred and unfair treatment of those whose sexual orientation or preferences do not fall under the categories of male and female. This includes rejection of the idea that only those in heteronormative

relationships are to be accepted in society. An example of this type of articles would be *First rainbow pedestrian lane in Cebu, Asia pays respects to LGBT community*.

Discrimination is considered as any form of unfair or unequal treatment of the media, whether intentional or unintentional, in their handling of news involving LGBTs that are manifested through the words and phrases used in the articles to describe or refer to LGBTs, labelled as "offensive terms." Examples of these terms would be transvestite, sexual preference and homosexual.

Journalists may or may not have gone through gender sensitivity training as a prerequisite to writing news on LGBTs. Focus interviews were employed to find out if news articles produced from the three sites were received by and had an effect on the members of the LGBT community. This either helped them form their opinions on the media or suggest any steps the media should take to produce better articles involving LGBTs. Meanwhile, content analysis was performed to find out if the news from the three media organizations were either discriminatory or non-discriminatory towards the LGBTs.

## **Methods and Procedures**

The researchers used both content analysis and focus interviews to ensure comprehensiveness of data gathered and to gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

Content analysis was used to identify if the articles followed or violated the seventh paragraph of the PPI-NPC Journalist Code of Ethics. Through this, the researchers identified discrimination (labelled as heteronormative) or non-discrimination (labelled as anti-heteronormative) in the news articles.

The focus interviews were conducted with editors and journalists from each of the online news website to determine how past experiences and personal biases may have affected journalists' reportage. The interviews revealed whether or not editors and journalists when preparing articles on LGBTs, were equipped with proper training and



specific stylebook guidelines. Focus interviews were also conducted with lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transpeople, to find out their opinions and perceptions on the media's treatment of online news articles concerning LGBTs affected them.

The researchers used a content analysis guide sheet to filter the online news articles. This guide includes the 1) article's themes: crime, social acceptance and participation, legal protection, political, health, science and technology, social media, education, and others, 2) author 3) date of publication 4) LGBT members mentioned 5) frequency of preferred and offensive terms used, and 6) quotes that pertained to members of the LGBT community.

Classifying the articles as heteronormative or anti-heteronormative was based on the definition given in previous scholastic studies found in the background and related literature of this study.

Moreover, a focus interview guide was used to facilitate the interviews with the editors and journalists revealing concepts such as their interaction with, personal biases and perceptions on the LGBT community, as well as other factors that may play a role on how the articles were written. A focus interview guide, helped to identify the LGBTs' opinions, perceptions and concerns regarding the online medium and its treatment on news concerning the LGBT, and how such treatment has affected them.

The articles under study were retrieved from the websites' archive through manual filtering, to make sure that the articles involving LGBTs were not merely mentioned in passing.

Aside from an editor from the three websites, the journalist who had written the most number of articles from those gathered by the researchers was also interviewed.

In the interviews of the LGBT, the researchers posted both on Facebook and Twitter a call for participation in this study. The posts stated two qualifications; 1) the respondent is as a member of the LGBT community and 2) the respondent must actively read news online.

The collection of news articles was done by inputting key terms in the search boxes of each news site, as well as through tags on news articles. The key terms or tags used were lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and LGBT.

Data from the content analysis were used as basis for the focus interviews. Members of the LGBT community who voluntarily approached and expressed interest in participating in the study were interviewed. Editors and journalists who edited and authored the particular articles served as the representatives of the three news sites in the focus interviews.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **A. News Sites and News Articles**

There was a total of 219 articles reviewed in the study. GMA News Online had the most number of articles at 101 (46.1%), followed by Rappler with 82 (37.4%) articles. Inquirer.net had the least number of articles at 36 (16.4%). The numbers, however, did not necessarily speak of the news sites' openness to publishing content about LGBTs, the level of heteronormativity of these articles, and words in the articles that refer to LGBTs.

Most articles were classified under crime, with 79 (36.1%) news articles. Those that fell under this crime theme were largely those that told the story of Jennifer Laude, from her death up to the investigation that followed. There were also articles under crime that were about members of the LGBT community who were victims of bullying and murder. These articles explicitly mentioned the sexual orientation or gender identity and/or expression of these victims in the headlines, e.g., "Indonesian transgender found dead in Australia" and "Family of slain transgender woman calls for justice" (GMA News Online, 2014).

Apart from crime, the other themes were social acceptance and legal protection. Both had 74 articles (33.8%) each. Articles under the acceptance were about the inclusion of LGBT in society, the opportunities given to them, and the positive attitude of the



people towards LGBT people. The articles classified under legal protection covered the lobbying and passing of laws for the protection of the members of the LGBT community, as well as laws that encroach on their basic human rights.

Articles classified under 'others' ranked fourth. News falling under this theme were about the LGBT community's advocacy and activism, like pride marches and film showings, stories of members of the LGBT community who came out to the public, and news items on religion, a lot of which were related to the Roman Catholic church.

Followed by the 'others' category was the political theme which had 23 articles (10.5%). The articles were deemed political in nature as they talked about the Philippine-United States relations as well as statements and courses of action from the government, politicians and political organizations during the height of Jennifer Laude's death and the trial that followed.

There were eight (3.7%) health articles that covered studies on the wellness of LGBTs, HIV treatment and cases. Science and Technology had seven articles (3.2%) that reported about a study on gay dads, scientists defending same-sex marriage, and gaming outlets that were criticized for showing gender discrimination. Six articles (2.7%) under the social media theme reported on social media playing a role for the LGBTs. Lastly, there were five (5) articles (2.3%) categorized under education.

## **B. Interviewees' Profiles**

Three editors, and 4 journalists were interviewed face-to-face.

Interviews with the LGBT volunteers, however, were not all done face-to-face. Some interviews were conducted online thru Facebook messaging and e-mail. Some opted for chat or e-mail interview due to distant location and time constraints. Almost all the participants were from Luzon for ease of access. Some LGBT informants chose to use pseudonyms for confidential purposes.

### *1. Editors*

The editor-in-chief of GMA News Online, previously worked as the organization's executive editor for more than a year before becoming Editor-in-Chief in September 2015. The Chief of Reporters of Inquirer.net shared editing responsibilities with the Inquirer.net's city editor, who was from Rappler was a former editor of MovePH, the organization's citizen journalism arm which included a section on gender issues.

### *2. Journalists*

Journalist #1 was a former general news reporter and she, along with another reporter, broke the news of Jennifer Laude's death to GMA News Online. She had already parted ways with GMA News Online and was managing a family business.

Journalist #2 was a multimedia reporter and had been part of Inquirer.net since 2005. Her beat was the Department of Justice and the Supreme Court.

Journalist #3 was a multimedia reporter for Rappler, writing breaking news stories, among others, for the metro beat. She was head writer for Rappler's evening newscast.

Journalist #4 used to write content for Rappler's gender issues section, from straight news to opinion pieces. From MovePH, she went to research and was also assigned to the election beat.

### *3. LGBT Participants*

"Eya" taught English to Grade 6 students. She was residing in Cubao, Quezon City at the time of the interview. Also from Quezon City was "Joanna" who was a college student. "Geal" an undergraduate student was already in her 2nd year in a two-year hotel and restaurant services course before recently



deciding to stop. She was from Laguna, Rizal but currently based in Dubai. Coincidentally, all of the lesbian informants were 22 years of age.

Ages of the gay informants were almost the same as the lesbians. Their occupations and their locations vary. "Vince," 28, was working as a training supervisor and was residing in Makati City. "Tony" was 21 years old and was currently studying. He lived in Parañaque City. Mark or "Erren", 21, was from Krus na Ligas (KNL), Quezon City. He worked at a business process outsourcing company.

All of the bisexual informants who participated in the study were women. "Frances", 20, was a journalism student from the University of the Philippines. She lived in Quezon City. "Moira", 17, hailed from Davao City. She was taking up BS Psychology from San Pedro College at the time of the study. She had an extra job as an artist. "Xuxa" was 20 years of age from Quezon City, and was a 3rd year college student taking up Sports Science.

Transgender informants had varying backgrounds. Jamie, 23, a student, was residing in Makati City. "Ms. Panama," on the other hand, was 25 years old and was working as a call center agent. She was a resident of Project 4, Quezon City. The last transgender informant was Jet Evangelista, 35, who went by the name "Meggan". She worked for a political party and was a resident of Quezon City. She was also the Executive Director of Babaylanes, Inc. when the study was conducted.

Mars, who identified herself as queer, was 20 years old and a 4th year student in the College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines.

### **C. LGBT Visibility in Online Media**

There was a notable peak of articles about the LGBTs in October 2014 and this was attributed to Jennifer Laude's death. Articles were published and updated regularly as

new information from sources came in. There was a higher number of articles following October 2014 and this can also be attributed to the Jennifer Laude's trial.

Taking the whole samples of articles into consideration, there were more locally written articles (137) than those that were from news wires (82). The latter made up for 37.4% of the total articles, meaning local news were more than half of the articles.

Among the three news sites, Rappler was the only one with more internationally sourced articles (44) compared with those written by its writers (38). GMA News Online and Inquirer.net, on the other hand, had more locally written news involving LGBTs. Notably, without big issues like that of Laude, the local article count dropped to almost the same number as internationally-sourced articles.

One of the LGBT informants who took part in a focus interview expressed his opinion regarding the number of local articles he sees online and his take on the lack of a specific LGBT news tag:

I notice, when I go online, I don't see much local articles or local news about it, probably recently would be Manny Pacquiao and Pemberton and that's about it. Nothing else. But when it comes comes international, (...) there is an LGBT tag. They (local news) have a separate column for showbiz. But they don't have a separate column for the LGBT community itself. (Erren, 21, gay)

Results show that there were 110 articles that mentioned a transgender individual or transpeople. There were 59 articles that referred to the LGBT community as a whole, closely followed by 57 articles that covered gay people or a gay individual. A far drop in count, lesbians were covered in only 14 articles, while bisexuals were mentioned explicitly in only three articles, all of which were in GMA News Online.

One of the lesbian informants noticed the low representation of lesbians and bisexuals in news articles and voiced out



concern as she grew afraid of society's judgments and the possibility of not living as freely and productively as she pleased.

#### **D. Heteronormativity**

From the 219 articles, there were 182 anti-heteronormative articles and 37 heteronormative articles.

Among the three news sites, Rappler scored the lowest percentage for heteronormative articles, with only 11 out of 82 articles being heteronormative (13.4%). This was followed by GMA News Online which had 18 heteronormative articles (17.8%) out of its 101 articles. Lastly, the only news site to go over one-fifth of its total articles was, *Inquirer.net*'s heteronormative articles which tallied up to 8 (22.2%) out of their 36 articles.

The study considered words and phrases used to describe or refer to LGBTs, vis-à-vis the GLAAD's Media Reference Guide. Looking at the sample as a whole, preferred words were used almost six times more than offensive words.

With Rappler, preferred words were used eleven times more than offensive words. *Inquirer.net* used preferred words ten times more than offensive words, while GMA News Online fared the least, in using preferred words, which were almost four times more than offensive words.

Upon closer inspection, there were anti-heteronormative articles that made use of offensive terms. The words "homosexual," "homophobia," and even "transvestite" were all used in what were tagged as anti-heteronormative articles.

In the 83 anti-heteronormative articles from GMA News Online 53 of them contained offensive terms. As for Rappler, 24 out of 71 anti-heteronormative articles used offensive terms. Out of the total of 47 times that Rappler used

offensive words, 35 of these were from anti-heteronormative articles. Finally, Inquirer.net had eight out of 28 non-heteronormative articles written with offensive terms.

Despite the results from heteronormativity of articles that showed a tolerant and not entirely discriminatory treatment of the media on news involving members of the LGBT community, the latter figures showed the continued use of offensive terms in articles that were classified as anti-heteronormative. It showed that there was still a lack of awareness among journalists on how to keep the articles written in ways that would be considered politically correct and acceptable to the LGBT community. A Rappler reporter points this out. She said:

As I mentioned, there are those who write about the VFA, there are others who write more about LGBT issues, and they sometimes referred to her as "Jeffrey." (...) It was also a very new thing for us, and there is no company-wide dissemination that this is the way of writing for LGBT topics. So I guess we needed to be on the same page.

#### **E. On LGBTs: Past Experiences and Personal Biases of Journalists**

All the journalists who were interviewed emphasized that they were following the basic journalism principles, as guidelines for their reporting of LGBT community. A Rappler journalist said that how she writes articles for every other topic would be the same for how she writes articles covering LGBTs. As part of the LGBT community, she shared that she had been an advocate of LGBT equality, but this manifests more clearly when she writes opinion articles.

Similarly, an Inquirer reporter mentioned, "For example with Laude, I have a lot of friends who are LGBT, but my only concern was how to give details on the report."

She said that she simply used the information that was given to her, and followed the office's instructions on the use of



the pronoun that would be appropriate for Laude. Inquirer.net made public a publisher's note explaining that it used a female pronoun for Laude, even days after her death.

A GMA News Online former reporter and Rappler reporter said that their past interactions and experiences with the LGBT community had raised their awareness about their plight, and in turn, made them more conscious of their work as journalists to be more inclusive and to always consult with their LGBT sources.

Generally, the reporters were aware of the concerns of the LGBT community when it comes to writing about their stories. This was manifested in the small number of heteronormative articles found in the online news. However, despite this awareness, the content analysis still suggested that, generally, there was something amiss in the treatment of the LGBT community.

## **F. Proper Training and Specific Guidelines Before Coverage**

All three news organizations had regularly offered in-house trainings to their reporters. However, these were mostly focused on style and rules and regulations of the news site. Outside the trainings conducted by the news organizations, the reporters also took part in trainings outside of their office. Journalists from Rappler, GMA News Online and Inquirer.net all mentioned partaking in trainings outside their news organization that touched on the topic of minimizing harm on the subjects of the news. However, only journalists from Rappler and GMA News Online explicitly mentioned being able to attend gender sensitivity trainings.

The Supreme Court and the Department of Justice, offers trainings on reporting on minorities, however, these trainings were condensed and only fleetingly tackled LGBTs, mostly focusing on "child abuse cases, sexual harassments (...) what to avoid, what not to put into your reports."

A GMA News Online Editor-in-Chief and an Inquirer.net Chief of Reporters also said that they were able to attend SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression) trainings, but their respective news organizations do not offer similar trainings.

Despite having their own stylebooks, not one of the three news organizations, had specific instructions and rules on the coverage of news involving LGBTs. Rappler, has an internal stylebook that its writers would follow. Preceding the death of Jennifer Laude, Rappler did not have any specific guidelines regarding how members of the LGBT community should be addressed. Following Laude's death, Rappler published an article under its section "Thought Leaders" detailing its decision of using Jennifer's preferred name and pronoun. The article cited GLAAD's definitions and, similar to Inquirer.net, quoted the Associated Press and BBC upon arriving at its decision, using the pronoun preferred by the individuals. If preference was not expressed, the pronoun which would be consistent with the individuals' lifestyle should be used.

Rappler's style guide follows a continuous process, and building up on every new issue that it encounters. Additionally, once an issue had been decided, it automatically becomes part of Rappler's style guide:

Similarly, Inquirer.net has its own guidelines and ethics guide that have been cascaded down to all reporters and editors on the field. It uses the style guide that the Philippine Daily Inquirer is using. However, while the style guide has provisions and reminders on sensitivity, there was no specific provision on LGBT's coverage. Like Rappler, Inquirer.net adopted international guidelines on how to cover LGBT issues, especially during the height of the coverage on Laude's death.

GMA News Online had formal and informal discussions on the issue of Jennifer Laude's death and how she should be addressed.



However, during the interview with a former GMA News Online reporter, she explicitly mentioned that in the duration of her stay as a reporter, the news organization did not have its own stylebook. However, provisions on LGBT reporting would be added as a reaction to the death of Jennifer Laude.

## **G. News' Effects on the LGBT Community and their Reception**

Eya said she found media's portrayal of the LGBT frustrating because she found it hard to come out from her workplace and be open with her sexuality. She recounted how her workmates on whom she revealed her sexuality were surprised that she was did not dressing like a "butch" because that was how the media portrayed lesbians. Eya said she found it frustrating that her fellow teachers questioned her being feminine; wearing lipstick and not cross-dressing.

Geal said she was not affected by the media's coverage of LGBTs because she chooses to read only positive articles on LGBTs that for her are inspirational. However, Geal said that because of media's lack of coverage on lesbians, she found it hard to picture herself having or pursuing a career.

Mark said he found the media's portrayal of LGBTs ineffective. He also thought the Media's coverage on the death of Jennifer Laude was insulting because of the media's improper use of pronouns. Tony said he felt that the media sometimes marginalized the LGBT community with how they portrayed. He added that their coverage gave him insights on how LGBTs stand in society today.

However, Vince felt that most news sites were more sensitive and open minded with issues involving LGBTs. "They are ensuring they are getting the side of LGBT people without pre-judging the situation or the issue," he said.

Frances reflected on the results of the study's analysis of articles when she said that there wasn't news on bisexuals, which led her to think that her identity was, in a way, not

validated. Frances added that most articles on lesbians, gays and transpeople were about crime or something tragic or odd.

Moira on the other hand expressed that she felt a bit freer about her sexuality because it was less stigmatized. Moira said discussions on LGBTs such as gay marriage would not have been brought up in her family if it were not for the exposure media had given them over time. She said media's portrayal of LGBTs have positively affected her although her parents were still uncomfortable with the idea of homosexuality.

She echoed Frances' thoughts about the lack of coverage on bisexuals, adding that media were not inclusive because they tended to focus on certain members of the LGBT community rather than create a wider perspective.

Xuxa, like Geal, said she no longer read negative articles on LGBTs because she felt "non-LGBT" people would never understand and would never try to understand the sector. But, she said it made her happy to see news in the Philippines about married gay couples. She felt that the media somehow had acknowledged that same-sex couples have a right to get married.

Ms. Panama was a transwoman who expressed disgust towards the media's lack of knowledge on how to address transpeople properly. However, Meggan said she had come to the point where she had become numb of the media's portrayal of LGBTs and was not affected by it as much as she would have been if she were still a young activist, saying it was because she had grown used to their ways and not because their ways had improved.

Mars said she could detect upon reading articles whether or not the author underwent a SOGIE seminar or not. She expressed dismay on how media outlets lacked effort to be sensitive in their reportage especially when it involved LGBTs.



## **H. Suggested Courses of Action from the LGBT Community**

Although Eya recognized that the media had been doing their research, they should be more sensitive in their reportage. She underscored how the media tended to put the blame on the minority sector especially for crime stories where a member of the LGBT was the victim.

Eya said that a gender sensitivity training should be given to journalists before they could cover news on LGBTs. She stressed how journalists should keep a close eye on the proper use of pronouns. It would be easy for reporters to know a subject's preferred pronoun or how they should be identified especially when interviewing the concerned person face-to-face, Eya said. She also said that a more open communication was needed in order to make LGBT issues a normal thing to talk about.

Joanna, Mark, Geal, Frances, Vince, Xuxa, Meggan and Ms. Panama all echoed the same sentiment on gender sensitivity trainings. This was especially necessary for impressionable persons like children who might interpret or understand news the wrong way.

Eya also brought up the issue of the importance of labelling members of the LGBT in news stories. She cited the tabloids as an example wherein some headlines would for example, outrightly state "ISANG TIBO PATAY" [LESBIAN, DEAD] to somehow hint to readers that the crime had something to do with the victim's gender identity or sexual orientation. "We're also people. Can we just stick [to] labelling us as people?" she queried.

Similarly, Frances said that online news should justify why articles had to mention if a person was a member of the LGBT community especially when it has nothing to do with the news itself. She asked for the media to provide contexts on how they write their news.

Geal on the other hand pointed at the lack of equal coverage of all Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transexual community in news stories.

Joanna avered that LGBT stories seemed to feature mostly celebrities who made news about them; leaning towards show business reportage. She suggested to also feature motivational or inspiring accomplishments of LGBTs. The media tended to broadcast topics they know would garner more attention and therefore lacked focus on more important issues.

For Mark, a whole column dedicated to stories on LGBTs should be made by Philippine news organizations in order to better educate people outside of the community. Foreign news outlets have a separate column for the LGBT community containing true and relevant stories about them. Mark felt that they should be adopted in the Philippines to disassociate LGBTs from topics such as sex and other sensational issues.

On adding guidelines to existing style guides on LGBTs, Mark said "I think it wouldn't hurt to know more about the proper way of approaching us, approaching the community."

"Have a deep understanding of the different LGBT issues in the society. Do not treat these as a one-dimension or one-layer issues. It is as complex as economy. It is as wide as poverty. Be impartial. Be open-minded," Tony said.

Meanwhile, Vince suggested other courses of action for journalists to improve their reportage on LGBTs. "Maybe they need to get reliable sources first like live interviews, conduct surveys and present statistics that discuss and prove their reports," he said in an online interview.

Transman Jamie said journalists should read more and be more aware and open-minded about LGBT issues. "Be more sensitive to what is and is not offensive to LGBT people,"



he said. He also believed that people should be trained on gender issues regardless of their field; not just specific to LGBTs but specific to gender issues.

Mars added that articles on LGBTs sometimes were not just offensive but also reinforcing negative stereotypes on the LGBT community that could have harmful effects. Aside from SOGIE trainings and open dialogues with the LGBT community, she and Moira both suggested that news organizations feature articles written by LGBT people themselves so that coverage would be more diverse.

## **I. Suggested Courses of Action from Media Practitioners**

The editor-in-chief of GMA said that the media should get to a point where LGBT concerns would no longer be special to write about. He said that there should be gender sensitivity across the board and not just about LGBTs, “how we portray the balance between genders, (...) what words we use, the type of tone that our stories take” could always improve. He said that it was a matter of exposure to issues about LGBTs and applies not just for their reporters but also for editors.

On gender sensitivity training, he said: “Personally, I think, it’s more effective for reporters or journalists, if they’re more exposed to real world situations involving sensitive issues.”

A former MovePH editor from Rappler said the media could always do more in terms of researching the contexts and trying to get better sources of information.

Content analysis showed how articles from news wires or international news organizations almost outnumbered that of local news outlets with regards to LGBT issues, and although the former Rappler editor admitted they could do a better job to expose the sector more, he also said that it was not just the media’s fault.

A journalist said that sometimes people were too critical of reporting on the LGBT community that they tended to distance the sector further from society because of the “special treatment” given. “I have this thinking that when you write about the LGBT Community, you don’t write for the LGBT community,” she said.

Other interviewed journalists and editors echoed her sentiment that even though the media were powerful, not all problems were created or solved by the media.

Though some of the problems presented by the informants had much to do with the work of journalists such as proper usage of pronouns and sensitivity in reporting, not all problems could be solved by the media. In order to arrive at this point; wherein both the LGBT community and the media understood each other’s sides, other interviewees presented ways for the media to improve their reportage in a more formal and uniform manner.

A former GMA reporter shared that one problem she encountered when she was a reporter was the tendency of journalists to become too technical in their work. “When you’re on the field and read your work, actions done to improve the article is sometimes only confined to proofreading and not really on the content itself,” she said.

On concrete suggestions for the newsroom to improve reportage on LGBTs, a journalist said, “There should be guidelines on LGBT reporting. Because if (...) it’s not written on paper, it’s not something that everyone should read about—then that’s what causes the confusion.”

An Inquirer.net reporter said there should be LGBT-specific provisions included in their stylebook. Hence, Inquirer.net was working on a separate ethics manual, which should include cases like LGBT, suicide and other specific and sensitive topics especially because online reporting had different nuances as compared to print.



A Rappler reporter reiterated the need for formal training on LGBT reporting and a SOGIE seminar as not all reporters were aware of what SOGIE is. She added that reporters should not just write news on LGBTs whenever there was a breaking news concerning them, like the Laude incident or same-sex marriage.

## **Conclusions**

Content analysis of articles revealed that a greater sum of the news on LGBT was anti-heteronormative in nature; however, there were still aspersions cast on the LGBT community in a number of news articles. Findings show that all three news sites did not completely comply with the seventh paragraph of the PPI-NPC Journalist Code of Ethics in their coverage of news concerning LGBTs from April 2014 to 2015. Specifically, articles that were supposedly anti-heteronormative at times contained words and phrases deemed offensive by the GLAAD Media Reference Guide.

The journalists' past interactions with the members of the LGBT community did not show any sort of bias or judgment to affect their reportage involving the LGBTs. Their past experiences with LGBTs, some of whom were co-workers, friends or family members, only served to enlighten them on things they did not previously know about the sector and which helped them deliver a fairer and more appropriate reportage.

All three news sites lacked LGBT-specific provisions in their stylebooks. The journalists were not required to attend gender trainings before covering news on LGBTs. Some editors and reporters who had attended SOGIE trainings did so out of their own accord.

LGBTs interviewed expressed various opinions with how the media had treated their sector. Predominantly, members of the LGBT hoped for a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of their sector in the media.

A majority of the LGBTs and the members of the media agreed that gender sensitivity training was necessary before reporters could cover news on LGBTs. It was also frequently mentioned that there was a need for newsrooms to update their respective stylebooks in order to include not only LGBT-specific provisions, but also other subjects that require sensitivity on the part of journalists. The LGBT community called for an institutionalized provision that would ensure sensitivity for reports involving the LGBTs in order to avoid reinforced negative stereotypes and further prejudice or discrimination by the public.

## **Recommendations**

It might also be helpful to conduct FGDs instead of interviews to encourage interaction, responses, and conversation with LGBTs and media people. This may also lead to having more insights and sources elaborating and expressing ideas with spontaneity.

Taking into account opinions from the non-LGBT audiences and laying them out alongside the insights from the LGBT and the media could also be used in future researches.

Possible researches may look at a wider scope of articles, and a longer and different timeline. Additionally, future studies may look at other news organizations, whether in new or traditional media.

Research findings suggest that heightened awareness on gender sensitivity for both editors and journalists are necessary. Thus, active participation in trainings that will educate them on SOGIE should be a must for the media.

Furthermore, the addition of specific provisions on LGBT reporting to in-house stylebooks of news organizations is called for. Having local standard guidelines at hand adapted to the Philippine setting instead of looking and adopting to international guidelines will avoid confusion and reinforce awareness among media practitioners.



On a related note, Rainbow Rights Project Inc., a legal organization in the Philippines with gay and lesbian lawyers and gender activists, alongside Outrage Magazine, a Philippine-based LGBT publication, has drafted an LGBT media reference guide that will supplement already existing in-house stylebooks. In addition to culled terminology from international stylebooks, an important addition in the reference guide is the inclusion of local lingo used in the LGBT community.

Constant dialogue between media practitioners and members of the LGBT community also plays a crucial role in the formation of proper knowledge about LGBTs.

### **Attachment**

#### **Journalists' Code of Ethics**

1. I shall scrupulously report and interpret the news, taking care not to suppress essential facts nor to distort the truth by omission or improper emphasis. I recognize the duty to air the other side and the duty to correct substantive errors promptly.
2. I shall not violate confidential information on material given me in the exercise of my calling.
3. I shall resort only to fair and honest methods in my effort to obtain news, photographs and/or documents, and shall properly identify myself as a representative of the press when obtaining any personal interview intended for publication.
4. I shall refrain from writing reports which will adversely affect a private reputation unless the public interests justifies it. At the same time, I shall write vigorously for public access to information, as provided for in the constitution.
5. I shall not let personal motives or interests influence me in the performance of my duties; nor shall I accept or offer any present, gift or other consideration of a nature which may cast doubt on my professional integrity.
6. I shall not commit any act of plagiarism.

7. I shall not in any manner ridicule, cast aspersions on or degrade any person by reason of sex, creed, religious belief, political conviction, cultural and ethnic origin.
8. I shall presume persons accused of crime of being innocent until proven otherwise. I shall exercise caution in publishing names of minors, and women involved in criminal cases so that they may not unjustly lose their standing in society.
9. I shall not take unfair advantage of a fellow journalist.
10. I shall accept only such tasks as are compatible with the integrity and dignity of my profession, invoking the "conscience clause" when duties imposed on me conflict with the voice of my conscience.
11. I shall comport myself in public or while performing my duties as journalist in such manner as to maintain the dignity of my profession. When in doubt, decency should be my watchword.

Approved by the Philippines Press Institute and the National Press Club in 1988.

## **Expanded Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct**

### **I. Covering elections**

#### **A. Pay your way.**

1. The newspaper must cover the cost of coverage during the election campaign and count, including dining out sources for stories, the airfare, hotel accommodation, per diem and operations expenses of staff members assigned to political parties and candidates. This prohibition excludes transport services and common rooming accommodations arranged by the political parties for all members of the media.
2. Staff members shall clear with their supervising editors invitations from the candidates or political parties to join out-of-town or overseas coverage events, so the newspaper may appropriate the necessary budget, if these are newsworthy events.



**B. Do not accept cash or gifts in kind from politicians and political parties.**

1. All editors, reporters, photographers, columnists, artists and other staff members must resist all attempts of candidates or political parties to bribe the newspaper in cash or in kind. Newspapers are encouraged to expose such attempts, whether consummated or aborted, to identify the culpable parties and to promptly return the bribe or donate it to charity with the appropriate documentation.

**C. Do not moonlight with political parties.**

1. No staff member shall be allowed to work on a part-time, full-time or contractual basis with any political party or candidate.
2. Staff members shall be discouraged from inviting candidates to stand as godparents in baptisms, weddings and other church rites, or as padrinos in the employment of relatives or friends.

**D. Beware of surveys.**

Statistical data derived from polling and surveying is especially susceptible to misunderstanding, misinterpretation and misuse. Newspapers should clearly distinguish between scientific polls and non-scientific surveys such as readers' call-ins or write-ins and person-in-the-street interviews that are reported in statistical terms.

This must be done in a way that is likely to be understood by the average reader, including the headlines and graphics.

- In using scientific polls, the sample size and the margin of error should be disclosed.
- In using non-scientific surveys, the manner in which they were taken and their limitations should be clearly explained in print. Merely labeling a survey as "non-scientific" is not sufficient.

- Surveys that do not meet minimal scientific standards of validity and reliability should not be identified as polls, nor should they be portrayed in language suitable to scientific polls.
- Great caution should be used in employing non-scientific polls to address substantial questions of public policy or to describe the popularity or approval rating of public officials or public actions.

## **II. Conflicts of interest**

Individual journalists (publishers, editors, desk persons, reporters, photographers, artists, columnists) must weigh their obligations against the impact of:

- Involvement in particular activities
- Affiliation with causes or organizations
- Acceptance of favors or preferential treatment
- Financial investments
- Outside employment
- Friendships

In the end, individual journalists might do well to ask themselves:

- Am I being independent?
- Could my action harm my integrity or my organization's integrity?
- Is the mere appearance of conflict enough to diminish my credibility?

Am I willing to publicly disclose any potential conflicts?

### **A. Be careful with secondary jobs you take.**

1. "Outside work," secondary jobs or moonlighting presents per se a potential conflict of interest, especially with individuals, firms or entities:
  - that are the subject of news, past or future;



- that are competitors of the primary source of income of the journalist (another broadsheet or magazine circulating in the same market);
  - that requires the journalist to render more than just editorial services (writing, editing, art design), additional services that would compromise the integrity of his/her profession and news agency (pushing press releases, organizing press conferences, acting as press agent, etc.)
2. Individual journalists who do outside work or acquire secondary jobs must properly inform their immediate superiors. (A secondary job is one which gives the journalist income less than what he/she gets from his/her newspaper.)
  3. Professional work as stringers or free-lance writers for newspapers, magazines, book publishers, news services, photo agencies and similar organizations headquartered outside their circulation area is usually acceptable. So is part-time teaching in local colleges and other professional or para-newspaper duties. All arrangements of this kind are discussed in advance with management.
  4. Journalists must avoid paid or unpaid work for a politician or political organization, and should not hold public office or accept appointment to any political position for which there is remuneration other than expenses.

**B. Don't use your paper/job to make money. Draw the line between journalism and your own money ventures.**

1. Financial investment by staff members or other outside business interests that could conflict with the newspaper's ability to report the news or that would create the impression of such a conflict should be avoided.
2. A staff member may not enter into a business relationship with a news source. A staff member may not make

investments which could come into conflict with the staff member's duties. A staff member with investments or stockholdings in corporations should avoid making news decisions that involve those corporations.

3. Similarly, staff members' employment by news sources or potential news sources should be avoided, and staffers should refrain from lending their names to commercial enterprises with no promotional value to their papers. Business interests that could conflict with a staff member's ability to report the news, or that would create the impression of such a conflict, must be avoided.

**C. You are entitled to advocate causes and join organizations but don't impose this on your readers. Disclose your advocacies and organizational involvements.**

1. Staff members should avoid any involvement in any activity which could compromise, or appear to compromise, the staff member's role or the newspaper's capacity, ability or disposition to gather, report, write or edit, faithfully, factually, impartially or fairly. Such activity must be cleared in advance with the editor(s) whenever any possibility of interference or conflict exists.
2. Journalists exercise discretion in all relationships with causes and organizations. Staff members are encouraged to join and to perform voluntary services for local religious, cultural, social and civic organizations. Newspapers have the same community responsibility as other businesses in donating editors' and employees' time to civic undertakings. Staff members should let supervisors know what groups they're involved with.
3. Journalists should avoid political involvement beyond voting. In no circumstances may a staff member seek political office or work, for pay as a volunteer, in a political campaign or organization.



**D. Don't misuse and abuse your privileges as a journalist.**

1. Journalists must take care not to use newspaper property, i.e. its name, its stationery, or press card, for personal gain or advantage. However, we recognize that our involvement as citizens may sometimes compromise or inhibit our professional responsibilities, and we judge each situation with that in mind. We are particularly conscious of the necessity to avoid personal involvement in either side of an issue about which we would be writing or editing stories for the newspaper.
2. Unpublished information gathered by the newspaper may not be used by staff members for investment decisions.

Staff members should try to ensure the confidentiality of information gathered by the newspaper by making every effort to keep such information from reaching anyone who might attempt to use it for personal gain before it is published.

Staff members should be careful in dealings with news sources-particularly those in the investment community-not to disclose before publication the nature of the story that has the potential to affect the price of any stock. And because the timing of an investment is often crucial, no one outside the newspaper should know in advance the publication date of a story.

When there is doubt about the appropriateness of a business investment, or about any possible conflict of interest, the staff member should discuss the situation with the supervising editor.

3. No staff member should write about, report on, photograph or make a news judgment about any individual related to him or her by blood or marriage or with whom the staff member has a close personal

relationship. Writing or editing a story about a friend's business, for example, presents a conflict and should be avoided. A staff member who finds himself or herself in a situation where a conflict of interest (or the perception of such) becomes likely should consult with the supervising editor about the circumstances.

4. Employees shall not use their positions with the newspaper to get any benefit or advantage in commercial transactions or personal business for themselves, their families or acquaintances. For example, they shall not use company connections:
  - To get information or a photograph for purposes other than those of the newspaper.
  - To expedite personal business with, or seek special consideration from, public officials or agencies, such as the police.
  - To seek for personal use information not available to the general public.
  - To get free or at a reduced rate not available to the public, things like tickets, memberships, hotel rooms or transportation.
5. Employees shall not use the company name, reputation, phone number or stationery to imply a threat or retaliation or pressure, to curry favor, or to seek personal gain.

### **III. Writing the story**

1. All efforts must be exerted to make stories fair, accurate and balanced. Getting the other side is a must, especially for the most sensitive and critical stories. The other side must run on the first take of the story and not any day later.
2. Single-source stories must be avoided as a rule. There is always the imperative to get a second, third or more sources, the contending parties to an issue, the expert source, the affected party, the prominent and the obscure, in the story.



We must strive at all times to ascertain the truth of our sources' assertions.

3. Documents are required, particularly for stories alleging corruption or wrongdoing by public officials or agencies, or private individuals and corporations and groups.
4. As a rule, anonymous sources shall be discouraged, especially if they are coming from the public sector or publicly accountable agencies. But when we have to shield the identity of our source.-because revealing it would put his/her job or life in danger-we must: First ascertain the truth of his/her assertions; Determine if he/she is not a polluted source or an interested or beneficial party; Describe him/her in a manner that would establish his/her expertise or right to speak on the subject.
5. We shall avoid at all times language, photographs, visuals and graphics that are racist, sexist, insensitive and disrespectful of men, women and children; the religious denominations, cultural communities, and gender and political preferences.
6. The identities and photographs of children and women who figure in the news as victims of sexual abuse (i.e. rape, incest, sexual harassment, prostitution, battering, etc.) must not be printed, and details about their personal circumstances and identities must be withheld. In the case of incest victims, the identities of the accused and immediate family members must also be protected. Disclosure of the identities of victims of sexual abuse-but not their photographs-may be allowed only in cases when the adult victim (above 18 years old) has decided to file a case in court.
7. Suspects in criminal cases must be properly described as suspects, Photographs of a police lineup of suspects must be avoided, except in cases of large public interest, and when prima facie evidence has been established against suspects who are publicly accountable officials.

8. Documents that had been leaked by sources, especially those from the government, must be properly described as leaked documents, when used in a story. As much as possible, the source must identified.
9. We shall accord equal prominence to rejoinders, rebuttals and clarification from persons or agencies criticized in our stories. These should run without any delays, or as promptly as possible, and should be edited only for grammar.
10. When we commit errors of fact or impression, we must acknowledge this on print, and promptly issue a clarification.
11. Misleading practices such as misrepresentation, trickery, impersonation, and the use of hidden tape recorders in newsgathering can seriously undermine a newspaper's credibility and trustworthiness and should be avoided. An editor confronted with a decision to employ such methods should meet the following conditions:
  - **Public importance.** The expected news story should be of such public interest that its news value clearly outweighs the damage to trust and credibility that might result from the use of deception.
  - **Alternatives.** The story cannot reasonably be recast to avoid the need to misrepresent.
  - **Last resort.** All other means of getting the story must have been exhausted.
  - **Disclosure.** The deceptive practices and the reasons why they were used should be disclosed on print at the time the story is published.

### **Advisory:**

No code of ethics can prejudge every situation. Common sense and good judgment are required in applying ethical principles to newspaper realities. Individual newspapers are encouraged to augment these guidelines with locally produced codes that apply more specifically to their own situations.

Sources: The Manila Times Editorial Guidelines, Doing Ethics in Journalism, Associated Press Managing Editors Association Code of Ethics for Newspapers and their Staffs



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